



Sean Bowditch on air at KLCC's studio.

# KLCC FACES CRITICS

## PUBLIC RADIO STATION DEFENDS ITS PROGRAMMING

BY STEVEN SAWADA. ■ PHOTOS BY TODD COOPER

**E**ugene's popular public radio station KLCC at 89.7 FM wraps up another successful Radiothon fund-raising campaign this week. The station continues to draw a large audience and high media ratings, and enjoys a high level of financial support from listeners and business underwriters. The station airs lively, national award-winning local, regional and international news, and a one-hour Sunday talk show. But not everyone's happy. Critics assail the station for lack of daily local talk shows, lack of national liberal programming, too much jazz (and not enough hip hop), and a lack of response to public input.

The criticism does not appear in polls or fund-raising numbers. The dissent is tucked away amongst individual critics, former station employees and volunteers, and at least one small community action group.

**K**LCC's management says independent Arbitron ratings show that KLCC has steadily increased its listenership over the years. But according to these pockets of critical community members, the numbers betray a disconnect to a large cross-section of Eugeneans.

David Zupan, chair of Eugene PeaceWorks' Eugene Media Action Committee (EMAC), believes programming decisions should hinge on what's positive for the community, not Arbitron data. "Do what's right, not necessarily what will boost ratings," he says.

Last fall, EMAC met with several of KLCC's managers including Steven Barton, KLCC's general manager, and Don Heine, the station's program director. Among a list of several concerns, the group echoed the public demand for KLCC to pick up the investigative news program "Democracy

Now." Zupan also brought up another recurring issue: the block of time that NPR's highly successful program "Car Talk" takes on Saturday and Sunday.

"One suggestion was instead of repeating 'Car Talk,' why not use that kind of valuable space for some more local programming, public affairs, or maybe a labor show would be appropriate," he says, referring to Portland's community radio KBOO's "Labor News" program.

Michelle Hollman, a former member of the now disbanded KLCC advisory board, agrees with Zupan. "Where's public access, why do we hear 'Car Talk' twice? There are a lot of voices in the community that we could hear," she says.

But according to both Barton and Heine, programming decisions are based on many factors, some unseen by the community at-large, and these decisions undergo much con-

sideration. In regards to picking up 'Democracy Now,' Barton explains that the show would compromise the station's mission to remain objective in its news reporting.

"We've heard a lot from people who want us to carry 'Democracy Now.' That's a common thing and it goes in waves," Barton says. "The answer to the reason why we don't carry 'Democracy Now' is because it is clearly an advocacy program. It advocates for certain positions. And it is the host and staff of the program who are advocating."

"'Democracy Now' is a news program, where they cover events of the day through a filter that Amy Goodman has crafted," Heine says in concurrence with Barton.

The management at KLCC is concerned with presenting ideas on all sides of the political spectrum, Barton continues. "Our position is that we're here to raise the level of dialogue to introduce ideas. We want people to have an intelligent and informed knowledge of what's going on, and an intelligent and informed discussion about it."

There was a similar conflict that bled into the news magazine and call-in programs of author and former KLCC reporter Alan Siporin. For more than 20 years, Siporin worked at KLCC as a reporter, commentator and talk show host. In the 1980s, he hosted KLCC's acclaimed news magazine show "The Blue Plate Special." That show was eventually dissolved and Siporin was put in charge of a commentary program, which aired on Thursdays and Fridays, and a listener call-in program, "Critical Mass," which aired on Sunday. In addition to his work at KLCC, Siporin also served as an editor and reporter for NPR.

Both Siporin and KLCC management contend that separating news from editorial content was a constant issue during his time at the station.

Initially, once a week, a live call-in program topped off "The Blue Plate Special." On occasion, Siporin would transition the two segments with a short political parody ala "Saturday Night Live" or "The Daily Show." This quickly became a problem for KLCC management.

"The standards for KLCC News take into account that people cannot leave all their beliefs and values at the door of the news room. But we do expect people to keep their personal agendas out of their reporting," KLCC's News