

NETV celebrates twenty years of rapid growth

Stories by Deb Gray

This November the Nebraska Educational Television Network (NETV) slipped quietly into its 20th year with no hoopla, no open houses.

"We're so busy, we have no time to celebrate," said Ron Hull, assistant general manager for programming.

NETV's adolescent years have been years of rapid growth. In its first 20 years, NETV has outgrown its shared studio space with TV station KOLN to move into the Telecommunications Center on North 33rd St., which Hull called "the best facility in the United States under one roof."

Nine channels

From station KULN in Lincoln, NETV has expanded into a nine-channel statewide network.

"We have the production capacity for any form of communication," Hull said. "We have facilities here for motion pictures, television and slide shows."

NETV's story begins in the early '50s when KFOR was not a radio station, it was television channel 10 and TV station KOLN, now Channel 10, was Channel 12.

Then, along came John Fetzer, a prominent American broadcaster and a co-owner of the Detroit Tigers, who bought out TV station KFOR, Hull said. KOLN moved into the vacated channel 10 slot, he said, freeing Channel 12.

The University of Nebraska then applied for the Channel 12 slot. After the Federal Communications Commission approved the move, on Nov. 1, 1954, KULN educational TV began.

Black and white

Boyd Rooney, assistant general manager—operations, remembered the days when everything was in black and white.

At first, Rooney said, KULN shared studio space with Channel 10. When KOLN was broadcasting network programs, the educational network used their studios, he said. Then, in 1957, they moved into a remodeled 30 x 30 foot space in the basement of the Temple Building on the UNL campus, he said.

What kind of productions came from this room?

"Small ones," Rooney said. "But we did some good things that received national distribution."

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Dick Gregory and NETV employee.

Nebraskans can see local art

The subject is Nebraska culture. The goal: to make Nebraskans aware of the talent of area artists, actors, writers and musicians.

Programs in drama, art, dance, literature, fine arts, and popular arts such as jazz comprise the cultural affairs unit at NETV, said Gene Bunge, senior producer of the cultural affairs unit.

"We also try to focus on Nebraska's cultural heritage," Bunge said. "We did a series on John Neihardt and another show called 'Pick-in by the River'—which told about the Brownville Music Festival, but also focused on the historical, colorful aspects of the town."

Two programs, Bunge said, that elicited big audience response were the live broadcast of the opera "Napoleon," written by UNL music professor Robert Beadell, Bill Wallis and Dean Tschetter, and the Willa Cather Centennial Concert, featuring the university orchestra and Hepzibah, Yaltah and Yehudi Menuhin.

"Bookshelf"

The unit also produces a weekly program, "Bookshelf," he said, which features book reviews by Clarence Forsberg and Otis Young. This year, "Bookshelf" has traveled throughout Nebraska, taping programs at libraries

around the state, he said.

"We're trying to organize our broadcasting better into patterns," Bunge said. "Lately, we've been scheduling programs into groups."

October was a month for art programming, Bunge said, November, drama will be featured. And, next month NETV will spotlight jazz, with a full evening of jazz music slated for New Year's Eve.

Distributed nationally

About one-half of the cultural programs are distributed nationally, Bunge said. Last year, programs receiving wide distribution included the Pete Seeger concert; "Sundown Shingdig," a program on square dancing narrated by UNL English Assistant Professor Roger Welsch which featured the Bluegrass Crusade; and programs about Zara Nelsova and Grant Johnsen, UNL's artists in residence.

In December, he said, the unit will tape a Christmas special with children; a program with Lincoln rock band "Straight;" and "You Gotta Have Art" with Gerald Ness, the executive director of the Nebraska Arts Council.

"We want to both show Nebraskans the talent, artists and painters here in the state and also to have their artistry shown to a large audience," Bunge said.



NETV cameraperson.

'Best of its kind'

Library leases tapes

It's not your run-of-the-mill library, for there are no books. Instead, there are rows and stacks of video cassette tapes.

This is the Great Plains National Instructional Library (GPN), described by LeMoine Cacek, video tape librarian in charge of distribution, as the "best of its kind in the world."

The GPN, located on the lower level of the Telecommunications Center on East Campus, began 12 years ago when Jack McBride, general manager of the NETV network, and Wesley Meierhenry, chairman of adult and continuing education, prepared a report for the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, according to Richard Spence, information coordinator at NETV.

Leasing Tapes

"Since it's very expensive for a school to produce their own television programs," Spence said, "they wanted to determine if materials video taped at different schools could be used by others on a leasing basis."

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The Meierhenry-McBride report concluded that they could, Spence said, and that distribution centers or libraries could disperse these tapes most effectively.

So, the GPN, along with other libraries in Massachusetts and Indiana, were set up as an experiment by the U.S. Office of Education, Spence said.

In 1962, the library was financed by government funds. By 1966, Spence said, it was self-supporting, receiving no tax money.

"It's really unique that the library went from government support to become self-supporting," he said. "The leasing charges now pay for all the salaries and expenses of the library."

Available material studied

When the library began, Paul Schupbach, director of G.N. and Tracy Clement, associate director, traveled throughout the country studying the material available for instructional television, Spence said. Through their "spade work," he said, the library grew to about 150 course series.

The library receives tapes from production centers across the country, Spence said. The library doesn't rely on a few specific centers for material, he said. Only a small percentage of tapes are produced in Nebraska, he said.

"Lately, we've started to diversify," Spence said. "We've gotten some 35 millimeter shows and some slide sets. And we've gotten into publishing."