

Testing, Testing 1, 2, 3

BY ED LEVINE

Calvin Hooker wants to read stories to home-bound seniors.

Kandy Ivy wants to broadcast her musical jam sessions with friends.

A member of the town's recreation committee wants to do play-by-play of youth basketball games.

Those are some of the ideas people have for WHPW-LP, Harpswell's new radio station which is currently under construction and plans to begin broadcasting soon.

More than a dozen people turned out on October 11 at the Cundy's Harbor library for the first in a series of sessions aimed at gathering ideas for programming and training prospective announcers and disc jockeys. Most had questions on how to get involved, while many had program ideas to share. Several took turns at a microphone to record station identifications and public service announcements under the watchful eyes of experienced broadcasters working to organize the new station.

Hooker, an energetic 85 year old

from Great Island, said he has long thought of bringing his deep, resonating voice to radio.

"So many people have come up to me and said, 'oh, that voice!, you



On the Air Calvin Hooker records a public service announcement for WHPW-LP as Nick Keene looks on. (ED LEVINE PHOTO)

should be on radio," Hooker said. "This seems like a great way to try it out."

Hooker took his turn at the microphone, reading from a series of station identifications and announcements which will be needed to be broadcast once the station goes on the air. "This is WHPW-LP, 97.3, Harpswell," he said in a booming voice.

Eventually, Hooker said, he would like to produce a program

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in which he reads stories to entertain senior citizens, sight-impaired people and other home-bound residents.

John Halpin, organizer and president of the Harpswell Radio Project, said Hooker's idea is just the kind of programming the station needs as it prepares to broadcast sometime in the next several weeks.

Halpin said planning for the low-powered, nonprofit station began a couple of years ago and has moved along slowly as organizers secured the required federal licenses and permits and raised money for needed equipment and fees. The group has cobbled together a transmitter from used parts and installed an antenna on a town-owned tower off of Mountain Road

shared with the local community television station.

The next step is to start testing the transmitter to see how good the signal is and what can be done to improve reception throughout the area, Halpin said. He hopes testing can begin in early November, once the station's volunteer engineers can correct some technical problems with the transmitter.

"The plan is to begin to have some sort of signal on the air if not by November 1st, then soon after," Halpin said. "People will be able to hear and give us feedback on the quality of signal at their house or in a car at various points around town."

Halpin said initial tests of the antenna with borrowed equipment showed the potential of a good signal throughout the area and was even heard in North Yarmouth. WHPW will utilize one antenna at first, then expand to a second unit when money is available, which should improve reception to all

parts of Harpswell and its islands.

"We want to get coverage across the entire town. The only way we can do that is to get on the air and get feedback," he said.

He said anyone interested in the tests or volunteering should visit the WHPW Web page at www.harpswellradio.org.

A handful of volunteers are currently working to produce some content for the early testing, namely in the form of music playlists, Halpin said.

But eventually, he said, many people will be needed to produce a variety of content for the station, which will feature the talents of people from Harpswell and neighboring communities. The Cundy's Harbor meeting was the first of three sessions planned throughout town to recruit more volunteers and offer initial training and encouragement to would-be announcers.

"I was really surprised at the

number of people who showed up," Halpin said, noting that few people attended some earlier organization meetings, but many turned out once the prospect of actually getting on the radio became a reality.

"There seems to be a pent-up demand for something like this," he said. "I'm really, really happy that there's lots of people willing to do things. That's really encouraging."

The next meeting, which will be divided into an informational session and announcer training, will be held from 4 to 6 p.m. on Saturday, November 5, at the Orr's Island Library. Another session is being planned for December in Harpswell Neck.

Richard Kazimer, a radio veteran and consultant who is a member of the WHPW board of directors, said nearly anyone with a good idea can be of help to the fledgling station.

"There's no such thing as a perfect radio voice," he said. "Do the best job you can."

So far, interested residents have proposed a wide array of program ideas, including a variety show, a community calendar, poetry readings from local writers, and musical shows featuring classic, reggae and many other genres.

"This is going to be people from greater Harpswell talking to people from greater Harpswell," Kazimer said. "Everything is organic."

Other programming possibilities include collaborating with local schools to get some students involved in broadcasts, working with town committees and area nonprofits to get their messages out, and joining national networks of other nonprofit stations to both receive interesting programs and possibly share Harpswell-produced content with much wider audiences.

"I think we're going to have at least a nice handful of local programming by the time we get on the air full time," Halpin said. †