

# KMUN IS ON THE AIR

BY DOUG SWEET

*These two articles by Doug Sweet were written for the NCTE 12 years apart. The first appraised the premier of KMUN-FM just before the radio station made its first broadcast April 17, 1983. The second was a call to arms against the fierce attempt by the so-called congressional 'Republican Revolution' with its much bally-hooped "Contract With America" to eradicate public radio. That assault on first amendment radio failed but the threat is persistent and Sweet's warning timely. He has left KMUN after nearly 18 years as the station's manager. These articles are reprinted in tribute to his creative good sense. ~MPMc*

If you will, please, on Sunday, April 17, turn on your FM radio and tune in to 91.9. You will be joining the party for the signing on of North Coast Community Radio, station KMUN. It has been a long time coming. Years have passed since the first seeds were sown. The licensing process alone consumed more than a year. It is with great reluctance that the Federal Communications Commission gives its permission to operate. Then there was the problem of finding space for the studio, space for the transmitter and antenna, space for a desk and a file cabinet to hold the FCC information. And, of course, money. It takes time to get the money to buy the equipment to play a record over the airwaves. People don't seem to have old FM broadcast transmitters sitting around gathering dust in their garages. A thrift store is no help at all.

Then there is the people power, which takes time to harness. Two hundred and 50 members who have joined without ever hearing an electronic peep out of the machinery. There are 150 or so volunteers who have done everything from clean the bathroom to climb to the top of the antenna tower; filing, writing letters, stashing records, soldering wires, building walls, writing guidelines, etc., etc. Then there is KBOO, Portland's community radio station, which has been parent and guardian for the baby KMUN in Astoria. The list of helpers (let us not forget the Coast Guard which put up our antenna pole) is so long I'll leave it to the Community Radio Honor Roll to list them. But the point is made. When you have no money, you spend your time.

So here we are folks. Sunday the 17th of April, for all the world to hear (at least this corner of it) to hear. North Coast Community Radio, 91.9 FM.

Consider, if you will, that KMUN is one of only 60 community supported radio stations in the United States. Community radio means two things: the station is financed by local membership in the station; and the programs heard on the air are produced by members of the community.

People who become members first of all have the pleasure of being shareholders in a continuous artistic happening. Turn on your radio and the share pays immediate dividends. Members get a monthly program guide that tells when a show will be on the air and who will produce it. If you like a show you can say to yourself, "I helped make that happen." If you don't like a show, being a member carries a lot more weight when you call up to complain. The greatest bonus is that you can call up to complain or praise because it is a station run by and for the community, not by some media conglomerate bent only on making money for itself.

Community radio is open to the public. That isn't to say you can walk right in and get on the air, but it does mean your energy and your opinions will have a direct bearing on what you hear. If you want to be on the air, come down to the station and let it be known. Someone will be there to listen and tell you how to put your ideas to work.

If you can't play the fiddle, play the radio. If you are within earshot of our signal (and we don't yet know our limits), this is what you will hear:

**Morning Classical** — Tune in at 6 a.m. for the extraordinary strains of Debussy, Bach, Vivaldi, Copland, etc., etc.

**Storytimes** — We will have a Book-of-the-Air for 30 minutes every morning so that you can catch up on your reading without straining your eyes. Repeated at 7 p.m.

**Bedtime Stories** — For you who are kids, for you who are old but never grew up, for you who turn in by 8:30 each night the Bedtime Tellers will put in you in the mood for a snooze.



**Jazz** — KMUN has a great collection of old jazz, new jazz, swing jazz and mean jazz. Several times each week, some in the afternoon, some in the evening. You can either be educated or intoxicated by listening to your favorite show.

**Folk** — You will be able to listen to the old and the new. The Saturday Night specialty will be Celtic (Irish, Scottish, Welsh); but you will find no limits on what you hear: '60s antiwar songs; women's folk; child ballads; broadsides; lyrics & laments; hymns & spirituals; lullabies & songs. There will be international folk music with traditional music from Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Germany, Tonga and wherever else we can turn it up.

**Public Affairs** — We want to tell you what is going on in the area; we will poke our microphones into city council meetings, port councils, government bodies of every stripe. We will be interviewing our congresspeople when they come to town. We will look into all sorts of cracks and crevasses to find a story. As a listener, don't be afraid to be part of the story. Call us up or write us a letter.

There is more. You will hear blues, new wave, very old oldies, and some not so oldies in the music field. There will be old time radio comedy. You will hear about events and services for seniors and just about everybody else.

Now look again and see where you fit in, or what programming we might have overlooked. Like all the work at KMUN, most programs will be hosted by local volunteers. KMUN can provide training for those who want to learn to use the equipment. All that is needed is your energy and commitment to hosting a program. Of course, there are guidelines — what you intend to do and why you want to do it on KMUN is the primary question of a proposal that should be submitted to the station. The FCC requires that everyone involved with broadcasting complete a training course, which consists of two parts: Community Radio Orientation and Technical Training.

KMUN is a community radio station that will be entertaining, stimulating, controversial, and we promise, rarely boring. You might not like everything you hear, but it will be worth listening to — and supporting.

As many of you might have heard, a number of the new members of Congress are questioning whether public radio should survive. Many say that while they hear from people who disagree with what they hear on public radio, they rarely hear from constituents who support public broadcasting. KMUN needs you to be the voice of the station to let your congressional representatives know how much you value having local, community-owned and operated radio in your area.

With the financial support of thousands of people over the years, KMUN has been able to add to the cultural and educational life of the many communities we serve. The federal government has been a partner in that through the U.S. Department of Commerce with help in purchasing equipment and through the Corporation for Public Broadcasting which has helped the station become nationally connected through the public radio satellite system.

In 1977 when the small group of locals were working to get a local public access radio station on the air, the mountain to climb was an initial cost of more than \$150,000 for equipment to begin broadcasting. The U.S. Department of Commerce has a program called the National Telecommunications & Information Agency, Public Telecommunications Facilities Program (NTIA/PTFP) which, since the early 1970s, has been helping new stations get off the ground. The reason? Economic, educational, and cultural development in the communities the broadcast station would serve. The program, however, only paid for half the amount needed to do the job. The idea was that the local community would use the federal funds as seed money and raise the rest from supporters locally. In fact, the federal money is never sent unless the local area completely supplies the remainder needed.

In 1983, KMUN began broadcasting with only an air room and a transmitter — no place to produce programs off air. In 1984, we added a production room we used to train the all volunteer crew which to this day operates the station. In 1985, we were able to add translators serving Cannon Beach, Nehalem/Wheeler/Manzanita, and the upper Nehalem valley and the north Columbia River shore. In 1987, we were able to purchase the satellite system which enabled us for the first time to get programs from other stations and independent producers. In 1989, we added translators in Tillamook and south Astoria to enhance our signals there. All of this was partially funded through help from the NTIA/PTFP program — but most of the money came from local and regional sources such as member contributions, the Oregon Community Foundation, the Meyer Memorial Trust, Jackson Foundation, Burlington Northern Foundation and many more. In other words, because of the federal assistance, KMUN was able to (pardon the jargon) leverage contributions which enabled us to complete the projects.

Success in spreading the signal led to a local outpouring in 1985, when we were faced with a need to move due to crowding and increased production demand, which resulted in

our buying a building to house the studios. We did this without federal funding of any kind.

But still, even with these successes, KMUN labors to raise the dollars day in and day out, year in and year out that it takes to operate the station. It is far easier to raise money to paint a building than it is to find funds to pay the electric bill. For years we operated with only one and a half staff persons to keep the enormous FCC and membership paperwork up to date, to train new programmers, and to fix broken equipment...as well as organize the outside fundraisers and community events the station sponsors.

Finally, in 1993, with the help of other stations and national organizations, KMUN became eligible for a community service grant from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). There has always been a threshold level of local support needed to become eligible for funding. But in 1993 some of the larger urban stations agreed to give up some of their funding so small rural stations like KMUN could get funding to help pay basic operating costs, help pay for local production, and purchase equipment. We will see some of the results of this in the next few months as we replace aging satellite and audio equipment in the station.

CPB funding has made a whole range of programs available that we had no access to before such as *Talk of the Nation*, *Soundprint*, *Car Talk*, *Morning Edition*, *All Things Considered*, *Classical Countdown*, *Riders Radio*, *Fresh Air*, *Selected Shorts*, *Sandy Bradley's Potluck*, *Marian MacPartland's Piano Jazz*, *Afropop Worldwide*, and just lately the regional news program, *Northwest Journal*. Indeed, most of these programs would not exist on any station without a contribution from CPB. These programs have helped KMUN increase local funding by matching up local programs with compatible national programs. The match-up has brought new listenability to our local programming by giving us a standard by which to measure ourselves. Federal funding has provided training opportunities for volunteers and staff to get better at what we do.

Yes, KMUN can probably survive as it did before CPB funding. But as you can see, without the Department of Commerce, the station would probably not exist. Yet, the world can probably get along without *Car Talk*, without *All Things Considered*, without *Piano Jazz*. But do we want them to go away? Is public broadcast funding less important to communities than, say, military bands which receive more than twice as much funding yearly as all of public broadcasting? (When was the last time you saw a military band march down your street?) Is public broadcasting less important than providing subsidies to tobacco companies to hold down the price of cigarettes? Is all the money to be spent on all the federal arts programs (CPB, National Endowment for the Arts, National Endowment for the Humanities, the Smithsonian Museum, etc.) for the next decade less important than buying one wing of one C-17 transport plane? (Those two amounts of money are roughly equal.)

One last thing. Critics of public radio seem to be saying that public radio has undermined "family values" by being liberal and fomenting permissive values. Consider this: KMUN has been the only station anywhere in the United States over the last decade that has a program of daily bedtime stories for children. We have been producing an "alternative to Saturday morning cartoons," the *Skinnamarink* show for more than ten years. And our work in getting teenagers off the streets and into the radio air room can be heard...when they play music and discuss the problems unique to young people.

Our local public affairs programs have covered city council and county commission meetings. We have interviewed pro-choicers and right-to-lifers; pro and con on ballot measures; candidates from all parties for public offices.

KMUN's programmers are a rainbow of the political spectrum from ex-county commissioner, Republican Bob Westerberg, to flaming liberal Carol Newman. And our policy of constantly seeking community volunteers and providing hands-on training for access to the airwaves has no caveats to admission.

So I ask you. Is KMUN worth something to you? Is it worth more than a yearly contribution? Is public broadcasting worthy of your help? Will you help KMUN and every other public station continue to be able to provide the programming we now take for granted? If the answer is yes, then please call or write our representatives, especially the new Speaker of the House, and let them know that local public radio is important to you. Do it today. The sooner the better.

It is the best support you can give KMUN. Listener support is the most important ingredient for any community radio station and our broadcast community has been great for many, many years. You've helped us a contributor, now we need you as a citizen.

—DOUG SWEET (NCTE, JAN&FEB 1995)



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