



The Friday Edition

The weekly arts and entertainment newsmagazine

Public radio flourishes in Eugene community

KWAX 'Friendraiser' reaches for support

In addition to wood products, grass seed, world-class runners and losing inter-collegiate athletic teams, the Eugene community is becoming known for another commodity it produces successfully: public radio.

The term "public radio" may be foreign to aficionados of funkadelic, bubble-gum, or Top 40 radio stations, but locally public radio is successfully competing with its commercial counterparts. Public radio stations do not broadcast advertising, but instead receive their funding from listener contributions and funds provided by governmental grants.

Story by Tom Hall
Graphic by Shawn Bird



Eugene is home to two radio stations affiliated with the National Public Radio (NPR) network, both highly rated nationally in listenership. KLCC-FM (89.1), located at Lane Community College, and KWAX-FM (91.1), here on the University of Oregon campus, are among the top 30 NPR stations in the country, based on Arbitron ratings.

Catherine Gilbert, KWAX station manager, says that "each station has a certain type of listener who becomes 'addicted,' and will only listen to public radio, but will switch between the two stations," and then confessed, "I do, too."

Both KLCC and KWAX offer their listeners more than entertainment, however. They provide almost limitless opportunities in experience, professional development and creative outlet for those interested in pursuing a career in radio broadcasting. Like many stations affiliated with colleges or universities, both rely heavily on volunteer

help. KLCC obtains its corps of volunteers primarily from the community, and prefers the term "community radio." Its sister station, KWAX, relies primarily on student volunteers from the University.

The different focus of programming between the two stations is readily apparent. KWAX concentrates on classical music, although it carries its share of jazz and folk music as well. Its news and features reporting has a "magazine-on-the-air" approach, says Nancie Fadeley, KWAX's public affairs director.

KLCC is more eclectic, and carries a mixture of jazz, folk, opera, special-interest features and "hard news" reporting.

"We're fortunate to have two good stations like KWAX and KLCC here in Eugene," says Gilbert, "because that frees both stations to offer more diversity, without duplication." She adds, "We're really more symbiotic than competitive. We both try to serve an audience which would not be served otherwise."

Gilbert assumed her post as KWAX station manager just last month, transferring

here from another NPR station affiliated with the University of Utah, because "Eugene seemed to be a community ideally suited for public radio — a very arts-oriented, aware community where the visibility of KWAX and KLCC is very high."

The visibility of KWAX may be especially high this week, with its semi-annual fundraising or "Friendraiser" drive dominating its air time. While the practice of asking for money from its listeners may strike a dissonant chord among a public accustomed to "free" radio, both stations could not exist without listener contributions, says Karen Kammerer, director of development for KWAX.

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One-fourth, or \$50,000 of KWAX's annual budget of over \$200,000 is obtained from the two telethons, an amount roughly equal to that contributed by the University itself, with the remaining half of their budget coming from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and other grants. "We need all the help we can get," says Gilbert.

Parallel with its financial outreach, KWAX is launching a drive to recruit new volunteers to run the station, which only has the minimum (to maintain NPR affiliation) paid staff of five. Students may participate as work-study employees, work for practicum or internship credit, or be "a purely altruistic volunteer," says Tom DuVal, KWAX's new program director.

"We're looking for people with a working knowledge of classical music, who can pick selections, announce them, and answer

Continued on Page 88

Local radio producer finds unusual poetry in everyday

If one were to look for a rags-to-riches success story, it would be hard to find one more engaging than that of M'Lou Zahner-Ollswang. Zahner-Ollswang is a local radio producer who is attracting national attention for her feature segments.

The devoted listeners of the highly acclaimed National Public Radio broadcast *All Things Considered* (aired at 6:00 p.m. on KWAX-FM) and its a.m. counterpart *Morning Edition* will recognize M'Lou's work as those warm, witty, and simply wonderful vignettes which break up the orderly procession of news reporting. In between the latest from Lebanon and the newest from Nicaragua, a national au-

Story by Tom Hall
Photo by Paul Ollswang

dience is captivated by "cameos: miniatures in sound," as M'Lou calls them, on such universal subjects as:

- the stuff you find under your couch cushions.
- the state-of-the-art cure(s) people have for hiccups.
- the joys/traumas experienced by people whose last name begins with "Z".
- the impact that moving has on people in our mobile society.

It is this search for "universals" which drives M'Lou, and a profound sense of compassion for others. "That's what radio is all about," she says, "trying to translate experiences which will touch people's lives. People are such delicate beings, and what they say about everyday things is very...well, poetic."

A poetic case in point is a radio spot



M'Lou Zahner-Ollswang, a local radio producer, is attracting national attention for her feature segments.

about a mysterious, mucilaginous and oft-maligned vegetable, simply entitled "Okra," which aired last week. "When I interviewed someone locally, she described the smell of okra cooking on her grandmother's stove, and recalled the sensation of biting into that first mouthful of the slimy stuff, over potatoes. That evoked a sight, smell and taste sensation, an image, in many people all over the country," she says. "That is real poetry —

when people stop and say, 'Oh, yeah — I know about that,' and are touched by a common experience," she added.

The eye (and ear) for detail which M'Lou possesses is one key to her success, but it was more difficult, she says, than some people might think for her to break into a national market for her work. "Most editors I deal with are pretty ruthless," she says, "so I've learned to tailor my shows to their needs, in two ways: by do-

ing more advance research, and by building in a 'fudge factor' which allows them to cut a little without ruining my concept."

"Not many people will succeed at what I do," she asserts, "because not many people are willing to do what is necessary to break in and stay there." She described how she read NPR's submission guidelines to a 'T,' and sent them six different spots. One was accepted.

"I 'cultivated' my editor, and still do; I also go back to Washington, D.C. (NPR's headquarters) once a year to do the 'Let's have lunch' bit with the staff of *All Things Considered*," she said.

The cultivation of her own talents in radio began just a few years ago, locally: "Believe it or not, I went to KLCC as a volunteer, with the express idea of getting onto National Public Radio," she said.

She did just that.

Now, however, her demand for excellence and freedom of expression has led her away from radio stations, she says, because most radio personnel aren't willing to match the dedication and time she finds necessary to produce a show of the quality she demands. Where does she produce her shows? "In a room in the upstairs of my house," she says.

The production of her popular radio spots has led to bigger and better things for M'Lou, such as her receiving a \$12,000 grant from the Satellite Development Fund of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, to produce two half-hour radio segments on the Washington Public Power Supply System (WPPSS) controver-

Continued on Page 88