



FY2024 “State of the Station” July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024

The “State of the Station” is a look back at Okemo Valley TV’s past fiscal year (July 1 - June 30). This report is broken down into categories, with a list of the most important highlights and noteworthy items beneath each one.

Administrative Notes / Personnel / Organizational Changes

- We have maintained our staffing level at approximately 3 FTE (“Full Time Equivalent”) during this past year, with our 2 full-time employees - Executive Director Patrick Cody & Operations Coordinator Rebekah Fontaine - along with part-time staff. These include Field Producer & Production Associate Peter van Gorder, Program Scheduler Will Harris (through December) and Elia Lloyd, and Production Associates Sarah Bennett, Sarah Devereux, & Gavin Greenawalt.
- George Thomson is not seeking another Board term, which means his 19-year tenure is coming to an end. He was a very dedicated and involved Board member who has contributed in many different ways to the organization. He is being awarded with a Community Impact Award for his contributions to Okemo Valley and throughout the community.
- Noah Schmidt, is stepping down from the Board after an 8-year tenure. Noah has been involved with the Station since the LPCTV days, when he *himself* was a student at LES. Noah is being presented with a plaque of appreciation for his 8-year run on the Board, including 4 years of leadership as Board President.
- Will Harris stepped down as the part time Program Scheduler in December.
- We hired Elia Lloyd in December, to take over the program scheduling responsibilities. She has been also doing some production work, helping out with some of the meeting coverage as well.
- Sarah Bennett, our part time Production Associate, left in May, after two years with us.
- We brought Gavin Greenawalt back as a part-time Production Associate temporarily, before he goes back to finish up film school at Champlain College. Gavin worked for us during the Summer of 2022.
- We have also brought back Sarah Devereux, who worked for us in 2021, to help out with production work. She recently graduated from Emerson College.
- The biggest news organizationally is that we applied for - and received - a permit to build a Low Power FM (LPFM) non commercial community radio station. We have an advisory committee working on bringing this project to fruition and getting the tentatively-named Black River Radio on the air. As we move towards integrating audio / non-visual media into workflow, the plan is to do this in phases. Because the radio station will take some careful planning and capital investments (requiring fundraising), it will take some time - hence, the phasing. The first phase will be podcasting, then rolling out an online version of the radio station, before finally culminating with



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the over-the-air broadcast station. We already have a couple of producers who are producing podcasts, so this plan is already off to a good start.

Local Programming

- Online delivery of programming continues to be an emphasis, between the video-on-demand (VOD) on our own website, You Tube channel, live streaming, and - as of last year - our “OTT” (Over the Top) streaming app.
- Okemo Valley TV’s You Tube channel has over 900 subscribers, adding approximately 100 subscribers just in the last year.
- For the last 18 months, we have been using Lightcast as a vendor for the 24/7 live streaming of our 2 TV channels and the free, downloadable streaming app.. We need to be delivering content in this way, so there is inherent value in the services we are receiving from Lightcast, but it does come at a substantial cost (approx. \$7,000 per year). We have seen some increased engagement with the app (which is available as a free download on Apple TV, Amazon Fire TV, Roku, as well as on mobile on Google Play / Android and Apple iOS). Where we have the most engagement and viewership is with the live 24/7 streaming of the channels. Our Lightcast account is also used to integrate videos on social media, including the You Tube channel. Lightcast has helped better streamline our workflow process for getting videos onto You Tube. My hypothesis is that this was the main factor in the channel’s growth over the past year.
- Despite being a small station, operating in a small, rural community, there continues to be a high usage of our services, both in the studio and out in the field, resulting in plenty of local programming to fill our schedules. This past year, there were 655 “local” productions that used Okemo Valley TV services and were distributed across our TV & online platforms. We classify “local” as any program that is produced from within our service area and/or by any resident from one of the Towns within in (Ludlow, Cavendish, Andover, Plymouth, Reading, or Mount Holly). A substantial portion of this was regular, recurring local programming, including local government meetings, church services, youth sports, & weather forecasts.
- Our TV channels have remained in place on 1076 & 1086 on Comcast and 166 & 167 on VTel. Those channels are in Standard Definition (SD) on Comcast and High Definition (HD) on VTel. While Comcast has committed to upgrading our channels to HD and has had a plan in place to do this for at least two years, the migration has not yet happened. We were first told it would happen in the Fall of 2023, but it was then delayed and now I have no idea when it might happen. Unfortunately, there are many more subscribers on Comcast than there are on VTel in our area, and our channels as seen by those Comcast subscribers are of very low quality, especially when compared against the other channels on their system. This is due to the



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antiquated equipment and infrastructure used to transmit those channels to Comcast, on top of the multiple signal conversions that need to happen to “downgrade” from digital to analog and from HD to SD.

- One of the other significant expenditures that we incur related to programming is the monthly subscription to Gracenote / Nielsen, for the cable TV programming guide. This is so that any Comcast or VTel subscriber can see our program listings on the channel guide and get information about each program, including the program that is currently playing. The service has been upgraded this year, and because of this, it is updated instantly on the guide and the information is far more accurate. The cost for this subscription is \$225 per month. Prior to the recent upgrade, it required substantial work on our part to manually run reports and then send to them; the process is now all automated, thankfully.

Local Community Producers & Statewide Programming Partners

- The 2024 Producer Award winners are: Rev. Joseph & Jessica Arnold (Outstanding Achievement), Will Simoneau / TecGym (Community Service), Amy McMullen (Youth Programming), and Claire McKey Berkman (Producer of the Year).
- In addition, there are so many community members who produced noteworthy works this year who are deserving of honorable mentions: Brendan McNamara, Tom Ayres & State Rep. Tesha Buss, Paula VanGuilder, Dave VanGuilder & Dave Pettit (the “Average Daves”), FEMA & Small Business Administration (flood relief), Carol Lighthall & Gail Beardmore (Chamber of Commerce flood relief efforts), Kyle Kennedy (for Ludlow Area Sports Trails & Fletcher Farm), Chris Blackley (aka “West River Weather Guy”), the United Church volunteer camera operators, Gary Blodgett & the students at Expeditionary School at BR, Bob Greenawalt & Lisa Hamm-Greenawalt (for a video project with the Kindergarten class at Reading Elementary School), Shannon Devereux (St. James United Methodist Church), Kelly Kingsbury (Ludlow Baptist Church), Kata Welch (Chester-Andover School Library), John Specker, & Zachary McNaughton / River Valley Technical Center (“Green Horn Live”), Kelly Stettbner (Black River Action Team), and Pat Moore (flood videos). These and other community members contributed the bulk of the **625 new program hours** of “hyper local” programming (**757 total shows**), produced in the one-year time period between July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024.
- In addition to the hyper-local community-based programming, 200 new shows (20 programming hours) were provided by Statewide partners. Much of this programming came from our “sister stations” in the Vermont Access Network (e.g. other community TV stations throughout the State), while others came directly from State government agencies. Nearly a quarter of this total came from the Catholic Diocese of Burlington (recordings of the weekly Sunday Mass). Other examples of this programming include Governor Scott Press



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Conferences, programs from Senators Welch & Sanders, Rep. Balint, & the State Board of Education.

Okemo Valley TV Production Work

- We continue to cover a regular and high volume of local municipal meetings. Many of these at this point are hybrid meetings, adding to the workload and level of complexity. We recorded, broadcast, and streamed **188 local municipal government meetings** during the past fiscal year.
- With the local school board meetings, those have almost entirely moved over to a format that is handled & recorded by fixed systems that have been installed on site by the School Districts, in the regular meeting spaces for each respective building. This goes for all of the Boards that we cover: Green Mountain Unified School District, Ludlow-Mount Holly Unified Union School District, Two Rivers Supervisory Union, Mountain Views Supervisory Union, Mill River Unified School District, & River Valley Technical Center. Only for special meetings that take place outside of the regular meeting spaces do we send staff out to cover meetings any more. Instead, we assign a staff person to join & record the meeting remotely. We then process the meetings, with graphics, titles, etc. This does provide some needed relief on our resources, although the technical quality of the recordings is often not as good with these systems. As with a lot of things, there are pros and cons. Over the past fiscal year, we recorded, processed, broadcast, & streamed **73 local school board meetings**.
- Over the last few years, we have worked closely with all our partner Towns - Ludlow, Cavendish, Reading, Plymouth, Andover, & Mount Holly, in implementing hybrid meeting formats in some way. Each space, each Town and each Board is a little different, so the amount of work and technical support ranges.
- There are fixed AV systems in place in Plymouth & Mount Holly Town Offices, complete with robotic cameras, fixed microphones, and all of the other technical components that are needed to be able to host, record, stream, and broadcast hybrid meetings. In Ludlow, we are working with the Town & FOLA to make improvements on the existing AV system and infrastructure in the Town Hall Auditorium. The Town & Village allocated some ARPA funding to make that happen. That project should be completed later this Summer.
- Following the devastating flood event last July, we worked closely with local, State, and federal agencies to get information out to the public related to emergency responses, as well as recovery & relief efforts, as we did in the aftermath following Tropical Storm Irene in 2011. The most noteworthy outcomes of this effort were the ongoing series of updates that our staff recorded with representatives from FEMA & the Small Business Administration, as well as the Okemo Valley Regional Chamber of Commerce, and the all-volunteer Operation Ludlow.



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- For the 2nd consecutive year, we partnered with the Vermont Standard newspaper during the legislative session, on the recording of updates with State Representative Tesha Buss (Woodstock-Plymouth-Reading). The Standard’s Senior Staff Writer Tom Ayres conducted the interviews.
- In an effort to add value to other non profits in our region, we provide regular coverage of different events as a way to showcase those organizations. These are typically basic “pro bono” productions of an event or promotional video that highlight their work. Because our resources are limited and we can only budget for 2-3 such productions per month on average, we try to do this in such a way that we “spread the wealth” throughout the community. This past year, such examples were FOLA’s “Okemo Valley Outdoors” event with Catamount Trails Association, Calvin Coolidge Presidential Foundation’s July 4th events, Cavendish Community & Conservation Association Summer Concert Series, Fletcher Memorial Library’s Fireside Chat with local author Jon Clinch, Okemo Valley Chamber of Commerce’s “Best of VT” festival, Ludlow Rec. Pickleball, Ludlow Farmers’ Market, and special presentations hosted by both the Mount Holly Community Historical Museum & Mount Holly Community Association.

Building Renovations & Improvements

- We have been operating in our current space in the Ludlow Community Center complex for more than 10 years, but the build-out is still not complete. It has happened in small phases, over time, as the budget has allowed. And that available budget amount has been mostly dependent on fundraising success. The last phase Because this project has spanned many years and phases, we have a new graphic illustrating the facility needs & improvements over time. That can be viewed on the “[About](https://okemovalley.tv/about)” page of our website (<https://okemovalley.tv/about>). The last phase of the project was completed in 2019; it is now time to turn our attention on the final phase of the build-out and completing the project once & for all, so that we can better accommodate current users of the facility while also paving the way for new uses that will foster further evolution of the organization and expansion of our services (including, but not limited to Black River Radio)
- Mark Blanchard from VIS Construction Consultants provided a cost estimate. Mark is on the Board of SAPA-TV (Springfield Area Public Access) and acted as General Contractor on their recent construction & renovation project. Based on a marked up version of our existing floor plans and a review of other details, plus a site visit & tour of the facility, VIS provided a cost estimate of \$169,000 for the work to be done, which includes contingencies and projected inflation adjustments. This is in line with the last cost estimate that was performed in 2021 by another firm.

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Community Engagement / Outreach & Marketing

- We outsourced social media work this past year, as an experiment. It led to a higher level of engagement with Instagram & Facebook posts. We appreciate the work by Abby Childs and Avery Stone in this area.
- We have been working with graphic designer (Abby Childs) on new & improved graphics, which has helped with marketing of services. Abby created the facility timeline graphic noted above.
- We partnered with Cavendish After School Program & the
- In late June, we partnered with our colleagues at SAPA-TV on a Summer AV Camp. We had all-female instructors, supporting all-girl and non-binary youth! Be on the look out for the release of content related to this camp coming soon.

Fundraising / Financial Support

- Thank you to this year’s underwriters: William Raevis Real Estate / VT Properties, VT Ski House / Lake Rescue Chalet, Open Door Vacation Rentals, & FOLA (Friends of Ludlow Auditorium) for their contributions. And to VTel for the in-kind support.
- Thank you to our members this year-along with underwriting. Membership contributions are a key component to our operating revenue.
- We also appreciate the support that we continue to receive from the local Towns through the annual appropriations. Thanks to the Towns of Ludlow, Cavendish, Mount Holly, Plymouth, & Reading. These contributions combined for \$5,650, the third highest revenue source in our operating budget, behind cable / PEG funds, and the State appropriation.
- We have been busy applying for grant funding to help with the cost of completing the final phase of our build-out. We received a \$2,500 grant from The Marro Trust and \$2,000 from Ludlow Rotary Club. We are working with a development & fundraising consultant to help the overall fundraising plan for the project.
- In recent months, we have been selling old, unused equipment and have donated other pieces (an old studio camera + pedestal to the Weston Playhouse). In all, we generated nearly \$3,000 in revenue from equipment sales over the past year.

Other Partnerships

- We are now sharing our shed with LAST (Ludlow Area Sport Trails), and provided space to hang their sign on our roadside sign structure. With the opening up of the new trail system, the American Legion baseball coming back to Pullinen Field, the youth basketball tournaments, and the regular community lunches being put on at the Community Center, the property is seeing a huge increase in activity.



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- We have lent office space inside the facility to our friends at Red Vault Productions, after the flooding last July, when their home (including office space) was severely damaged. Red Vault is interested in exploring possible co-working space options with Okemo Valley TV in the future.
- For the last several years, it's become evident that we need to find innovative ways to ensure our future and be sustainable, vibrant, and growing. We benefit from having several regional colleagues in a similar situation. We are in a fortunate position to not only have such a robust network of community access media organizations in our region, but we also benefit from the abundance of technological solutions to better streamline our work, pool resources, and collaborate. Our closest partner in all of this is Springfield-based SAPA-TV. We have been working together on a number of things over this past year, most recently coverage of the Green Mountain HS graduation and a Summer AV camp at River Valley Technical Center

Statewide Advocacy Work

- VAN (Vermont Access Network) is our statewide membership organization, representing the twenty-four community access TV stations & media centers throughout the State. Its chief initiative over the past 5 or so years has been advocacy work on the State and legislative level, as we have the existential threat of our funding structure being tied to cable TV revenue, which is in decline. Increasingly, the delivery of our programming and engagement with it is through the internet, we are still tied to cable. In short, our funding structure is antiquated.
- VAN has been working with Action Circles as its consultant, with a focus on legislative matters. Action Circle's work for VAN has been centered around raising awareness of the funding challenge that PEG / community access faces (see above), and to build support in State government and in the legislature for establishing a solution to the problem.
- We have been fortunate in that over the last few years, we have been receiving State budget appropriations, through the support of the Legislature. Thank you in particular to our local State Representatives- Reps. Arrison, Buss, & Nicoll, and to our Windsor County Senate delegation of Sens. Clarkson, McCormack, & White for their support.
- When we passed the budget for this year, we were anticipating Okemo Valley TV's share of the Statewide appropriation to be \$25,000, which was based on a \$600,000 projected total contribution to VAN. However, that total contribution ended up amounting to \$1m, and as such, Okemo Valley TV's share ended up being \$20K more than projected (we received \$45K).
- There is also growing support on the concept of attaching PEG funding to online delivery / streaming of video programming. In fact there was a bill that went through the process this year - a streaming tax bill - that had wide-sweeping support, particularly in the Senate where it passed unanimously. However, it did not go through the complete process in the House before



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time ran out on the legislative session. All is not lost; we expect this to be picked back up, at least conceptually when the legislature convenes again in January.