

Off-beat news labels KLCC

News director seeks listener participation

By Randy Malat
Of the Emerald

The philosophy of KLCC news, unique on local airwaves for the range and depth of coverage it allows, is reflected by the attitude Don Hein brings to his work.

"I'm curious," says Hein, in his fifth year as news director. "I'm trying to find out something more about somebody else."

"I want my listeners to have as many different points of view thrown at them as I can find in the community. That's one of the reasons I've been able to get a large staff. KLCC has always made people in the community community reporters. Every KLCC reporter is a pair of ears, a curiosity module floating around town, asking questions, finding out stuff."

If the increasing support from local business underwriters and a steadily growing list of listeners is any indication, the community approves of what KLCC 89.7 FM is doing.

The mutually rewarding relationship seems to grow with age. KLCC has responded to the success of its fundraising and to other indications of listener satisfaction with an eclectic selection of music not found in commercial radio, and "alternative" news and public affairs programming that accounts for 20 percent of its air time.

About 25 volunteers join Hein and Greg Harris, host of News from the Northwest Corner, on the news and public affairs staff. When faced with a miserly local economy, energetic people are perhaps more inclined to devote their time to a financially unrewarding, but creatively stimulating endeavor.

Judging by the staff's enthusiasm, the reportorial freedom and marketable experience that KLCC news exchanges for that time and energy is a compelling lure. They often speak of KLCC news in glowing terms, like converts to a faith that has given a sense of self-identity and a measure of self-fulfillment.

Maggie O'Grady, who reports on human rights issues and contributes to Women's Night Out, a Sunday evening program, regards her role at KLCC idealistically.

"Most important to me is



Photo by Jonathan Siegle

KLCC news director Don Hein at the Hult Center opening.

just getting out the issues that I think are important," she says. "Cultural diversity is what's important to me. The only way you challenge yourself is to be constantly exposed to as many different people as possible."

"Why I continue to work there has a lot to do with Don," says John Cooney, who spends the late hours every Saturday and the early hours Sunday putting together a news show composed of short-wave transmissions from around the world.

"He's got an uncanny sense of what he should be doing. As long as there's creative energy he's not going to get in the way."

"The Sunday morning program," Cooney says, "lets both of us stretch out and see how much we can push personal freedom on the radio. The idea is to present a world view, what's happened on the planet, without giving weight to the typical North American news situations. I feel there's too much weight put on our culture, and an ignoring of other people's culture."

Hein speaks of his role with self-satisfied modesty.

"I'm concerned about libel, fairness and that we're covering the kind of things that have to be covered," he says. "Beyond that, I leave it to my reporters to do the covering. I respect their abilities. A lot of times I don't agree with the story they come back with. But I'm not going to change it. I'll

take the credit for creating an environment in which the volunteers can take gratification for what they do."

A station management policy that's supportive of the news department rounds out the equation.

"He's able to maintain a good working atmosphere in the news department on a day-to-day basis. He's a warm person. He's friendly," says station Manager Jon Schwartz. "He's also able to make touchy decisions. He works hard to maintain fairness and balance in the news."

KLCC's reputation outranges its transmitters and has paid dividends to a number of volunteers Hein has seen come and go.



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