

seeing and hearing VOICES

The following is an abridged version of an article for Community Media Review.

VOICES stands for “Values, Options, Issues and Choices in Society.” It is a collaborative effort of South High School, MTN, and the Humphrey Forum, a museum at the University of Minnesota.

The VOICES program is an English class that is also a social studies class that is something much more. Students learn about citizenship and about the media. Steve Sandell, director of the Humphrey Forum, said, “Civic education has to build civic skills, and the most important civic skills are reading and writing.” These days reading and writing must include the ability to read and write mass media.

Julia Mann is a VOICES student this past year who worked on a documentary about MTN. She says, “Before VOICES when I watched TV I never thought about the process to make it.” But now when she watches a show she thinks about all the shots and how the filmmakers got them and trimmed them.

During the year, students in VOICES learn video production and make two short documentaries about issues in society. Topics covered by projects this year include the youth vote, organic agriculture, the local smoking ban, school funding, environmental sustainability, development along the city’s riverfront, child care, and the future of public access television in Minneapolis.

“Every year I am even more amazed by the

work of the Voices students,” says MTN Executive Director Pam Colby. “Many of them take on really edgy subject matter, push the boundaries and do that with style and high production values. It is very impressive.”

Sandell says that these videos address issues in a way not often seen in the mainstream media. “Young people think about what is possible, in health care, in child care, in other issues. Their first question is often, ‘Wouldn’t it be good if...’ or ‘What if...’”

VOICES students learn both that they can change society, and also how other forces, in particular the media, bring about social change. “I think that the media changes society because it very easily persuades people to change their opinions based on what they see and hear,” says VOICES student Gabriel Campana. Classmate Abby Norlin-Weaver adds, “Stereotypes are formed by the media. I think the news changes how you see things.”

Mark Bispala, who was a student in the program in its first year, looks back at his own experience with the class. “I think you become more aware of the media’s impact and the way visual images are influencing our thoughts as citizens. We are bombarded with imagery and we have to use our eyes in different ways to interpret these symbols.”

One of the goals of Media Literacy is to turn passive TV consumers into active citizens. VOICES does this both in its training for youth, but also by programming the youth-produced

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editor/design... john akre (send contributions, suggestions, complaints, news tips, tv shows on a stick, etc to: jakre@mtn.org (612) 331-8575 ext. 307.) the monitor is published bi-monthly by the minneapolis television network.

the director's corner

Once a year, the members of the Alliance for Community Media gather for their annual conference. Last year the conference was in Tampa, Florida, where the temperature was 110 degrees. This year, conference attendees enjoyed the fresh air and majestic views of Monterey, California.

The Spanish translation for *Monte Rey* is "Mountain King." It was important for community media people to gather together, consult the Mountain King, and peer out in search of the long view. But, like the Bay Area in general, fog plagues the view in Monterey, and as citizens, we need chutzpah and sheer will to make it through the fog. We are living in times as treacherous and unpredictable as the riptides of Monterey Bay.

A battle lurks on the horizon with the telcos (the phone companies), led by Verizon and SBC plunging into the video provider world. As sure as autumn will come to Minnesota, this tidal wave of change will fog an already confusing regulatory terrain. It is imperative to the survival of community television that the telcos be administered in the exact same manner as the cable companies. They must support government, educational and public access. This support must include operating, capitol and capacity obligations, which the cable companies now provide. If telcos are allowed to move forward without these obligations, the cable companies will attempt an "unfair playing field" court case and legally argue against paying

current fees. We must stand firm and remind our elected officials that these giant corporations are using the cities' municipal rights of way to conduct their business, and profiting from that. A portion of this profit ought to be devoted to the local community.

These issues are as old as the United States Constitution, and those fighting for local media control have stayed vigilant. In 1982, at the first Alliance conference, keynote speaker Rev. Dr. Everett C. Parker said, "The dominant force for change is the marriage of electronic means of communication to the computer. A number of technologies that provided communication channels or handled information, and which were once individually distinct, have now been molded into a single whole." The Rev. Parker went on to make this prophetic statement, "The same thing occurred in television. First the licenses, starved for programs, were eager to have their schedules filled from the public sector. Then, as the commercial value of time increased, public service programming was curtailed, until now it is practically nonexistent. There is no reason to think that cable will fare any differently in the normal course of events."

Today, we add the Corporation for Public Broadcasting to the endangered species list. This struggle is of major importance to all media makers and consumers. Our own community media efforts may be served by this CPB debate as our neighbors and friends are educated about the current public media landscape.

The good news is that we have capable and talented leaders, such as former

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the minneapolis television network

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mtn goes to the state fair

MTN will be at the Great Minnesota Get Together this year. MTN will join with access centers from all over Minnesota to host a booth in the Technology Building at the Minnesota State Fair this summer to promote public access television and give people coming by the booth a chance to get their faces and ideas on TV.

The state fair booth is a idea of the MTN Public Relations Committee, and the idea spread at the Minnesota Community Television Conference in February. The booth will feature information about access TV and access centers all over the state and a small TV studio where fairgoers can make a short TV show. State Fair programming produced at the booth will run on MTN after the fair.

The booth will be staffed by public access people from all over the Twin Cities. Public access staff and volunteers will share the duties of sharing the news of

public access with the greater Twin Cities fair-going community.

The Minnesota State Fair runs from August 25 to September 5.

If you would like more information, or if you would like to volunteer to occupy the booth during the fair, contact Martin Hallanger at extension 312 or at martin@mtn.org



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projects in the long running **Video Voices** show on MTN. The **Video Voices** TV program has been on MTN as long as VOICES classes have been coming down to the MTN studio.

Sandell thinks that VOICES is as much about the audience that watches the videos that the youth produce as it is about the learning experience that the students have. "The **Video Voices** show is dedicated to this mission of civic education, giving the broader community a chance to take a look at the questions that young people ask and giving young people a chance to ask questions and pursue the answers." Norlin-Weaver adds, "I think that our video impacts society and makes a difference by informing people."

Anthony Johannes, a student whose video was about environmental sustainability initiatives in Minneapolis, said that one of the most valuable aspects of VOICES was introducing him to public access television. He says, "MTN is a place where the average person can get their voice out, and reach a lot of people. It is very cool."

Johannes adds, "Voices has been great. It is such a unique class."

John Akre

assigned number series drop off notice

Time Warner employees have relocated from 801 Plymouth (Playback), including the person that buzzed in Assigned Number series producers.

The door will be unlocked from 11am to 7pm, seven days a week.

Producers still have to get their tape in the slot by 4:30pm for it to play that night.

Martin Hallanger

beth's conference review (and duck report)

Last month I went to the National Alliance for Community Media conference in Monterey, California. It was an eye-opening experience. Yes, there is cable access outside of MTN. Of course, I knew that already, but I didn't realize all the different shapes it could take. Also, I learned that there is more to community media than just public access cable stations. There are lots of community based media organizations that don't get one penny from the cable companies. This is good news for us, because with the changes in the media landscape, who knows how much longer we can count on franchise fees. There are models for life after franchise fees.

Youth media is one area where there is a lot of energy and innovation happening right now. Part of that is media literacy, teaching kids to be smart about what they see on TV. The New Mexico Media Literacy project (check out their website at www.nmmlp.org) is dedicated to that goal. They work with schools to help get media literacy into the curriculum. Another part of youth media is teaching kids to use video as a way to get more involved in their communities and advocate change. Community Technology Centers Network (www.ctcnet.org) is one organization that funds this type of youth media program. Twin Cities community media group Asian Media Access has received a grant from them.

There's another local connection. I was in a workshop

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MTN Executive Director Anthony Riddle, who now serves as Executive Director of the Alliance for Community Media, with offices located blocks from Capitol Hill in Washington. Locally, Cor Wilson, the Executive Director of CTV, now serves as the President of the National Association of Telecommunications Officers and Advisors, a crucial national organization leading the charge for cities to defend their right to regulate the public right of way. MACTA is NATOA's local chapter. They work with the League of Cities at the Minnesota state level in this important battle for community control of media, a non-partisan issue.

Finally, we have the courage and will to do what is right.

called "Digital Distribution: Building Youth Media Online," and the presenters, one from New York City and one from Boston, were talking about using the internet as a tool for sharing and promoting youth-produced media. What was their example? "Battleground Minnesota," a video about last year's election produced by youth at Phillips Community Television in Minneapolis. The workshop presenters did not know the producers of this program. They just found it listed on the Youth Media Distribution Website (www.ymdi.org).

Technology was also a big theme at the conference, particularly using the internet as a way of promoting and distributing work. Soon, access centers and individuals will be able to download programs from the internet and burn them to DVD in the same way that many people already do with music and CDs. If you're someone who makes 20 VHS copies of your program every week, and addresses and stamps 20 envelopes to send the tapes to access centers throughout the country, this may be good news for you. Check out the website, www.digitalbicycle.org.

And I did get to the beach too. I saw two seals, one sunning himself on a rock and another swimming in the chilly ocean. And I saw a guy try to catch a duck on the beach so he could take it to the lake across the street. He thought the duck was lost, but I'm still not sure.

Beth Peloff

Last year we lost one of the finest and strongest voices in the community media field. Dirk Koning of the Grand Rapids Media Center died prematurely and unexpectedly in February of 2005. It was Dirk's vision and energy that kept many of us going. At the conference in Monterey it was clear that Dirk's legacy will only make us more determined to succeed. I leave you with words Koning wrote in 1999, "If we promote the message as the message, not the medium as the message, we will stay relevant. If we use media as a social development tool, we will remain relevant. If we define ourselves and not let ourselves be defined by corporate media, we will remain relevant..."

Pam Colby



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**next mtn member's
screening:**

**friday, september 9
7 p.m. in studio A**

Bring something to screen or just come to watch. There is a 10 minutes limit on all show clips. Questions? Call John at (612) 331-8575 ext. 307.



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