

News keeps KMTR team on the move

Real newsrooms don't function at all like the portrayals on television sitcoms do

By Kaly Soto
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The news stops for no man, or woman or news team for that matter.

Most of the ideas that mainstream America has about how a television newsroom functions come from shows like *Murphy Brown* and *Mary Tyler Moore*, where everyone cracks jokes and has time to schmooze around the watercooler.

In actuality that doesn't happen. It's not because people in the newsroom don't want it to, but there is simply no time for it.

A typical day in the KMTR newsroom begins with news director Jim Frandin pacing back and forth in front of a table full of clippings from local and national newspapers covering the major events of the past day. The newsroom also puts calls in to the Lane and Douglas County sheriff's offices.

"It's a mental run down of what the news will look like tonight," Frandin said. Frandin honed his news instinct in radio and has used his talent in television for the past 25 years.

His advice to reporters is simple. "It took me 25 years to learn to grow a tomato plant. About three or four years ago I got into gardening, and I am into it big time. I live up the McKenzie River now and I'm out in the garden in the spring when I can see the bald eagles.

"I used to live and die this business seven days a week, and it almost killed me... I have another life now, and if I could give anybody any advice it would be get the other life first, and don't ever lose it, because I blinked and 25 years went by."

There are four reporters, two women and two men, who will venture out into the field from 9 to 5 gathering interviews and video footage for the day's news cast at 5 p.m.

On this particular day the North American Free Trade Agreement vote is still up for grabs. Reporter Gwynn Copeland is busy working on a story about the impact NAFTA will have locally. She hopes to find two local companies who are willing to go on camera with their positions on NAFTA. The idea is to find one company in favor and one in opposition. The companies are not talking, not to television reporters anyway.

Copeland gets a few quotes over the phone, but these quotes don't do her much good because she has no video footage to go with them.

Copeland goes to the University to find an economics professor who will explain to the news audience the local impact NAFTA may have.

"If U of O has experts in an area, we use them as a resource," Copeland said. "And if they don't have an expert they can usually give us a person to call."

As the day progresses the story becomes harder and harder. Copeland has called every major corporation and local business, hoping to find someone who will talk to her, but has no luck.

She then tries state congressional representatives hoping that one of them will be able to at least give her a name. She was not quiet about her frustration at the dead end she was facing.

"All of these (representatives) have their minds made up as to how they are going to vote," Copeland said. "And no one can give me a name of a company or constituent who agrees with their position."

Kohr Harlan is on the computer trying to write copy. He says he will "figure out the pictures later."

Catherine Stephens is already on the road (incidentally she does double duty by giving traffic reports for radio station KDUK). She is going to Albany and Corvallis to investigate claims that the Albany police are using discriminatory practices.

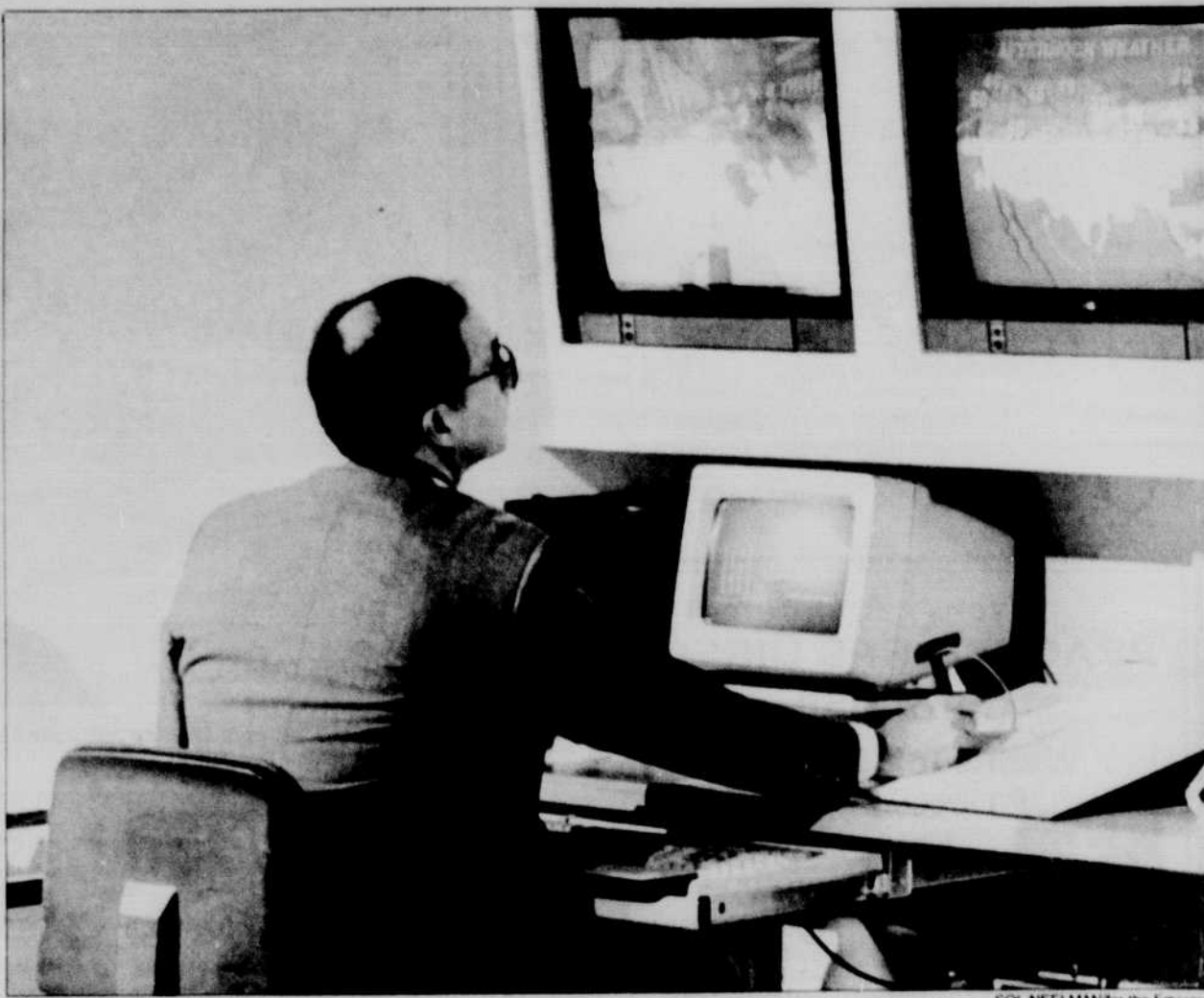
John Cappell is on his way to Cougar Reservoir to do a story on soil contamination. He, like Stephens, is trained in video tapping his own spots. Cappell goes without a camera crew, even though he says, "It's not my forte."

And these are just the morning assignments.

Like the community desk at the *Emerald*, the assignments desk at KMTR is full of press releases from community groups and local events coordinators looking for a little free publicity.

It is Tracey Baker's job to read these press releases and pass on the good news stories to Frandin. In addition to keeping the newsroom abreast of everything, Baker must also contact with national and state legislators.

"The Governor's office and politicians are pretty good



KMTR meteorologist Joseph Calbreath prepares computer graphics to complement his weather report.



KMTR reporter John Capell records the voice over for his story in a specially designed phone booth at the station.

about keeping us posted," Baker said.

Each of the reporters is responsible for writing the copy for their stories as well as shooting and editing footage. They must also do voiceovers for the footage. The amount of work these reporters do in one day is equivalent to the work Murphy Brown and Frank Fontana do in a month of episodes.

If the reporters are unable to attain the necessary footage in the field, they may decide to use footage from their sister station in Portland, KGW, or their network, NBC, if they can get it. KMTR tries to do this as little as possible.

"(KGW) takes more from us than we do from them," Frandin said.

Getting footage from the network is an entirely different ballgame.

Because both are working to make NBC look good, it would make sense for them to cooperate with each other to do the best job. But television is much more competitive than that.

Frandin told an interesting story about NBC and the Timber Summit held in Portland at the beginning of the Clinton administration.

"For two weeks prior to that summit we attempted to talk NBC News into providing some kind of coverage. Now Portland's close enough, so we sent some crews up to the conference.

"Because of the length of the conference, and in actuality it ended about 7 at night after our normal air time, we provided live coverage of it from 5 p.m. until it ended, and then we did out the news cast because NBC news would not provide us with any satellite feed material.

"We had to pay \$1000 that day for that particular material that day. The morning of that event, seven minutes before it began, NBC decided to give it free to the entire country. So we spent \$1000 for nothing.

"The relationship that you think exists between the network and the local affiliate is all but nonexistent."

For the most part Frandin tries to keep his newscasts as locally focused as he can.

"We believe that we have a responsibility to Douglas and Lane counties. They are our area and we rarely move out of them."

Frandin, even though he works behind the scenes, is the team leader. It is his job to determine what is and what is not news.

He prods his reporters with quotes such as, "If you can't find anyone shaken by that story here, than you're not trying hard enough or you've got the story all wrong" and "Jo Beer Can is just as good a source as someone with a Ph.D."

He is also concerned that his reporters don't use confusing terminology or language that will turn the viewer off. "Talk over the heads of the audience and they'll turn you off," he says.

During fall term, KMTR had three interns that worked in weather, sports and news.

Leanne Johnston, a student at University of British Columbia, was doing her internship in atmospheric sciences. She returned to UBC this month to complete her degree. During her internship Johnston helped KMTR's resident meteorologist Joseph Calbreath make weather maps.

Both think the field is exciting because, as Johnston said, "Everyone does their own weather."

Calbreath, who has been in the weather business for many years, thinks his job is ideal.

"Weather is a good gig," he said. Even though he works from 2 p.m. to 11 p.m., he has a generous dinner break and is able to go home and see his family.

The news anchors come in at 2 p.m. to read copy and get familiar with the day's stories. By then the news room is in chaos and the adrenaline is flowing freely. The pace is frantic by airtime.

But Frandin is unaware of all that. He is home with his plants and his other life.