

MCCET TURNED 30 THIS YEAR

Launched with just a black and white, reel-to-reel video recorder, our local public access channel has come a long way in the past 30 years.

No longer must heavy equipment be lugged up to Bald Hill each night simply to cablecast local programs. Today, Mendocino Coast Community Education Television (MCCET) can send a clean cablecast from its modest office at the Fort Bragg High School, as well as send live feeds from Fort Bragg's Town Hall and the John Diederich Education Center.

From its humble beginnings as a high school television production class, MCCET has slowly grown to become a valued part of our local civic life, thanks to 30 years of donations of gifts and time from the community, volunteer video producers, and from volunteer MCCET director Charlene Aumack.

Each time MCCET has obtained new equipment, coast cable viewers have seen a jump in local programming. When the first equipment was purchased during 1971-1975, local programs were typically shown just one night a week, Tuesday evenings. Following the 1985 franchise agreement with the cable company, which allocated MCCET some \$22,500 for equipment, local programs appeared several nights a week, for as many as 15-20 hours total. MCCET typically has some local programming 4 to 5 nights a week in spite of its aging equipment.

MCCET expects to completely upgrade and expand its equipment following approval of the new cable franchise agreement by the City of Fort Bragg and County of Mendocino. This will permit continued growth in the quantity and diversity of local programming for the enjoyment and enrichment of coast viewers.



Charlene Aumack at MCCET

Frequently Asked Questions

What Public Access Television?

Public Access television, also called PEG (Public, Education, and Government) Access television, is television by and for the community.

Such television serves as the voice of the community by airing local government meetings, graduations, community events, and other locally produced programming as well as non-local programs as requested by community members. Facilitating the production of television programs is basic to all Public Access television.

Public Access television developed as cable television spread in the 1960s. In the 1970s, Federal law governing the cable industry incorporated the proviso that a community could require, as part of its franchise agreement with a cable company, the provision of Public Access channels and allied funding.

Public Access differs from broadcast television because content can only be delivered by cable, not via a satellite dish. As a result, Public Access is available only to cable television subscribers.

How Does Public Access Differ from Public Broadcasting?

In contrast to community-run Public Access, Public Broadcasting is a national network of television stations that produce programs for large audiences much as any network station does.

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MCCET's Future

Our future will be determined by the terms of the franchise agreement now being negotiated. We cannot make concrete plans until the agreement is finalized and we know what support the cable company will provide to MCCET. But here are a few of the plans we've discussed:

- Improve production quality for city council and other Town Hall meetings. This involves having Adelphia improve the cabling from Town Hall and provide new equipment. If we receive the funding requested, it may be possible to install remote cameras, new microphones and sound system in Town Hall.
- Find a new facility for MCCET in an accessible location with space to build at least one production studio, a couple of editing rooms and room for staff and volunteers to work.
- Develop separate channels for government, education, and public access. This will allow for more local programming, as well as increase the educational and other programming requested by local schools or community members.

Frequently Asked Questions *Continued*

How Does Public Access Get Money to Operate?

Typically the cable provider provides funding for equipment and production facilities. Funds for staffing and general operations come from several sources, including the cable provider, local government, cable subscribers, and community donations. Public Access cannot sell advertising, they often raise part of their budget needs through program underwriters, memberships fees, and fundraisers such as MCCET's Annual Auction.

How Can I Help MCCET?

- Help make MCCET's December auction successful! Become an auction sponsor for \$25. Donate items or services to the auction before November 8th.
- Call or send letters to each Mendocino County supervisor in support of the proposal that MCCET receive 20% (\$15,000) of the franchise fees received by the county for coastal subscribers to Adelphia Cable TV. Please note that the county receives almost \$200,000 in franchise fees or about \$25 per year from each subscriber. MCCET needs \$2 out of that \$25 to support staff and operational expenses.
- Become a volunteer producer. Call 961-1127 for more information.

MCCET's 20th Annual Auction

On-Line bidding starts November 25 at

<http://mccet.mcn.org/auction.html>

Live auction on Channel 3 Dec 7th – starting at 7pm

CABLE FRANCHISE NEWS

We expect the new cable franchise agreement to be signed early in 2003.

In June 2002, city and county administrators hired John Risk, a consultant with experience in negotiating franchise agreements. He has reviewed the Adelphia's past performance and also has drafted legal documents on franchise conditions for the cities and county. This work is currently being reviewed over a 45-day period. Negotiations should start following completion of this review.

The previous 1985 cable franchise agreement, which expired in 1999, provided very little financial support. This time around, MCCET has higher expectations for the new franchise agreement.

Our central aim is to get the cable company to allocate money for new equipment and production facilities. We've submitted a document listing the financial support and other commitments we want included in the franchise agreement. Our requests for support from Adelphia are based on the budgets and franchise agreement support for Public Access in communities having similar population and subscriber levels.

Negotiations will be complicated, however, by Adelphia's bankruptcy, which means the company's funds are restricted during their Chapter 11 reorganization.

We'll provide an update as soon as we have news on the negotiations.