

Keeping it live

Community voices stay on the radio during COVID-19

BY CAITLIN SEYFRIED

If you're looking for socially distanced communication, radio fits the bill. Local radio stations have not been immune to unexpected challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic. Many are producing audio from home.

"We're on the radio, so we're used to being locked in a room by ourselves and not seeing people," said Stephanie Meadows, owner of Hits 94.3 KRKZ FM in Astoria. "Not getting to see our clients has been really hard."

Many stations produce their own shows, requiring several staff, volunteers and other contributors, like business clients, to share a studio space.

Advertising for local businesses is central to KRKZ's operation.

"We try to support our local businesses as much as possible," Meadows said. "When this first hit we did a call-out on the radio: if you need help announcing hours or need to get the word out about your business, let us know. We ran stuff for free. We still are running stuff for free."

KRKZ's free advertising spots are ran through the station's Community Marketing Grants program. Local business owners can apply for free advertising at the station's website, 943krkz.com.

Like most radio stations, KRKZ reorganized its office and operations in response to the coronavirus pandemic. Staff and contributors who usually would be inside the

station are instead working from home.

"(Our goal is) to keep things positive and entertain people like we always have," Meadows said.

In Seaside, 94.9 The Bridge KGBE FM has also been offering free advertising to local businesses.

"We've had to change a lot," said station owner and general manager Boomer Barbosa. "Instead of doing paid advertising campaigns, we did a lot pro-bono, to do everything we could to help out the local businesses we've had partnerships with for years and years."

Impacts of COVID-19 at the station included a temporary reduction in staff. "We're back to just about full force of where we were before the pandemic," said Barbosa. "We figure that's the best way we can serve the community. We've got to have the workforce there to do it."

Producing radio at home

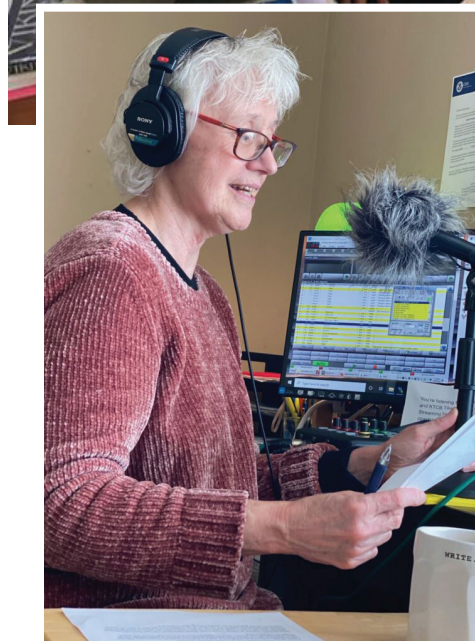
Both Meadows and Barbosa mentioned a shift toward producing radio at home, when possible, to encourage social distancing. At Coast Community Radio KMUN 91.9 FM, the transition to at-home production for more than 50 volunteer programmers has been a huge undertaking.

"When COVID hit, we went to a lock-down policy where we had the absolute skeleton crew staff in the building and we weren't allowing volunteers in," said station

See Page 7



Lloyd Bowler, recording for Coast Community Radio's Scandinavian Hour, in full Norwegian regalia.



Joanne Rideout, Coast Community Radio's news director, programming live.



Jerry Middaugh, Coast Community Radio's Wednesday Morning Folk programmer.

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