



## Director Report July 2020

### Remote Work & a Slow Return to "Normal"

- After shutting down our facility on March 16<sup>th</sup> and working remotely exclusively for two months, little by little, I had been coming back in to work on site a couple of days per week starting in late May. And earlier this month we began keeping regular, albeit reduced, hours of operation. We are now down to operating 20 hours per week, with 1 staff person at a time. The hours (at least for now, as we see how things go) are Monday – Friday, 12-5. We are open to the public during these hours. Physical distancing guidelines are being practiced and we are requiring that masks be worn. There are signs on the doors indicating the new hours and guidelines. It has been good to open the doors back up, enabling others to use our services. So far, we've had
- Still, most of our work is being handled remotely. We are fortunate to have that as an option, thanks to the technology.

### Production & Programming

- Live streaming & broadcasting: We used \$7K of the \$20K from the Comcast settlement funds earmarked for "remote origination" (aka live remote broadcasting) to purchase new streaming equipment. This enabled us to broadcast live anywhere with a reliable high speed internet connection, replacing the antiquated and grossly under-used coaxial cable "drops" in the Town offices and schools. Simultaneously, as an added bonus (and which will only increasingly become more of a focus), we can stream live to the internet (primarily, our You Tube channel and Facebook page). We need to be promoting this extensively, as it will open the doors to new opportunities and bring more value to the services we provide, particularly in this new world in which we've found ourselves living, with distance learning, remote meetings, virtual events & concerts, etc. We used the new set up for school graduations (with some hiccups),
- Black River HS graduation: We produced the event as a live stream, in partnership with school officials. Due to a combination of factors (new equipment, internet / tech issues at the school, and a last minute addition to the program), the stream was delayed for 20 minutes, which held up the ceremony, keeping many people waiting. Being that this was the last graduation for the school, there were a lot of people tuning into the stream (I believe we had over 500). We finally got it going by resorting to a Plan B (using Zoom to stream to You Tube) which worked but it wasn't optimal. I put together an edited and much more polished version afterward. We did receive a nice letter from Senator Bernie Sanders, who provided a pre-recorded address for the event. He thanked us for putting it all together, making it happen, and for the work that we do in the community.
- I worked with SAPA on the Green Mountain HS graduation. It was a 5 (!) hour event, which we streamed live, using SAPA's equipment. They did some editing to trim it down to 2 hours
- We streamed & broadcast the CTES 6<sup>th</sup> grade graduation live, using our new equipment. It was the trial run for our new equipment. It worked well. Eric & I worked on it together.

- Eric & I did a basic production of LES 6<sup>th</sup> grade graduation, which streamed live over You Tube, using Zoom.
- I recorded the Chester-Andover 6<sup>th</sup> grade graduation.
- Composting Workshop in Cavendish: Streaming / broadcasting live at 6:30 pm on Thursday July 23
- Studio Use: we are starting to record in the studio again, at long last. Over the last several weeks, we have had Cavendish Librarian Kata Welch, musician John Specker (on 1 different occasions), and Ralph Pace (interviewing Steve Stettler). More to come!
- Legislators: today I recorded a "Get Out the Vote" PSA with the State senators (McCormack, Nitka, & Clarkson). On Aug. 4, they come into the studio to record a half-hour legislative update show. Rep. Logan Nicoll will be coming in to do something similar next week. I am trying to get something scheduled with Rep. Charlie Kimbell (Plymouth-Reading-Woodstock) as well.
- Cavendish concert: we were out on the Proctorsville Green last week, recording the 1<sup>st</sup> concert of the series. Eric worked the camera; I tested internet signals to determine if we might be able to stream / broadcast live from there. It might be possible if we can work out a partnership with either Outer Limits Brewing or Murdock's.
- Local media partnerships: I have discussed different partnership scenarios with the The Chester Telegraph and The Mountain Times
- Zoom: We now have a second Zoom account, as more Boards have come to rely on us for hosting / recording their remote meetings. Over the last couple of months, we have added Mt. Holly Planning Commission and Cavendish Board of Civil Authority to this list.
- Constitution Project: For the last several months, this project has been in a state of near completion but unfortunately, it had to sit on the shelf as we've worked on more pressing tasks. However, I have given myself a deadline to finish this by the end of July. It just needs to be done at this point. In lieu of having a public screening, I think we need to schedule it as a You Tube Premiere, and promote / publicize it widely.

## **Outreach & Marketing**

- Facebook Page: Our Page, which is otherwise perhaps our most effective marketing tool (for better or worse) has been stuck in a purgatory of sorts. It is believed there is some glitch causing the page to be flagged for unknown violations, repeatedly, and subsequently restricted. For This is still a problem. Cara Philbin, a volunteer who lives in Ludlow and formerly worked in marketing & social media for NPR, has been looking into this – she even had a colleague of hers, who worked at Facebook, looking into it.
- Program Guide: Our schedules are updated regularly and kept as up-to-date and accurate as possible on the electronic program guide on both Comcast & Vtel. This is something we were trying to get for years, and now we have it.
- Channel Change: we need to continue to spread the word about the channel change on Comcast. We are no longer on 8 & 10 (or 20 & 21 in Mt. Holly). We are on 1076 & 1086. I have fielded several comments, mostly negative, from subscribers about this change.
- Survey: We need to do a new, well-crafted survey. It needs to be publicized widely. A marketing committee task, perhaps.

## **Administrative / Financial**

- Collaboration Discussion: Ongoing dialogue with neighboring colleagues about collaboration, pooling resources, and/or possible merger has been temporarily on hold, as other pressing matters are being addressed, However, momentum had been building and many signs are pointing to the fact

that some type of meaningful regional collaboration should happen. Similar conversations are happening more broadly, on a statewide level. There seems to be increasing interest. As such, the Vermont Access Network has hired a non profit management consultant, Andy Robinson, to offer a series of workshops on this topic, beginning in September. Mr. Robinson specializes in strategic planning, fundraising, collaborations, and mergers.

- New Board Members: Welcome Sharon Huntley & Pat Moore to the Board!
- Strategic Planning: Something to work on this year – last plan was 2015 and a lot has changed since then. We have begun looking into some major organizational changes – having a plan would be good for guidance through this process.
- VTel: We have not received the 2020 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter franchise fee payment from VTel. This was due by May 15<sup>th</sup> and should have been accounted for in the FY2020 budget (which ended June 30<sup>th</sup>). In fact, none of the other 5 access stations in VTel’s service area received a 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter payment. The issue, we were told, was because they were looking into how they might apply the new FCC rule change (passed last Fall, cable companies now have the ability to put a value on in kind services that they provide to communities, and subtract that from the franchise fee. (The problem is, have been in dialogue with the President & CEO, Michel Guite. He was unaware of the regulations and claims that payments will be sent by the end of this week.
- Legislative Work: S.318 (the “PEG Access Funding” bill) was approved. This changed from being about the original ask for the funding study to COVID-based funding, with some additional funds for the study. The funds – over \$400K – will be distributed throughout the Vermont Access Network membership. More details & a more complete report on this is forthcoming.