
Harpswell Community Radio is On the Air

BY ED LEVINE

WHPW, a new low-power station which aims to offer programming by and for Harpswell residents, began broadcasting at 1:22 p.m. on November 9, playing a pre-recorded loop of music and announcements.

John Halpin, organizer and president of the Harpswell Radio Project, said the current broadcast
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DJ David Brooks of Harpswell records an announcement for WHPW-LP. (ED LEVINE PHOTO)

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casts are designed to test the capabilities of the station's transmitter and antenna and allow engineers to fine-tune the signal so it can be heard throughout the town and its islands.

"We have asked for feedback from listeners as to where they can hear us and the quality of the reception," Halpin said.

"We have reports from many parts of Harpswell. There are some dead spots and we will work on that," he said. "We're also reaching Brunswick, Topsham, West Bath, Bath, Phippsburg, Freeport, North Yarmouth, the eastern side of Portland, Richmond, and others. This will change somewhat as we adjust to provide the best service to our local audience."

Halpin encouraged area residents to try tuning to the station at 97.3 FM and report on signal strength and quality. Reports can be made by emailing harpwellradio@gmail.com or texting or calling 207-833-6618

For now, the programming consists of a variety of music which repeats about every 36 hours. Eventually, however, the station hopes to feature a wide variety of programs produced by area residents.

"The programming should be quite diverse and what is being aired right now isn't at all representative of what it will become," Halpin said. "While there will be music programs exploring specific genres there will also be, at times, a random selection from what will be a vast library."

To find Harpswell's future radio stars, station organizers have been holding a series of information and training sessions where people can sign up, submit program proposals and learn the basics of radio production and announcing.

So far, the introduction to radio sessions have been held at Cundy's Harbor and Orr's Island. The next will be held from 10 a.m. to noon on Saturday, December 10, although the location has not been finalized. Halpin said prospective announcers should check the station web site at [\[swellradio.org\]\(http://swellradio.org\) for information on that and future trainings.](http://www.harp-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

"We will continue to do them into the foreseeable future and move them around to different locations so that they will be convenient to more people," Halpin said.

The training sessions have proven quite popular and each attracted more than a dozen people interested in producing their own programs.

"Of the nearly two dozen show proposals that have been submitted by local producers thus far, only about one third are exclusively music," Halpin said. "Others include music interspersed with local poetry, readings, and narrative pieces on specific subjects."

Halpin said WHPW hopes to have an initial programming schedule by the end of the year. Besides local content, the station will feature some syndicated programs produced by non-commercial stations around the country, as well as regional content, including "The Humble Farmer" Maine radio program.

In addition to tuning the transmitter and training, WHPW organizers are also focused on fund-raising and developing the infrastructure for future growth. For now, the station consists of an "electronics hub" located in a shed off of Mountain Road. Halpin said the group is searching for permanent studio and office space and is asking the public for help.

"Our studio must be within

10 miles of our antenna location on Mountain Road," Halpin said. "Anyone who might have something to offer should contact us."

The station is also hoping to raise money to create several "production pods" in various locations, likely the local libraries, to allow people to produce professional quality programs for broadcast.

"The idea is that once people are trained to use the equipment and know the basic regulations concerning non-commercial radio, they would be able to reserve time on equipment in the library to produce a radio piece," Halpin said.

He said each of the production pods is expected to cost about \$1,200. Other costs are expected to include at least \$25,000 to develop studio space; about \$1,500 for the main computer and automation software; up to \$3,500 to set up Internet streaming, including music licensing; \$1,200 to \$1,800 to upgrade the antenna system to improve the signal; and about \$4,000 for audio processing equipment to "give broadcasts a fuller, richer sound."

Halpin said fundraising is under way to help finance some of those projects. Money comes from direct donations and fundraising events, and organizers are hoping to apply for some grants. While the non-profit station is prohibited from selling advertisements, it can have "underwriting sponsors" and is hoping to attract area busi-

nesses interested in supporting local programs.

"As we build our our capacity we need to raise funds at every stage," Halpin said.

Halpin said the work is being done by a group of volunteers who have been working for more than a year to get the station on the air. As that goal comes closer to reality, the number of volunteers is growing.

Halpin singled out Richard Kazimer and Nick Keeney, who are conducting the training sessions, and engineer Howard Yanik, who helped WHPW acquire no-cost and low-cost equipment, refurbished and repaired some systems, climbed the tower and installed the antenna, and is in the process of setting up the automated system.

"He has contributed in-kind services that would have cost us thousands of dollars on the open market," Halpin said. †