

PLEASE STAND BY

Dynamic, enterprising and inventive, Community Television of Santa Cruz County weathers the modern media storm but still faces an uncertain future

BY JENNA BROGAN

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This past May, YouTube turned 7 years old. To mark its birth, the Official YouTube Blog proudly announced that 72 hours of video are uploaded to the site every minute. Though it seems that now, more than ever before, individuals are creating videos with their smartphones, digital cameras, and computers with the purpose of sharing their footage with as many people as possible via the Internet, YouTube's success has one local nonprofit scratching its head.

For nearly 18 years, Community Television of Santa Cruz County has been putting locally made videos on the air via three area channels. Whether those videos were produced onsite at its Pacific Avenue studio or produced elsewhere, CTV will air "anything that's not illegal" and stream it on its website,

Keith Gudger, vice chair of CTV, says with a laugh.

"Google may try not to do evil, but they're still a corporation and they still have rules and constraints, whereas Community TV is community-based," Gudger explains. "You come in that door, you fill out a form and hand [the video] to us, and it's on the air."

But despite the low cost of membership—\$25 per year—CTV, which currently has about 300 members, is facing federally mandated changes to its funding, which will significantly diminish its offerings to the community beginning in July 2014, unless the organization can scrounge up more than \$300,000.

THE DILEMMA

The funding changes are a result of The Digital Infrastructure and Video Competition Act of 2006 (DIVCA), a state law that incorporates a federal ruling from the FCC to restrict the majority of funding for community access organizations like CTV to facilities, management and capitalization. Under the new law, salaries and benefits—including those required to tape local government meetings—community classes, free film production services for local nonprofits, and more will no longer be covered at CTV.

"If you look at our current budget, which is about \$650,000, of that, slightly over \$500,000 is salary and benefits," says Lynn Miller, CTV's inter-

im executive director. "So if you think in terms of the overall budget, it's a much bigger crunch, because it's the bulk of our budget."

According to Gudger, "at least 50" community access facilities in California have disappeared since DIVCA went into effect in 2006, including 12 community programming studios in Los Angeles. However, CTV has yet to feel the blow, since it was able to obtain a waiver that pushed the DIVCA start date back to July 2014.

In early July 2012, Miller took over for Mary Ann Thyken, CTV's executive director since December 2009, with the goal of helping the nonprofit to come up with creative solutions to its financial woes.

While CTV has hosted fundraisers in the past, and applied for grants, attempting to raise a sum of this magnitude is a daunting challenge.

July 2014 may seem like a long way off, but the Board of Supervisors has given CTV an early deadline of Oct. 23, on which date they must provide a specific plan of action, detailing the steps it will take between now and July 2013 to prepare for DIVCA. "They're very anxious to fix the situation now, because [otherwise] it will be way too late in the game," explains Miller.

To some degree, the County has already inadvertently helped to prepare CTV for

DIVCA to take effect, by reducing its budget by 15 percent this fiscal year. Consequently, CTV is now closed on Mondays and Tuesdays, and does not have a designated staff person to greet people and answer questions about membership at the front desk.

Yet, even with its bare-bones budget, CTV remains open to members for 40 hours each week, during which time people can check out audio and lighting equipment, as well as professional grade Standard Definition cameras, film inside the studio, volunteer on various productions, take classes, and use professional editing equipment.

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But the big question on every CTV member's mind is whether or not the nonprofit will decide to merge with the Gilroy-based Community Media Access Partnership (CMAP). The idea, which the board at CTV is currently reviewing, would be a **reduction in cost** for the nonprofit, since departments like administration and payroll would not be duplicated.

THE PLAN

In order for CTV to not only survive DIVCA, but also to build a sustainable future for itself, the County of Santa Cruz has required that all three stations remain available, and that CTV work with local nonprofit and for-profit groups to find ways to enhance its funding, according to Miller.

Two ways that Miller believes CTV could accomplish that goal are by applying for grants and marketing the organization differently than it has in the past, "with a great deal of focus on increasing the revenue that comes through the door," he says.

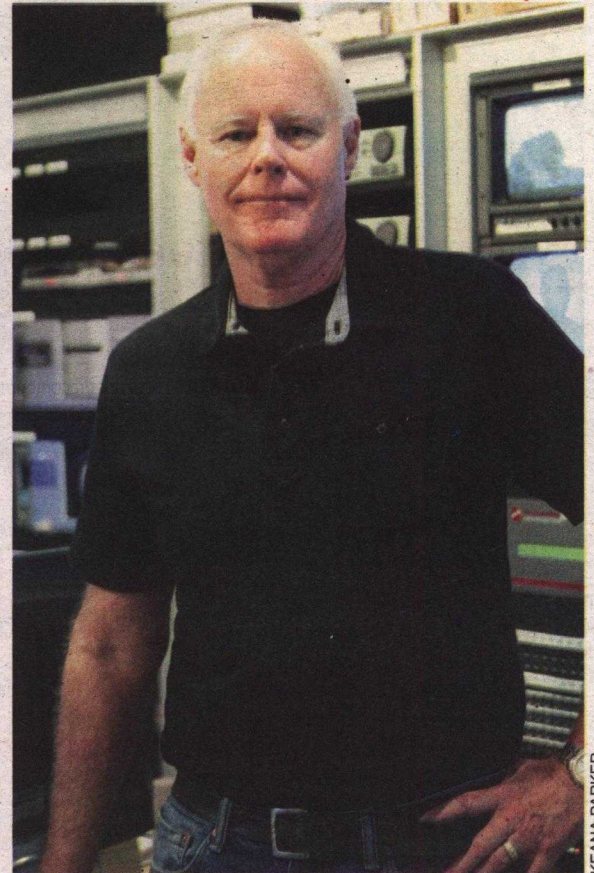
CTV plans to continue to film local government meetings, but since the salaries required to cover them

are not a part of the DIVCA expenses, it may look to the County and the City for financial support.

CTV will also be looking to independent producers to cover community events for local nonprofits, which it used to do for free, but no longer has the funds for.

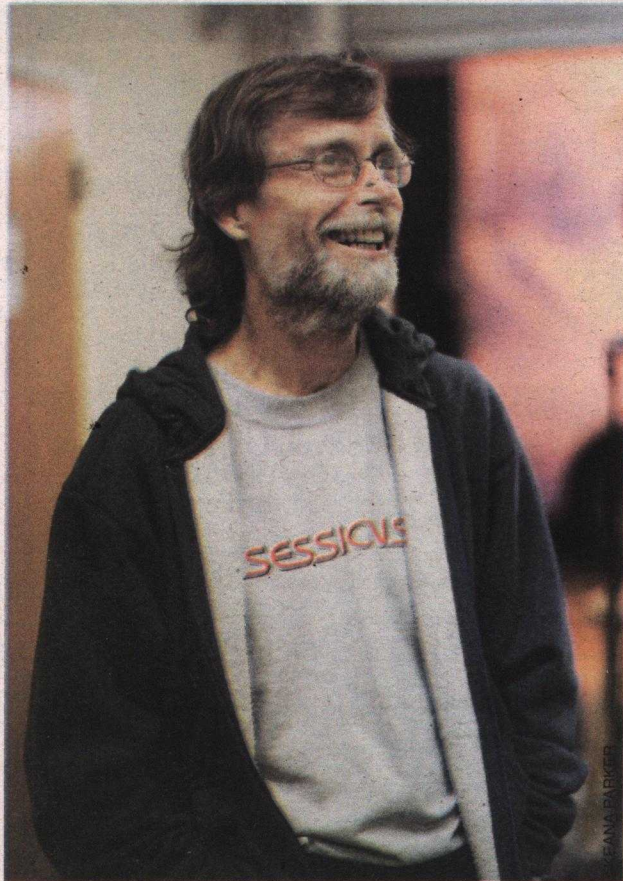
"We're going to look at many different things to attempt to utilize our facilities and equipment," adds Gudger. "If we can find a way to use facilities and equipment to return operating income to us, to allow us to continue to provide services, that's what we'd like to do."

Though right now it feels like a pipe dream, Gudger has some big ideas for the future of CTV, should the organization make it past this speed bump unscathed.



KEANA PARKER

MAN WITH A PLAN Lynn Miller, interim executive director, is helping CTV to tackle its financial woes.



I HAVE A DREAM Keith Gudger, vice chair of CTV, has big aspirations for expanding the nonprofit.

“Google may try not to do evil, but they’re still a corporation and they still have rules and constraints, whereas Community TV is community-based. You come in that door, you fill out a form and hand [the video] to us, and it’s on the air.” —Keith Gudger, vice chair of CTV

“You can imagine with that kind of money, we could build a really nice facility, and we could have it filled with great pieces of equipment for producing digital media and teaching our community how to use that kind of media,” he says. “We already do some training right now—it’s aimed specifically at how to use the stuff in this building—but I think we have to expand that idea beyond just what happens here into, ‘How can people use media to enhance their lives?’”

Gudger’s dreams for CTV are nothing new. When he first started volunteering with the organization just over four years ago, he and a group of CTV enthusiasts tried to expand the production-oriented facility. Though the plan never came to fruition, over the years, his passion for CTV has never wavered. And he’s not alone.

“In this community, there’s a lot of attention paid to CTV—not in terms of dollars, particularly—but a lot of attention is paid here,” says Miller. “And we want to make sure it doesn’t lose its flavor.”

One way Miller and his team intend to demonstrate CTV’s vital role in the county, is by working with the medical community to bring attention to health issues via CTV programming.

“One of the things that I think [CTV] would be very good at, is helping to remind people of some of the issues surrounding diabetes, heart disease and obesity,” says Miller. “If the [messages] work as well as I think they will, they’ll get people’s attention, and potentially save medical costs and analysis. There’s nothing better than prevention.”

But the big question on every CTV member’s mind is whether or not the nonprofit will decide to merge with the Gilroy-based Community Media Access Partnership (CMAP). The idea, which the board at CTV is currently reviewing, would be a reduction in cost for the nonprofit, since departments like administration and payroll would not be duplicated, says Miller. In addition, the merger would make CTV eligible for larger grants, because CMAP is a regional

agency that speaks to a larger demographic.

Should the merger happen, CTV would not go away; it would still have a functioning board, but the emphasis on marketing and fundraising would increase, says Miller. He adds that CMAP and CTV would have to develop mutual bylaws that would mesh for both entities, and CTV would put together a Memorandum of Understanding, in which it would state the terms of the merger for the County to review.

"If we do [the merger]," says Miller, "it will have to meet the County's criteria, and in a greater way, have to meet the community's criteria."

THE TEACHER

For Richard Dussell, DIVCA presents a real threat to what he believes are the three tenets of CTV: freedom of speech, equal opportunity, and community enrichment.

Dussell's love affair with CTV began in 1995—a year after it opened—when he took a beginner's directing/producing class, which allowed him to work on a Sunday night program with his peers. Over time, he started producing his own show, which was designed to teach others who wanted to learn the ins and outs of creating a television program.

"I'd welcome people who were new, and I didn't care too much if things went wrong—it was just about having fun," he remembers. "I used to tell people, 'If you want to be on TV, come on down.'"



KEANA PARKER

HARD AT WORK Staff producer Victor Herrmann works in the HD mobile Community TV bus.

The show evolved into a primarily music-centric program, with some poets and artists stopping by on occasion. While he had to limit the number of novice crewmembers on certain high-quality music programs, just under a year ago, Dussell once again created a TV 101 show, which has afforded beginners the opportunity to practice their skills.

Though producing shows at CTV is simply a hobby for Dussell, who is now retired, he says he enjoys being challenged by others' viewpoints at CTV, and jumps at the opportunity to help them on their projects regardless of his stance on the issue being covered. "Part of the reason I do it is because I believe in free speech," he says.

Giving local youth the chance to shine is another reason he loves his work at the nonprofit.

On *Look Mom, I'm On TV*, which airs from 7-8 p.m. on the first and third Friday of every month,

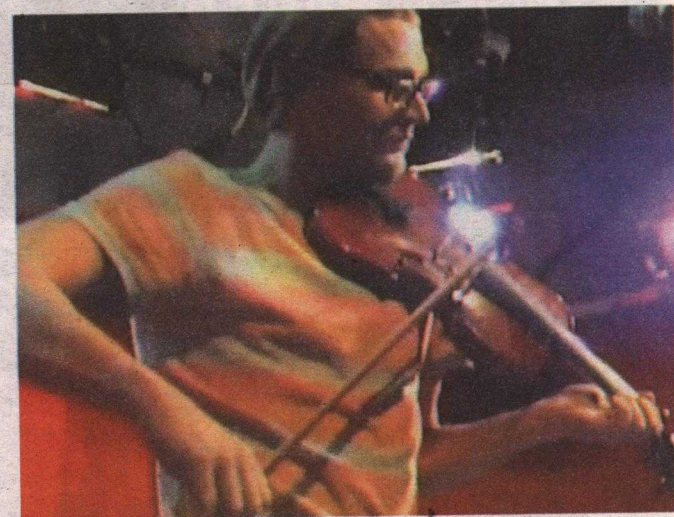
Dussell invites local bands and musicians from out of town to stop by and play a set. Jackie Partida, of local teen band Jackie Rocks, has performed on the show a couple of times.

"It's important to consider the role the station occupies in the local entertainment world," says Dussell. "If you're a 13- or 14-year-old with a band, and you want to get on TV, this is a place to get on TV, get some exposure, and perform in a studio. It really helps their confidence. ... I'd hate to see it go."

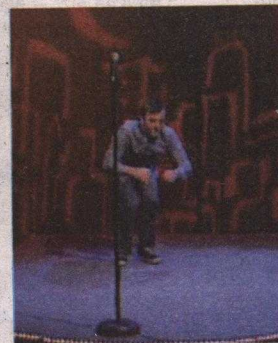
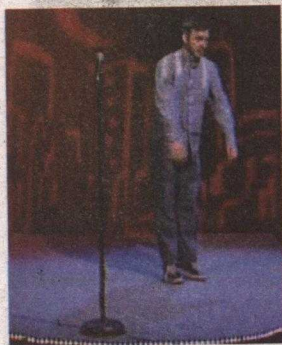
The ability to produce live television at CTV is another big draw for Dussell.

"You don't get much live TV—especially on the West Coast—except for the news, sometimes," he says. "Live TV is always great."

While Dussell says he's glad to see that CTV is working to come up with solutions for a viable future, he fears that even if the nonprofit is able to remain



The interns of CTV present *The Exceedingly Open Mic* hosted by Correll Barca-Hall.



open, it may have to hike up membership prices—which he believes could have a catastrophic impact on community involvement in this economy.

"Some of the other public access stations in the peninsula charge you to use their facilities," he says. "Even charging \$50 would put a damper on CTV.

There are producers who are way low on the income scale. It's important for even the homeless to come on and talk about the issues that are important to them."

THE VOICE

Like Dussell, local producer Mathilde Rand, believes that CTV plays a critical role in the community: a place where the often unheard find their voice.

A volunteer at CTV since December 2006, Rand has worked on numerous programs—from a children's show called *Storytime*, to a radio show, to a theater show, to music videos, and more. But perhaps the most meaningful project she has worked on at CTV is a couple of short films, which she shot in Mississippi during the cleanup effort after Hurricane Katrina.

"After those documentaries showed on CTV, people said to me, 'Now I really understand what people went through,'" recalls Rand. "When you're involved in something like that, you can get really close to the people and what's going on there, without all of the analysis you see on the news. I was able to capture a moment in time for that group of people. And I was able to share that at CTV."

Rand wasn't always an experienced producer. She took her first directing class at CTV, and by volunteering on others' programs, she obtained the skills necessary to eventually produce her own shows.

"What I like [about CTV] is that you get to be a part of a very creative group of people," she says. "Sometimes I don't know what I'm doing—like how to send bears to the moon—then someone will have an idea; it's a group effort. As you're doing it, it becomes a learning experience."

Between figuring out how to transform a local musician's vision for his six-minute music video into reality with a green screen and working out in the field, and determining the logistics of a call-in radio show on television, Rand has a new understanding and respect for Hollywood.

"It takes an enormous amount of time," she says. "You get a real appreciation for people who do feature films."

Rand's love for producing at CTV motivated her to further her education at Cabrillo College, where she took more television and film production classes. It was during her time there that she filmed a rally at the Town Clock in Downtown Santa Cruz, and the resulting footage was entered into the college section of the Santa Cruz Film Festival.

"Just by volunteering at CTV, I got to be involved in this world of creative people, and got to learn an enormous amount of techniques in producing and directing," says Rand. "It encourages you to do more."

In fact, it is that desire to do more at CTV that makes the DIVCA changes so difficult for her to hear.

"I feel I can help bring people's voice to others through CTV," says Rand. "CTV is open to everyone; it either helps people to bring themselves to the community, or we as producers can help share the stories of others."

THE POINT

Miller is the first to admit that not everyone is as big of a fan of CTV as Gudger, Rand and Dussell.

After all, the fact that the nonprofit has no corporate filter and will literally put anything that is legal on the air, can be a double-edged sword.

"Sometimes people tune in and go, 'My goodness, why is that being shown on television?'" he says, with a laugh. "We have to deal with that, and we don't mind. We like that idea. But I can imagine that a number of county residents turn on CTV and go, 'I'm gonna miss that station—is there a way to program that one out or something?' I understand. But that's a real key for community media, is that it accepts anything. And that's what's lost when the cable companies win and shut down those channels, is the ability to show this community anything that's going on around here. And not just sensationalized stuff."

And therein lies the beauty of CTV; like a game of Russian roulette, one minute CTV could be airing a religious program created by a local spiritual community, and the next, it could be an examination of the Occupy Santa Cruz movement or a Qigong show for seniors.

"Different perspectives don't hurt anybody," says Miller. "You don't have to change your mind, but you can get a different perspective, and I think that's what CTV does... if you leave it on long enough."

While anyone can make a home video with his or her cell phone and upload it to a website like YouTube, Gudger encourages all who want to take their skills to the next level to become members at CTV.

"It's easy to forget that there's a huge jump between what you took with your cell phone and what you can do [with professional equipment]," he says. "We provide many opportunities to volunteer on productions of all levels—the simplest, cheesiest productions, up to very high quality, and in doing so, you learn an awful lot about what works and what doesn't work. And there are a lot of people, both staff and volunteers, who are happy to share that knowledge." ■

HOW TO GET INVOLVED:

CTV encourages its supporters to ...

- Write to their legislators about passing the CAP Act, which would lift the DIVCA restriction on facilities and equipment.
- Write to their County Supervisors and City Council members, and tell them how important CTV is to them.
- Write a check to help CTV in its efforts to survive DIVCA.
- Become a member at CTV today.

For more information about CTV and how to get involved, visit communitytv.org. Tune in locally to channels 25/71, 26/72, 27/73.