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For your listening and learning pleasure, Montana's public radio, KUFM

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marlbeth dwyer • news editor

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FOR YOUR LISTENING AND LEARNING PLEASURE,
MONTANA'S PUBLIC RADIO, KUFM
by Cary E. Holmquist
UM Publications and Media Relations

MISSOULA--

People in western Montana not only listen to KUFM, radio station at the University of Montana, they also participate in its day-to-day production--that's why it's been called Montana's public radio since 1972.

Operating from the UM radio-television department at 17.2 kilowatts and with the help of three translators, KUFM provides most of western Montana with "alternative" radio programming which listeners request, according to Philip J. Hess, station manager and chairman of the UM radio-TV department.

"As a non-commercial FM station, we're not restricted to pleasing advertisers," Hess said, "so we can provide greater access and service to the listeners, who have responded and actively take part in KUFM's programs."

As an example, Hess explained that it was the listeners in the Butte and Helena areas who requested and raised funds for the translator equipment in their areas to bring KUFM's programs to them. The translators, which pick up KUFM broadcasts from a transmitter tower atop Big Sky Mountain north of Missoula, are located on Mount Helena and Mount Belmont for the Helena area and XL Heights for the Butte and Anaconda areas. The Mount Helena translator is owned by the Helena Public Radio Translator Association, a non-profit organization of apparently devoted Helena listeners.

Once listeners receive KUFM, the only public radio in Montana, they begin requesting programs not provided by commercial radio stations. According to Terry Conrad, music and program director, KUFM's staff coordinates programs to fill those requests, which include more news and different kinds of entertainment like jazz, classical and folk music, radio theater, poetry and story reading; and children's programs.

KUFM RADIO--add one

Only about 25 percent of KUFM's programming comes from the National Public Radio (NPR) network; the rest is originated and produced locally.

"Public radio like KUFM is much more exciting than commercial radio because of the greater variety," Conrad said, "I am able to work with several kinds of music, for example, rather than a straight format of just country-western or pop." Conrad worked for commercial radio stations in Detroit, Mich., before coming to Montana.

"We approach radio as an art form," Conrad said, "which means getting people involved. We stress that you don't have to be a professional to participate since the staff can provide the technical assistance, but you do need to know what you want to say and do."

Examples of listener contributions include a one-and-a-half hour weekly program produced by members of the Retired Senior Volunteer Program, live music performances, features by UM students, an opera commentary by a Missoula opera buff before the Saturday Metropolitan Opera program, and news programs by local special-interest groups.

Jyl Hoyt, acting news and public affairs director, said that public radio offers tremendous opportunities for informing people about the world around them because all its time is devoted to news and public affairs and none to commercial programming and advertisements.

"With more time, KUFM can cover more in depth the international, national, regional, and local news events," Hoyt said, "and we can learn why something happened as well as the 'who, what, where and when.'"

As news director, Hoyt said that her goal is to educate the listeners about the events and "great wealth of knowledgeable people" that affect everyone's life. She added, "People cannot participate in their democratic government and society until they have information." Her intent is to help more people to be prepared for participation.

(more)

KUFM RADIO--add two

Following her objectives, Hoyt produces three daily news broadcasts and a weekend issues program, "Montana Edition," in which proponents of all sides of an issue may voice their opinions. She has applied for funding for a person who would report daily on the Montana legislative session via telephone from Helena and who would participate in a weekly analysis of the legislature's activities with UM history and political science professors.

Hoyt said KUFM's local news reporting can inform the rest of the nation about Montana citizens and their concerns. She makes special reports to the NPR network's news headquarters in Washington, D.C., to try to clarify Montana's positions on issues like the coal severance tax, the wheat and timber markets and various special issues.

Hess said that KUFM's programming is aimed at all of western Montana except for the Monday evening broadcasts of the Missoula City Council proceedings. "We have news 'stringers' in several cities who report for us from time to time on local events," Hess said, "but we don't have enough money to pay them to work more often."

He added that listeners from all over the area call or write announcements and news items for broadcast by KUFM staff.

Both Hess and Hoyt said that if listeners in Butte, Helena or other western Montana areas wanted more local coverage they can have it. The only requirements would be both interest and funds for personnel which would come from the requesting area. They said it would be possible for locally produced programming to be "patched into" KUFM's signals at specified times from a local production unit or by a staff member at KUFM whose specific assignment was for local-interest production.

Since February 1979, KUFM has aided in providing a reading service for visually and physically handicapped listeners via a sub-channel signal. The Western Montana Radio Reading Service, a Missoula non-profit organization funded by gifts from local businesses and listeners, provides news, columns, comics, letters-to-the-editor advertisements, books and magazines read by volunteers. Equipment used by the service was purchased under a federal grant obtained by KUFM. The program is free to more than 700 users who listen to the broadcasts on special receivers over a 10-county area in Western Montana. The service hopes to begin transmitting to the Helena area when funds become available.

(over)

KUFM RADIO--add three

"We've grown a great deal since 1965 when KUFM was only a 10-watt, part-time student-training facility," Hess said. "Since 1971 we have been able to add more time, equipment and staff through federal telecommunication grants."

Located on the third floor of the UM Journalism Building, KUFM's facilities include a master control studio, from which the programming is actually broadcast. KUFM also has two more production studios, one for news and the other, complete with master production equipment, in constant use for students' classes. Hess said that the station's equipment is high quality, "state-of-the-art" to meet federal grant standards.

A fourth translator for the Rattlesnake Canyon in Missoula will be installed on the top of UM's Aber Hall and in operation by fall 1981. The canyon is shadowed by mountain walls that block the FM radio waves which travel by "line-of-sight."

For receiving broadcasts from NPR, the station installed a satellite dish, through funds from a federal grant. The satellite facility increases the fidelity, quality and reception capacity over the former poor-quality telephone-line reception system.

Hess said that funding for KUFM comes from three major sources. State funds through the University of Montana, amounting to about \$100,000 annually, provide the housing, studio power, four full-time and several college work-study student staff and matching funds for federal grants. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a non-profit corporation created by Congress in 1967, supplies about \$40,000 a year for a fifth full-time staff member, student hourly employees and the funds for the \$5,000 annual program service fee for NPR programming. Other funds from corporations and foundations are sought for additional personnel.

The \$21,000 operating budget for the station comes from the listeners, Hess said. Without these contributions, which pay for small equipment items, records, program production costs and transmitter power, Hess said the KUFM would have a staff, NPR affiliation and equipment but no power or programs to broadcast.

"Another advantage to such great dependency on listener contributions," Hess said, "is that people who give money get an emotional stake in the operation of the station, which makes them feel like they really can participate--it really does become their station."