

# New cable TV studio ready with rough spots

By GREG BEEBE  
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SANTA CRUZ — The franchise agreement requiring United Artists to open its new television studio to amateur producers is unworkable and an invitation to video disaster, says the chairman of the newly formed city-county Cable TV Commission.

Commission chairman Tom Karwin believes guaranteed half-time community access to United Artists' \$400,000 studio — as stipulated in the city and county's franchise pact with UA — "represents a significant resource . . .

"But the (cable TV) commission believes that it is an unworkable arrangement, and United Artists is unenthusiastic as well. They're not eager to have people from the community coming in and fooling around with their new equipment."

Though he praised the county's efforts in striking the "unusual" bargain for community access TV, Karwin said the deal is "a concept created by lawyers rather than production people."

"The arrangement is, in many respects, a generous one," said Karwin. "But it's so structured that I think it would really be the downfall of community television."

The issue of shared use of UA's studio comes as the company is gearing up for tonight's debut of expanded, locally originated programming on KRUZ-TV. The local station is also a product of the city-county franchise agreement.

United Artists has spent thousands of dollars equipping its almost-completed Scotts Valley studio with lighting rigs, control decks, audio equipment and new cameras. In addition, the company is finishing a cable-system upgrade which pipes as many as 57 channels into homes in the cities of Santa Cruz and Scotts Valley and the county's unincorporated area, including two — channels 71 and 72 — dedicated to community programming. (The cities of Watsonville and Capitola are served by another firm, Sonic Cable.)

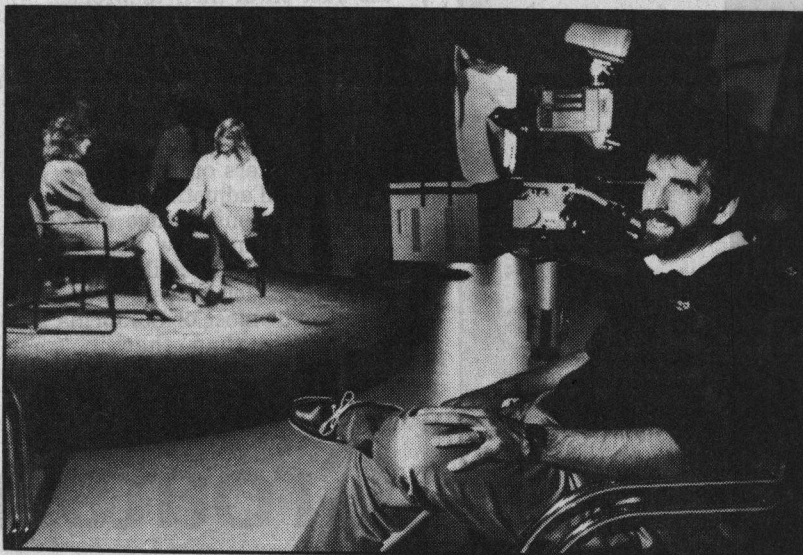
Stewart Butler, general manager of United Artists' local operation, said that although the community-access deal is perhaps "difficult and awkward," UA is fully prepared to allow public, educational and government use of its studio.

"But from just the standpoint of the technical complexity of the equipment, I concur with Tom's thoughts that the facility we have here is for people with production experience," said Butler.

"My concept of public access is coming in and walking out an hour later with a concept."

It would take "several hours of information, training and review," said Butler, for a layperson to learn how to use one of UA's video cameras. He envisioned "some sort of certification program" in which fledgling producers would gradually gain experience, video knowledge and UA's trust.

The contract with the city and



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Stewart Butler, United Artist Cable general manager, sits in studio that's available for community access.

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— Cable commission chairman Tom Karwin

county gives community members "priority access" to UA's studio. "I don't fully understand what that means," said Butler.

"It's going to reduce our flexibility," Butler said, "but we can work around it with some basic rules and regulations. People won't be able to call up today and say they want the studio tomorrow."

"It's going to be able to work, but there's going to be some problems and rough spots."

Thus far, there has been scant discussion about the ground rules for community use of the TV studio, and when such access would begin. Santa Cruz Supervisor Gary Patton said at last week's board meeting that community TV access is a "major policy issue" confronting the commission and the board.

Patton also expressed a desire "to actually get the public on the air" post haste.

"I'm very much in favor of trying to have this vital community access system as soon as possible," said Patton, who said he understands UA's concerns about its "lovely studio and such great equipment. . . .

"Having everybody and their brother who wants to be on cable TV trooping in there could screw up their facility. I can understand

that," said Patton.

Getting the public on the air will most likely cost the city and county money, said Karwin.

"It's quite possible that UA would require that their staff manage the equipment and be paid for it," said Karwin. Butler confirmed that would be the case.

"What the commission would like to do," said Karwin, "is convert that obligation into monetary terms and establish a separate facility" overseen by a non-profit organization.

Such an arrangement, said Karwin, would make certain that community members would have "100 percent occupancy" of a TV production studio stocked with "equipment chosen for community uses."

Butler said, "That obviously would be our preference, too. It would eliminate the conflicts that may occur in the shared concept, and it gives me back the flexibility that I currently have. . . .

"Selfishly, yes, it's to our benefit to have a stand-alone facility," said Butler. It would, however, "take more energy and effort to make a stand-alone studio go."

A separate community TV facility, said Karwin, could feature more user-friendly equipment. Butler said portable, high-grade store-bought video camcorders would probably be more appropriate equipment for amateur producers.

Karwin has been eyeing "a so-called 'hotline' studio developed in Chicago which is, in effect, a do-it-yourself interview studio . . . With a little bit of training people can virtually present their own TV programs — with viewer call-in phone lines — live, without requiring a crew."

"I think that we could take advantage of that here," said Karwin.

One thing is certain: Once community TV access is established, there will be no shortage of people wanting to use it.

"Everybody has a message to present, and that may be more true in Santa Cruz than in some other communities," said Karwin.