

Dear Members of the Board of MCCI

3/21/2019

Thank you for your dedication to keeping the public asset of MCTV up and running for all these years! We have you to thank for not only preserving the station through the lean years when the Montague selectboard gave the cable access assignment to Greenfield – but also for backing the creation of a local weekly newspaper and exploring the possibility of adding a local low power FM radio station.

I have not been as involved in the TV station over the years as I would have liked to be. But now I am producing a series of short videos (some longer ones too) involving interviews with local businesses within a few blocks of the Shea Theater – in the hope that they will be noticed by people who attend Shea Theater events. The business district would do well if more people who came to town for Shea events came early and shopped at some of the locally owned stores or took advantage of their services. So that was the general idea behind the Rumble series (so-called because of a benefit I produced at the Shea on Feb. 22<sup>nd</sup> centered around a screening of the movie Rumble, about the Native American influence on American roots music and rock and roll).

Coincidentally, as I was working on these interviews, I got a phone call late at night from a former producer at MCTV who had a series of complaints about the way the station is run that he wanted to talk to somebody about. I told him I was not the proper person to discuss these matters with, but he persisted, and eventually I wrote down several of his more specific concerns.

Since then, my own experience working at the station these past few weeks have led me to add a few items to the list of concerns I had

jotted down from that late night phone call with a disgruntled former producer. A few other people who are associated with the station as producers have also passed along some concerns, which I have added to that list.

I bring these items to your attention not as criticisms but as constructive concerns – hoping you might take time to read them over and allow me some time to come back to a subsequent board meeting and discuss them with you at more length.

I realize there is a lot involved in running a cable access TV station, and that resources are not sufficient to meet all the needs of the station, that your funding stream is by no means guaranteed in the future, and that the concerns I am bringing to you are just minor items, for the most part, in the overall picture of the ongoing management of the public's local TV station. I am also aware of all the time your board and staff invested in the proposed renovation of the former Cumberland Farms building, and the disappointment of not receiving adequate support to make that plan a reality, to date. The fact that you have persevered through all the ups and downs MCCI has faced and overcome during the last two or three decades is impressive. Your taping of the selectboard, finance committee, school committee, and town meetings continues to be an invaluable service to the community. I appreciate all your hard work.

Thank you,  
David Detmold  
863-9296

Some concerns raised about the operation of MCTV (in no particular order):

1) Is there a clear, comprehensive written document outlining the responsibilities of a volunteer producer and the responsibilities of MCTV that can be handed to a volunteer producer when they first come into the station to get involved in video production? Many other cable access stations (such as Pittsfield Community TV, where I was visiting last week) make such documents available at the first visit of a volunteer – outlining what a volunteer should expect for support in producing videos or live studio programs, and what in turn the role and responsibility of the producer shall be. Also: do producers own their work; or does MCTV own their work, once videos are produced and aired?

2) Is any advanced technical support available to regular producers who may wish to refine their editing techniques?

3) Is there a reason why regular station hours cannot be adhered to? For example, when I came by to try to sign out a camera this week on Tuesday morning, I found a sign on the door stating: Running Errands at 11:15 a.m. and returned an hour later to find the sign still up and the door locked. This may seem to be an isolated occurrence, but it is not. Other businesses manage to keep to their posted hours, making it easier for the general public, rather than for the staff and owners of those enterprises, to conduct their business. This is an ongoing problem, for years, at MCTV.

4) The ventilation system at the studio is filthy – the vents have long strands of dust hanging off them and do not appear to have been cleaned or maintained in a long time – while producers have complained of feeling faint, head-achey, or feel sickened by the air inside the studio.

5) Producers who receive compensation for their work at

MCTV have complained that they feel “nickled and dimed” by full time staff when putting in invoices for their agreed upon work. A specific complaint is that the full time staff, who receive regular paychecks, are shortchanging the paid producers even though the quarterly balances tend to show regular surpluses in the line item that pays for production assistant stipends.

- 6) Is there a clear policy for using copyrighted materials in MCTV production – could that be communicated in writing to volunteer producers?
- 7) Does the station have access to tech support to deal with what appears to be a regular problem of the main computer crashing when rendering files?
- 8) Is there a clear system for dropping off and returning things like SD cards and thumb drives? These appear to not be dealt with in a systematized fashion – like having each device containing video data labeled ahead of drop off, and an area where small cubicles could be located with the name of each producers on each cubicle (just an idea) where these vital links between the producers and the eventual TV screen can be kept safe and returned to their producers, as need be, before they get erased, mixed up, lost, or written over. There can be problems with files that require producers to go back to their originals and make additional copies – but the originals need to be kept secure for a period of time and available to their originators, or disappointment will result.
- 9) Do MCCI maintain a program for outreach to the public schools, and involving teenagers in production of video; if so, are the details of this program available on the MCTV website, and does the program feature a periodic public

evaluation component? (In the past, MCTV was very active in the schools, and in working with at risk youth as producers.)

- 10) The fact that key members of the board and staff have, historically, been close neighbors, and, presumably, close friends, on North and Center Street in Montague Center, seems to be both a strength and perhaps a weakness of MCCI/MCTV.

Is there a clear hiring policy, including regular performance reviews and exit interviews available to the public, when (occasionally) a staff position opens up? Or are hiring decisions made within the family and friendship network of the key board members and staff, as some have, in the past (since the days when Jeff S. was hired), suggested. Again, the station is a public asset, using public funds, and so a hiring / performance review / exit interview policy probably exists, making this an easy question to answer.

- 11) Do you have a person on staff or available to staff who is bi-lingual and able to conduct outreach, answer questions, and work with Latina/o community members – who are the rapidly growing population among downtown residents?

- 12) Is there an archive in which important files or videos of key events still exist and are accessible from the years before Robin Mide departed – such as the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Montague parade, and (to my mind, most important) the Reconciliation Ceremony with the Narragansetts?