

## South County

### **Churchton radio station looks to make its mark**

By E.B. FURGURSON III, Staff Writer

After only few months on the air, low-power radio station WRYY in Churchton is well on its way to meeting the promise of its call letters and motto: "We are your radio."

The all-volunteer, nonprofit station airs a variety of programming around the clock -- jazz, gospel and bluegrass music and shows on local, political and environmental issues, American Indian music and philosophy and even children's literature and music.

The station's philosophy is to provide an outlet for music and talk that may not have a place on commercial radio, as well as give a voice to the community.

"By comparison, we are like a community store amongst all the big-box stores," said program director Eric Funk. "We might be hard to find, but we are worthwhile when you get there."

Run on about \$400 a month under the auspices of South Arundel Citizens for Responsible Development, its signal is at 97.5 FM.

It uses one of the first low-power community radio licenses granted by the Federal Communications Commission last year.

But it is that low power -- only 100 watts compared to the 50,000 of some area broadcast stations -- that presents the big challenge of reaching its audience.

Complicating the matter is that the signal is broadcast via a computer satellite hookup from across the Chesapeake Bay in Talbot County.

As a result, the signal is heard only five miles inland and can be affected by

buildings and even trees, factors that don't exactly worry bigger stations, said Michael Shay, a member of the radio station's board. The station suggests that a \$10 antennae available at Radio Shack will boost reception for most area residents.

The problem is tough on the fledgling station. In order to get more listeners to spread the word about WRYY, they have to be able to tune in.

"It is kind of like the chicken and the egg," Mr. Shay said.

Still, the station is getting a lot of notoriety in broadcast circles and in the national media. A 10-minute segment on low-power radio stations featuring WRYY will soon be broadcast on PBS television's *The News Hour with Jim Lehrer*.

A Washington media think tank, the Media Access Project, is also heralding the station's leadership in the fledgling low-power community radio movement.

"One of the station's central attributes is so many members of the community are involved," said Cheryl Leanza, the organization's deputy director.

One of those is West River's Annette Najjar, who runs the station's control board for her children's literature and music show, "What Will We Hear Today?"

For an hour, beginning at 3 p.m. on Thursdays, she spins discs of children's and grownups' music interspersed with three or four children's book readings, all adhering to the theme of the day.

"I try to find music that is outside of the mass-market Disney and Nickelodeon stuff," she said.

Another unique show is "The Good Red Road," hosted by Southern Maryland residents Jay Winter Nightwolf and Rico Newman. They spend two hours on Saturday afternoons speaking about environmental, political and philosophical issues mixed with music from their culture.

Mr. Winter Nightwolf, a Buffalo Ridge Cherokee, and Mr. Newman, tribal spokesman for the a Piscataway-Nonoy tribe in Southern Maryland, appreciate the non-traditional radio outlet allowing another perspective on the air.

"To us everybody is a brother or sister. But for the family tree to be complete all the branches must be recognized," Mr. Winter Nightwolf said.

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To find out more about the station and its programming schedule, go to the WRYR Web site, [www.wryr.com](http://www.wryr.com).

- Published December 18, 2002, [The Capital](#), Annapolis, Md.

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