

ACM NEW YORK ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2015 - 1/15/16

by Maryann Arrien, Chair: ACM of New York

The year 2015 was a busy one for ACMNY. We videotaped the Roundtable Discussion “The Future of Community Media in New York State” on April 18, 2015 at Open Stage Media (Proctors) in Schenectady, NY. On that panel we had Assemblymen Peter Lopez (R) and Angelo Santabarbara (D) from the Schenectady area, President Michael Vandow of Schopeg Access Inc., Proctors Executive Director Philip Morris, and former Public Service Commission Chief of Municipal Assistance John Figliozzi with ACMNY Chair Maryann Arrien as the moderator. Into that program were woven videotaped interviews with past and present ACM North East Region Chairpersons Nancy Richard and Karen Hayden, ACM National President Mike Wassenaar, Assemblyman Kevin Cahill (D) of the Kingston Area, Assemblywoman Sandy Galef (D) of the Ossining Area, United States Congressman Chris Gibson (R)(NY-19), and two former New York State residents working in other states, namely, Executive Director Jennifer Evans of West Hartford Community Television in Connecticut and Outreach/Membership Coordinator Erica Jones of Somerville Community Access Television in Massachusetts.

There were two edits of the four-camera shoot, one full length 1 hour 31 minutes and another abbreviated version called ACM New York’s “The Issues” which was 21 minutes long. These videos were uploaded to our own ACM New York YouTube Channel, our new ACM New York video collection on www.archive.org (The Internet Archive), and also uploaded to our www.ACMNY.org website server for direct download in various video formats in Standard and Hi Def. We placed links on our ACM New York Facebook page, did e-blasts to our New York State contacts, and physically mailed both versions of the video to every PEG station that we had a submission contact address for. There was an attempt to put out a press release, but the story about the dearth of Community Media in New York state has yet to get any traction in the press.

This year Chair Arrien testified at a hearing in Yonkers to support the demand for a dedicated Public Access Channel in that city, which is the 4th largest city by population in New York State. Cynthia Ashley is spearheading that effort and our video was aired in Yonkers to help build grassroots support there for the new channel. Chair Arrien also attended multiple meetings in Albany to try and help with the situation there, and the videos were aired there despite recurrent problems with black video on ChannelAlbany, and the lack of listing of the show on any kind of program schedule. Keith Irish has been tenaciously monitoring the PEG channel outages in Albany, and the previous part time worker running ChannelAlbany has resigned. The city of Albany put out an RFP to refill the part time position with a deadline of about a week or two by snail mail only, and only two persons applied for the vacant position. The position, which had been 20 hours/week, has been increased to 24 hours/week but still does not come close to meeting the operational needs of that combined public and government access channel for Albany. The New School of Radio & Television, a for-profit company, has been overseeing the operation (or non-operation) of the channel, and fortunately is relocating out of Albany, so we are hoping that the cable uplink will be moved to where the public

access TV studio is presumably at the Albany Library. As of last night the part time position has been awarded to Jake Sardos, who will start in mid February to give Albany time to allocate funds to pay him with.

In the Kingston Area there has been a changing of the guard that might open the way for progress for PEG in that area with a new mayor for the city of Kingston, and a new Supervisor for the Town of Esopus. Brian Barnes has been playing our videos incessantly on Esopus Area Community Television, which also feeds the city of Kingston, so there is some hope for increased future grassroots support for PEG there.

During the interviews done for inclusion in the roundtable discussion, Chair Arrien presented a Legislative Wish List for New York State which called for: minimum standards of the number of local channels according to population density, a minimum percentage of 40% of the franchise fees to be used for PEG related purposes, a timetable for conversion of PEG channels to High Def video format, requirements for channel placement and accessibility on the cable box and inclusion on the Electronic Program Guide. Assemblyman Kevin Cahill and Assemblywoman Sandy Galef were the most amenable to sponsoring a bill or bills in the Assembly to help with these PEG Access issues, although it is possible that Assemblymen Lopez and Santabarbara may also been interested. Since most of our efforts have gone into distributing the video, there has not been enough effort put into following up with those legislators and approaching others in the Assembly as well as the NY State Senate. That is work for the future for those ACMNY board members, advisors and allies who wish to help with public policy.

Last year ACM New York submitted comments on the Charter/Time Warner Cable Merger to the NYS Department of Public Service. We called attention to the interests of PEG in New York and demanded assurances from Charter that they would honor their obligations to build out PEG in areas that are presently without local channels in the TWC service area. The latest news is that the NYS Public Service Commission has approved the Charter/TWC merger. This does not bode well for New York because of Charter's history of cutting back on the interests of PEG in other states. Nonetheless, this huge monopoly will be the primary cable service in New York State. In hindsight, it would have been far better for PEG if it had been Comcast rather than Charter to absorb Time Warner Cable. But New York is not alone in that scenario – Charter will eventually become the largest cable monopoly in the US as it plans to absorb several other smaller companies along the way. As an aside, Cablevision is in the process of having its ownership transferred to Altice, a Netherlands-owned media company that is expanding into the Tri-State area.

ACM national membership has fallen off in upstate New York because of the increase in dues. Fortunately for ACM national the largest Community Media Centers whose dues went from \$500 to \$5000/year have chosen to stay on, helping ACM National to meet their operating costs. Unfortunately the individual ACM members who are not associated with a big Community Media Center, volunteers, part-time government channel operators, and those who have lesser involvement with the ACM have not chosen to renew their memberships at the \$50 Supporting member level, which would

qualify them for the ACM listserve. Chair Arrien's contention that the old free public listserve helped to bring new members into the fold with its educational value for new channel startups has to date not been considered important enough to help build ACM membership where there are no centers. The new \$50 membership also has eliminated voting rights in ACM for the Supporting Members. Only the more expensive \$200 Individual membership, or Organizational membership carries a vote with it. ACM National considers itself more of a Trade Organization now, and has not put much effort into helping the underserved areas. To try and help remedy this deficiency in expansion Chair Arrien officially proposed, through ACM National Board Members Barbara Chisholm and Keith Thibault, an idea for a new membership category called the "Supporting Membership: Underserved Area." The proposal asserts that in a long range business plan ACM National would lose nothing by having a \$20-\$25 membership for individuals who live a substantial distance from a Community Media Center, such as 30-50 miles. By creating such a membership, it would increase the potential that over time that a new channel could be started up in that underserved area, even if it is run at first by a volunteer or a contractor for very low pay. Ten years later, there could be 10 new Community Media Centers in those vast dark areas of a state such as ours which would be far more likely to join the Alliance as Organizational members, producing a future increase in income for ACM National. In the intervening time, the smaller dues of even \$20 is more than the \$0 that the Alliance would be able to glean from those areas over the next 10 years. The proposal is being considered, but after the last conference call about this, I am dubious that the national board is concerned enough about underserved areas, and wishes instead to concentrate on the built up areas that can pay larger dues and not "increase office time" with calls for information from newbies that they experienced when the old individual membership dues was \$35. ACM New York is basically 'all there is' for underserved areas of our state, with the continuing support of the ACM North East Region, to assist New York residents with their PEG related issues whether on the local municipal level or advocating for them on the state "public policy" level.

In 2015 ACM New York spent far more than its \$1000 ACM North East Region State Chapter support check on scholarships. We spent in the neighborhood of \$1500 on scholarships alone, sending 5 people from New York to the ACMNE Regional Conference in Hartford, CT. The North East Region also awarded a Scholarship to Zeb Schmidt for the ACM National Conference in Pasadena, and to Cynthia Ashley for the ACM North East Region Conference in Hartford. All these scholarships sent people from Albany, Schenectady, Herkimer, Carmel, Mamaroneck and Yonkers to the conferences, and also provided ACM national Supporting memberships to some of those recipients plus an additional one from Hastings-on-Hudson who would otherwise have not paid \$50 to join ACM national for one year. So we are doing everything we can to send people from New York State to these ACM conferences and trade shows to bring back the knowledge to their local areas. We hope to continue this practice and spend a large amount of our budget to give scholarships to our residents to attend the ACM National Conference in Boston, Massachusetts which will take place August 18-20, 2016, and continue to pay for Supporting Memberships to introduce New Yorkers to the ACM listserve to extend its educational value. Note that the ACM NE Region will not be doing a Regional Conference this year, and will throw all of its effort into

supporting the National ACM Conference in Boston. The ACM North East Region will only do a Video Festival this year, and that may be the only income for the region for 2016.

Our task to educate the underserved areas of New York State is a very difficult one. We must look to other ways than the ACM national listserve to bring much needed technical and operational knowledge to small operations in underserved areas and to dark areas that need to start with a government channel. With our technical advisors to the ACMNY Board we hope to explore new ways using social media, e-mail and the internet to reach our isolated audiences that will replace a portion of the traditional time-intensive press interactions that worked better in the old days of public relations outreach to local newspapers.

We are thankful to ACM President Mike Wassenaar who understands our problems and graciously gave us an extended interview to use in our ACM New York video productions. He is doing great work on the national level with the FCC and with government leaders. But here in New York it is up to us to continue with our legislative initiatives with each of our own NY State Assemblypersons and Senators, and to accompany others with their visits with their state representatives to give voice to our difficulties and encourage them to sponsor legislation that will help PEG Access on the State Level.

In conclusion, the lesson from this 2015 Annual Report is that we must look to our own ACMNY Board Development, and find more people with different skill sets to use different methods to accomplish our goals than just trying to mail out another DVD. We need to find ways to reach more people with our message that preserving PEG Access is worth it, free speech is worth the trouble, government and educational access is vital to our democracy and that we are here to help and to listen and to opine in new media outlets.

The time has come to think out of the box.

Respectfully submitted,
Maryann Arrien

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