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The first of a series
of articles concerned with
Media in Mendocino County

KZYX

And The Future Of Community Radio

Big Picture: Community Control

Community media—including television, radio, internet and print—is important for many reasons. It is often said that a democracy requires that everyone have access to information and opinion. That has always been true. But at this moment we stand on the brink of a breathtaking change in communication. Computer or “digital” technology is opening the door to interactive, back and forth communication at all levels of government and social life.

Real popular control over community media is now technically possible. I don’t claim to know a lot about that technology, but “we” regular folks had better set up some structures to keep us all informed about what is happening. Our city councils and the county board of supervisors are and will be making important

decisions about our public media and communications infrastructure. While discussion of the infrastructure (telephone lines, fiber-optic, satellite, cable modem, DSL, ISDN) is beyond the scope of this article, I would like to point out that if we want to acquire public control of communications some of us need to understand and think about it.

Media oversight is sure to be an important part of the “economic localization” groups that have formed in several Mendocino County areas.

Popular control of local media is neither a Republican nor a Democratic issue, neither conservative nor liberal. The desire for more control over our lives crosses political borders: Everyone wants it.

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Who Am I?

My name is King Collins. I’ve lived in the Mendocino County since the mid-eighties. I have raised a family in Ukiah, and lived and worked around the county as an electrician, a desktop publisher, a teacher at Mendocino College, and sometimes as a journalist.

I am a believer in community radio and the power of open dialogue, and an unapologetic advocate for *public disclosure and free speech*.

When I was elected to the board of KZYX two years ago, I saw it as my responsibility to be open (transparent) and direct, and to keep in touch with the members who elected me. Recent developments, including the energy crisis and the emerging “economic localization” groups have greatly increased my desire to keep in contact.

King Collins

KZYX Picture: Member Control

This series of articles presents a vision for Mendocino’s community radio station, KZYX. In this vision members have greater knowledge of and control over the station’s organization and programming than currently exists, and board, staff and programmers meet together to discuss and improve working conditions and the quality of on-air programming.

It also discusses events that took place at KZYX over the last two and a half years when I was an elected member of the station’s Board of Directors. My term ended this spring (2005). Working on the board was a trying experience and like others before me, I was tempted to just move on and put the whole experience behind me.

I decided instead to take the matter more seriously by “going public.” I wrote a pamphlet, “The Secret Life of KZYX - A Minority Report,” and let the chips fall where they would. As it turned out, they mostly fell on me.

What I have written here is, first and foremost, my own opinion. However, in

speaking for myself, I think I am also speaking for quite a few others. The pamphlet reflects a lot of feedback from friends and colleagues. Some suggested that I remove references to individuals. After some reflection, I agreed to remove comments about particular staff members, but I’ve kept comments about board

members, who are elected and serving as public persons.

I think it is better to err on the side of openness—an idea that distinguishes my views from those of the board majority who prefer to err on the side of “confidentiality.”

Even though the Secret Life of KZYX has had limited distribution, it has been read and commented

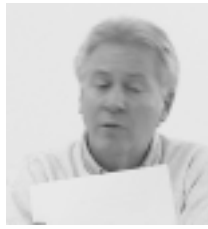
on by a good sample of KZYX community members. I have posted the original and readers comments on my web site, and I think most people will agree that the document has passed muster as a valid critique, in spite of the fact that the KZYX board president says he has never read it. (See cartoon at near the end of this piece.)

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The “Old” Board Members Who Are Continuing



Johanna Cummings
Programmers Rep



Tony Miksak
Coast



Charlie Hochberg
Anderson Valley



Lynda McClure
At-large



Wendy Blankenheim
Anderson Valley



Robert Crawford
Inland

KZYZ Board Split Centrists and Egalitarians

The board is selected by the members to represent their interests and to uphold the mission of the radio station. How to do this is one of the big issues of the board. There are nine board members: two from Anderson Valley, two from the coast, two from inland, two “at large” and one elected by (but for the past half dozen years not specifically representing) the programmers.

The board splits. During my term, the board typically divided over key issues. I have shown (in the pamphlet) that there is consistency in those splits that points to two “tendencies” on the board. I use the word “tendency” to describe two perspectives or leanings, and two distinct groupings.

I have named the tendencies “Centrist” and “Egalitarian.” The word Centrist will refer to those who seek to concentrate power and communication in the hands of a few. In contrast, the word Egalitarian refers to those who believe individuals

should have full access to information and equal rights in all areas of social and political life. Here, of course, such words are applied to the social and political structure of KZYZ.

Based on opinions expressed and votes taken during my last year with the KZYZ board, the tendencies on the board were represented as follows:

Centrists:

Tony Miksak, Robert Crawford, Johanna Cummings, Wendy Blankenheim, Charlie Hochberg,

Egalitarians:

King Collins, Zac Zachary, Lynda McClure

I will not venture to categorize the newly elected board members, though Jane Futcher has said complimentary things about the *Secret Life of KZYZ*.

The Centrist Point of View

As the name implies, the Centrists want decision-making concentrated around a central authority.

In their view:

- Board members should adhere to current ways of doing things, the status quo.
- The Board President should decide which committees exist and who will chair those committees.
- Board members are expected to keep out of “operational” matters and rely on the General Manager for knowledge of what is happening at the station.
- Board members are not to be involved in, or even publicly discuss, programming.
- The proper role of board members is only to discuss and act on “policy,” long range planning, fund-raising, and hiring or firing of the General Manager.
- Board members should maintain “confidentiality” about board discussions and support the majority view as if it were the unified opinion of the board.

According to the Centrists, board members should always project a rosy picture about what is happening at the station, and never inquire into what is going on with staff or programmers.

The Newly Elected



Jane Fitcher
Inland



Mike Grady
Coast



Antonia Lamb
Coast

The Rejected



King Collins (Me)
Inland



Zac Zackary
Coast

The Egalitarian Point of View

Egalitarians share decision-making power whenever possible and seek answers from open public dialogue.

In their view:

- All aspects of our community radio station should be run in a democratic fashion, according to simple and clear protocols.
- At the board level, all board members are equals; the board president is a facilitator - rather than arbiter - in board meetings and other matters, including the selection of committees and committee chairpersons.
- Board-staff relations are direct (unmediated) and organized so that the ideas and concerns of each are shared. The General Manager, if there is one, encourages the sharing of information, so that the board is aware of staff needs and concerns, and vice versa.
- Staff and board meet regularly as a committee-of-the-whole in open, family-style meetings.
- Programmers have a voice and a consistent way of communicating among themselves and with board and staff.
- The membership is a valuable resource, not just for funding and labor, but also as a source of ideas and creativity. Therefore, it is a priority to establish permanent and effective means of communication between membership, board and staff.
- Board and station issues are regularly reported to the membership in a public forum, such as a monthly radio show. Issues are transparently reported on, and feedback from the membership is welcomed.

Spoofing the Know-Nothings



If the cartoon above is not immediately clear to you, here's a brief explanation:

Tony Miksak, pictured with George Bush in the golf cart, is the president of the KZYX Board of Directors, and the leading thinker for

the Centrist majority. After months of discussions, he says he has never read the KZYX Minority Report.

However, others have read it and commented on it, including over 20 KZYX members, programmers, staff and board members.

Member Control Issues At Recent Board Meetings of KZYX

Zac Zackary and I, recently voted off the board in the midst of the hysterical response to my pamphlet, have agreed to work together to keep track of what happens with the member control issues on the new board.

1) Community Advisory Board. Denton Presents Letter

At the May board meeting, Jim Denton, presented a letter from the new "Community Advisory Board" which raised the question of whether the advisory board would be *guaranteed* a role in programming. Denton said that he and most of the others would resign if the Board did not grant their request for a seat on the current programming policy committee (and later on the proposed Programming Council).

After some equivocation, the board (of directors), overruled the objection from Johanna Cummings that as chairperson she must have the final say in selecting committee members, and agreed to seat the individual selected by the community advisory board.

2) Ukiah Studio Project.

The new "Interim General Manager" Mitchell Holman promised to provide the Ukiah Studio Committee with an all-in-one computerized transportable console. The cost of about \$5000.00 would be paid out of the funds already donated to

KZYX for the Ukiah studio. This report and follow up materials will be sent to the techs in the Ukiah studio group, and other who express interest.

3) The Ballot Survey Data.

After two months of questioning by CAG members and other interested parties, the board has finally come up with a good way to collate and analyze the responses to the survey that went out with the ballots 3 months ago. Johanna Cummings has complained that the written responses were

confidential and that handwriting might reveal the identity of the respondent. The handwritten responses are being typed up and all will be posted on the KYXX web site. A summary analysis will also be provided.

4) The Right to Use the Membership List for Member-to Member Communication.

This is evidently an indiscussible matter. But to keep the question alive, I gave the board secretary a check for \$325.00 as "good faith payment" for mailing out the Minority Report. Unfor-

tunately, some members have expressed the view that the pamphlet would "damage the station."

5) The membership outreach problem.

Do we cater to those who "show up" or to the wider community? This issue was clearly posed when Mitchell Holman said to the advisory board delegate: "I think your advisory board represents only a very small part of the community." There should be a more discussion about this important

question. If we really intend to represent primarily the "progressive community" then we cannot expect to greatly expand the membership. Personally I think we should encourage more viewpoints—including those who are not friendly to the progressive agenda—not just because the mission statement requires it but because the opposition of viewpoints makes better radio. This discussion would be good in the newsletter.

6. Who will do the newsletter?

During my time on the board, the newsletter was always arranged quietly, without the participation of the minority (Zac Zackary, Lynda McClure and me) who could not be counted on to follow the centrist line. The latest newsletter includes the voices of Lynda and Jane Fatcher, and we will see whether they are able to make the make a more useful publication.

7. The Bylaws Committee.

Jane Fatcher chairs this committee which is considering increasing the size of the board and other aspects of the outdated bylaws.

That's all for now, folks.

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More about KZYX at:
www.greenmac.com

Coming soon: *The Future Of Community Radio - Part 2*

Mitchell's Chance

New Temporary Leader

In February, 2005, the station had been without a General Manager (GM) for over 7 months. Since then an Interim General Manager, Mitchell Holman, has been hired, and if he does not stumble he will very likely be hired as the next GM.

Keeping a General Manager has been a problem since the beginning of KZYX. There have been a lot of GMs and most of them have quit or been fired within two or three years.

Mitchell Holman, has proved his digital engineering skills in carrying out the remodel of the Philo studio. By all reports he has done a

great job. Hopefully his experience as a band leader and promotor will serve him and the community well. He seems to be intent on making changes in the programming, toward producing more quality local shows and expanding the variety of music programming. And he has exhibited a refreshing anti-bureaucratic bent.

Ukiah Studio?

Mitchell has said that the Ukiah Studio would soon have a new digital mobile studio purchased with \$6000.00 already raised by Ukiah folks. (See report above.) Could it be that the log jam that has stopped the Ukiah studio is breaking up?



Mitchell Holman
Temporary GM

At any rate, Ukiah hopes that Mitchell will follow through on the promises he has made and then his nose will not grow longer.

Don't let us down, Michael: We're counting on you!