

The Capital

South County

South county's WRYR expands scope on Internet

By E.B. FURGURSON III Staff Writer

South county's low-power radio station is celebrating its third anniversary with the launch of Internet streaming, recruitment of behind-the-scenes volunteers and some national recognition.

The Town Creek Foundation gave WRYR \$10,000 to put its signal up on the Web, which will help the Churchton-based station expand its corps of listeners interested in environmental issues and the Chesapeake Bay culture.

Those who previously had trouble picking up the station's weak 100-watt signal at 97.5 FM can now pick up the broadcast by visiting www.wryr.org and clicking on the "on air" button.

The capability for simul-casting was always at the station's fingertips, but complicated technical and copyright issues and costs prevented earlier webcasting.

"Now anybody anywhere can be listening to your community radio station and learning about your local issues," said Mike Shay, one of WRYR's founders. "We are Your Radio" is a project of the grass-roots group South Arundel Citizens for Responsible Development.

"This funding is no mere good-neighbor gesture," Mr. Shay added. "It is recognition that community radio is an important and growing alternative to mainstream media."

Beth Jones at the Town Creek Foundation concurred.

"WRYR covers many areas of interest for the foundation," she said from the organization's headquarters in Talbot County. "The station and SACReD have worked to preserve and restore the Chesapeake Bay."

The grant was issued under the foundation's news and commentary program that, among other things, seeks to monitor and challenge mainstream media to present a broader range of perspectives and stories.

"The trend is toward consolidation of media outlets, and the low-power FM movement _ of which WRYR is a leader _ is the countertrend," Ms. Jones said.

Low-power FM stations were allowed under FCC regulations five years ago in part to balance the rule changes that have allowed widespread consolidation of radio and television outlets.

The mostly rural stations, which have limited signal strength by design, are meant to serve specific small communities.

"Community radio is able to show the uniqueness of our communities rather than the same thing," Mr. Shay said, comparing the small stations to high-powered radio outlets, often owned by a shrinking pool of corporations like Clear Channel or Infinity Radio, which air similar formats across the country.

That's one of the points he made on Feb. 8 when he testified before the Federal Communications Commission on behalf of WRYR and the community radio-backing Prometheus Radio Project, of which he's a board member.

Outgoing FCC Chairman Michael Powell hosted a public forum on community stations in Washington to learn about their experiences in their fledgling years and find out what more can be done.

Mr. Shay pushed for more funding and lifting signal restrictions to give more stations, especially in urban areas, access to the airwaves.

"I told them, now that we have a seat at the table, we want a slice of the pie," he said this week.

Sens. John McCain, R-Ariz., and Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., introduced a bill to allow more community stations that same day.

Currently, WRYR airs a mix of pre-recorded programming and home-grown shows including "Parents Journal" with Bobbi Conner, "Bay Shore Jazz" with Gary Hacker and "Chesapeake Country" with Tom Wisner.

To enable more local people to get on the air, WRYR will host two training sessions on how to use the new digital technology at the station.

"They will get training with the digital software to record, edit and produce material to be aired," said volunteer station manager Chris Pokorski. "They will learn how to do recording in the field and/or do interviews, then how to get the digital recording into the computer, even burn CDs."

The first workshop will be held Feb. 27 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the WRYR studio, 5419 Deale-Churchton Road, Churchton. The second will be held later on the Eastern Shore.

Published February 17, 2005, The Capital, Annapolis, Md.

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