Harpwell Radio Station’s Programming Shapes Up

BY ED LEVINE

Harpwell’s own radio station has officially sprung to life with a new license and original programming now on the air.

After years of planning and two months of live testing by local volunteers, WHPW received an operating license from the Federal Communications Commission on January 10.

“This means that we are no longer operating under a construction permit and are officially a recognized radio station,” said John Halpin, president of the Harpwell Radio Project, which is operating WHPW as Harpwell Community Radio on 97.3 FM.

“I’d like to personally thank everyone who participated over the last four years in helping to bring this project from imagination to reality,” Halpin said. “It’s been a long haul, and there’s still a lot to do as we build studios, upgrade our coverage and signal quality, and work toward streaming online.”

WHPW initially went on the air in November, broadcasting a pre-recorded loop of music as engineers tuned the low-powered signal to reach throughout Harpwell and beyond. Many residents tuned in and reported back to WHPW on the quality of the signal throughout the community.

“We would very much like to thank everyone who has reported in from various locations,” said Halpin, noting that the signal reached well beyond Harpwell and has been heard as far away as Portland and Phippsburg. “We’ve been able to clean up the on-air sound and reduce static in some areas.”

The first original program to launch of the station is a morning show called “Ear View,” a mix of news, interviews and some commentary, hosted by radio veteran Harpwell Radio Project board member Richard Kazimer. The program airs from 8 to 10 a.m. Monday through Friday. There’s also a community calendar of local and regional events and a weekly “Litanie of the Beans,” a rundown of bean suppers in the area.

Halpin said there are also several music shows debuting in coming days and weeks, including an electronic music show co-hosted by a Harpwell Coastal Academy student and faculty member. The station will also air “The Humble Farmer,” a syndicated programming featuring classic jazz and Maine humor, at 7 p.m. on Fridays.

Halpin said a full programming schedule is being developed and will be posted on the station’s Web site, www.harpwellradio.org.

There are still many more opportunities at the station and Halpin said local residents are encouraged to email their ideas programming@harpwellradio.org.

Organizers also have been holding a series of information and training sessions throughout town over the last several months. The next session is set for 4 to 6 p.m. on February 11 at the Orr’s Island Library. Another is planned for April 15 at the Topsham library. Halpin said he hopes to schedule a March session as well. Residents should check the WHPW Web site for updates, he said.

Planning is also under way to place a series of custom-designed “production pods” -- consisting of a computer, microphone, headphones, and free-standing acoustical panels to isolate sound -- in local libraries.

“The idea is to make the means of producing content for radio very accessible to members of the local communities,” Halpin said. “Individuals will be trained and certified to use the equipment through our training sessions. Then they will be able to reserve time at their local library and go work on their production on their own schedule.”

Halpin said he hopes the first of the pods will be in place by the summer, depending on funding. He estimated each will cost about $1,500 and the organization is looking for donations and applying for grants to pay for the pods and other needed equipment.

Another fund-raising priority is to start live online streaming of the station’s signal, which will cost about $3,500 for music copyright licensing and fulfilling record-keeping and reporting requirements. Other planned improvements in the future which will depend on funding include a $4,000 broadcast audio processor to give the signal a fuller, richer sound, and a second antenna bay to improve the signal at a cost of at least $1,500.

Halpin said a series of fundraisers are being planned for throughout the year and the radio project will soon begin offering underwriting sponsorship possibilities to local businesses. The group also solicits individual donations at a variety or levels and is also raising money through Amazon.com’s charitable Smile program.

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