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St. Andrews station gets its wings

Community channel set to expand beyond cable



Brian Dickson is the technical director of St. Andrews Community Television – a Cable 10 station that's soon making a leap to the open airwaves.
Chuck Brown/Telegraph-Journal

By Chuck Brown
Telegraph-Journal

Programming pioneers in St. Andrews are about to take their little community television station into new territory - the open air.

Volunteers with St. Andrews Community Television are breaking free of the boundaries of cable television this spring to hit the airwaves as an independent low-power broadcast station. The move will mean anyone in St. Andrews with a TV - whether they're hooked up to cable, satellite or an antenna - will be able to pull in Friday night Algonquins hockey, TV bingo, town council meetings and other local programming.

"We saw an opportunity to not only reach people on cable but to reach anybody with a TV set," Brian Dickson, the station's technical director, said in an interview at the CHCT-TV studios in the W.C. O'Neill Arena Complex.

"Our goal is to try to reach everybody in the community who has a television and that means pretty much every person," Mr. Dickson said.

"We've had a lot of feedback from people in the community saying, 'I wish we could get the community channel.'"

The station, with studios tucked away on the arena's second floor, acquired a broadcast licence in November from the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC). Mr. Dickson said the planned 100-watt transmitter will send the station's programming from the arena rooftop to any TV within about a 12-kilometre radius. Viewers will be able to tune the channel in on UHF-26. Cable TV subscribers will still be able to watch on channel 10.

The community broadcast licence is a New Brunswick first and it's attracting interest from other communities. Mr. Dickson had a visit from community station operators on Prince Edward Island who wanted to learn how St. Andrews got its broadcast permit.

The station's volunteer producers, technicians and on-air personalities are aiming to produce

about 14 hours a week of programming. In about 13 years of operation, Mr. Dickson and the volunteers have cobbled together a modest studio (the latest renovations totaled about \$160) and a control room with a wall of monitors that could double as a television museum. Among the high-tech gear such as computers, DVD and sound mixers are relics such as an old Commodore computer monitor salvaged from the local school board years ago.

The station's volunteers have worked hard to make the channel active and involved in the community by bringing many aspects of St. Andrews life into the town's living rooms. Broadcasts of St. Andrews Algonquins midget hockey games on Friday nights are among the most popular programs, Mr. Dickson said. The station also has local shows on gardening and cooking and there's a handyman show in the works. St. Andrews Community Television also broadcasts town council meetings, variety shows and interviews.

"It's local and they see their friends and relatives on television and it really has an impact," Mr. Dickson said.

As a volunteer, he said he gets a lot out of the station too.

"This is a retirement hobby and it is a lot of fun to do," he said.

The volunteers are now raising \$18,000 for the transmitter by selling station memberships like PBS and by selling advertising. Mr. Dickson said they're also preparing to launch a TV Bingo show with part of the proceeds helping the station set up the transmitter.
