



Lake Minnetonka Communications Commission members Chris Vogt and Thom and Maria Lofquist bring local television to 18 area communities.

Lights, Camera, Action!

The Lake Minnetonka Communications Commission helps residents produce their own TV shows.

IT'S POWER TO THE PEOPLE AT THE LAKE MINNETONKA COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION (LMCC). If you have opinions, hobbies or creative expressions in the public interest, free classes through the commission can help turn your message into a TV show on four public access channels with viewers in 18 communities.

"That's a big thing when it comes to community television: local access to the airwaves," says Chris Vogt, productions manager at LMCC.

Thom Lofquist of Excelsior is a contractor for a large cable company during the day, but on evenings and weekends, he's one of the people with power. The 51-year-old began taking production classes at LMCC about 10 years ago. He films city council meetings and other events, but about eight months ago, he added production of his own show, *Excelsior Forever Upward!*, to fulfill his desire to tell stories.

"It's such a dynamic medium," Lofquist says. "You can do so many interesting things and it's a great opportunity to tell stories."

Lofquist and his wife Maria were named Producers of

the Quarter by the LMCC in February. Their show has three 10-minute segments on local businesses, issues, history and a routine guest spot from Excelsior mayor Nick Ruehl. Lofquist's all-time favorite segment was on his father's experience in World War II.

"My dad [Gordon Lofquist] had tremendous stories," Lofquist says. "I didn't want those to be lost; I wanted to tell them and pass them on as far as possible. The process is wonderful in being able to do this."

The LMCC has a series of classes for beginners—like the Lofquists—to reach production certification, Vogt says. The classes range from lessons in the studio and with the cameras to production in the on-scene van and using editing software. "Once they become certified, they can use our equipment and staff assistance, and the studio all free of charge—and not everyone does that," Vogt says.

A great staff is what has kept the LMCC's most popular show going strong into its eighth year, says Dee Scott, creator and producer of *Friendship Set to Music*. The square- and round-dancing show started on a whim after Scott completed the LMCC's production certification. She thought it would last maybe 10 shows. In December, *Friendship Set to Music* will air for its 200th show. "It's beyond any expectations," Scott says.

The show started in the Lake Minnetonka area, but as more square dancers saw it, they told their public access stations to air it. "It didn't take long for people to start talking about it and for it to spread," Scott says.

Friendship Set to Music is now broadcast on 75 cable stations in 12 states from New York to California. The hour-long show was incubated by the LMCC and now airs six days a week on Channel 12. "That is a community resource unequalled in the media," Scott says of the LMCC's classes and opportunities.

The LMCC began 27 years ago and launched production classes at its inception. Sometimes class sizes max out at 15 students, and sometimes it's closer to five, Vogt says. The classes run every Wednesday from 6:30–8:30 p.m.

"The first thing you have to have in community television is dedication," Vogt says. "Dee has done a fabulous job of getting the local community—her friends—involved in that show. You need to have a crew to put on a show. We're here to help you, but LMCC is a small staff; we can't do it all. We can't direct the show, and run audio and camera and host all at the same time."

After an aspiring TV producer earns certification and displays the proper motivation, Vogt says, the show must educate or entertain Lake Minnetonka viewers in order to get the keys to the studio. "Any community interest you have," Scott encourages, "you can do a show about it." //

Interested in production classes?



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