



[Home](#) / [Harpswell](#) / Harpswell radio station to be out of the 'loop' in January

Harpswell radio station to be out of the 'loop' in January

By [Callie Ferguson](#) on December 14, 2016 [@calliecferguson](#)

HARPSWELL — When radio listeners tune to WHPW 97.3, they get a stream of uninterrupted music, set up on a 22-day loop.

But sometime in January, 97.3 will air familiar voices broadcasting local news and entertainment on the town's only community radio station.

For the station's co-founders and board members, that moment will usher in a long-awaited change that presents the opportunity for diverse, original programming, customized for the community.

"(Community radio) gives a voice to people who don't really have that," said co-founder John Halpin, who was joined by board members Richard Kazimer and Betsy Saunders for an interview Tuesday.

Halpin, who has previous experience at a low-power FM station in Arizona, applied for a low-power broadcast license in 2012, when the Federal Communications Commission opened up a rare window for applications.

But it took several years to generate interest in the project, secure a 501c nonprofit designation, and acquire the funds to install a transmitter and station antenna, which shares a tower with Harpswell Community Television at 8 Community Drive.

Finally, at 1:22 p.m. on Nov. 9, WHPW 97.3 went live with a loop of "placeholder" music. Saunders said she was shocked to learn that the 26 watts of signal power broadcast the feed as far away as Damariscotta.

Now, the station's board – consisting of the three founders and a few core volunteers – is looking for those voices to which Halpin referred.

They are in the midst of putting together a broadcast schedule that will include a live morning talk show hosted by Kazimer, spoken word and poetry programming, and a bluegrass music show.

Halpin said the original programming will reflect the democratic, home-grown nature of community radio.

Kazimer added that “there are fewer people owning more media at any time in American history,” referring to the effects from the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which enabled corporate media companies to easily buy, consolidate and homogenize small, commercial stations.

While small and community-oriented, Halpin and Kazimer argued that WHPW’s programming would be richer than a typical commercial station, given its independence from corporate oversight and content guidelines.

Except for some standard FCC rules prohibiting inappropriate content, anyone with a good idea is welcome to pitch a program.

“Community access. It’s an educational station. We hope to get kids involved. Music, history, art, talk, radio theater – whatever people envision their program might be,” Saunders said.

Halpin said the station will likely supplement original programs with broadcasts of municipal meetings and public service announcements.

He is also interested in purchasing the rights to syndicated content through public radio exchanges, or archival audio stories from local organizations like the Salt Institute for Documentary Studies at Maine College of Art in Portland.

But it takes work to turn a good idea into full-fledged original programming.

So far, the board has hosted four training sessions designed to teach members of the community how to plan and record a program.

Eventually, Halpin said the station will build a central studio, which could cost upwards of \$35,000. Until that happens, live and pre-recorded programs will be recorded at home and then synced to automated broadcast software.

Kazimer hosted the most recent training session Dec. 9, when he explained to a group of about a dozen people the in’s and out’s of free online recording software called Audacity, and where to find inexpensive microphones to record programs. Another training is scheduled for Jan. 7, from 10 a.m.-noon, at the Cundy’s Harbor Library.

“The idea is for people to get into this without incurring a major cost,”Kazimer said.

In the meantime, Saunders is working on partnerships with local libraries to set up satellite recording pods, outfitted with recording equipment and proper acoustics.

Halpin said so far, the station has amassed enough interest to launch original programming next month, but will have to fill gaps with music.

Over time, he said, the station “will hopefully build, and get better and better and better.”

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Harpswell Community Radio board members John Halpin, Betsy Saunders and Richard Kazimer plan to launch original programming on WHPH 97.3 in January.

Edited 12/14 to correct spelling of Richard Kazimer's last name.