

## **Petaluma Community Access Access Activities Plan and Budget for Fiscal Year 2009-2010**

“Public access TV, also called cable access, community access, community television, and PEG (Public, Education and Government), is a system that provides television production equipment, training and airtime on a local cable channel, so members of the public can produce their own shows and televise them to a mass audience.”

from THE HISTORY OF PUBLIC ACCESS TELEVISION Copyright 2000, Bill Olson

*The contract between PCA and the City of Petaluma requires that an Access Activities Plan and Budget be created each Fiscal Year beginning July 1 to establish goals and describe the method of reaching them. The following document is submitted to satisfy that requirement, serving as a business plan for the operation of the station.*

### **A Brief History**

Petaluma Community Access, Incorporated (PCA) is an independent, non-profit organization incorporated in 1995, as a 501(c) (3) corporation in the State of California, to operate the public, educational and government cable access channels in the City of Petaluma under a professional services agreement with the City. The contract was renewed in January 2006, and is up for renewal again in December 2010.

PCA is a membership organization governed by a Board of Directors. Funding for the establishment of PCA is provided through the cable franchise agreement between the City of Petaluma and the current cable provider (Comcast). A capital equipment fund established by the initial cable provider (and replenished in a recent settlement with the current cable provider) is administered by the City for real-property improvements and purchases of equipment for station operation. Operating funds were initially generated from a mandatory surcharge to the cable subscriber of \$.50 per month, later raised to a voluntary \$2.00 per month, and are presently comprised of a \$.25 mandatory subscriber surcharge and continued payments of the voluntary \$2.00 charge.

For its first twelve years of operation, PCA was located on the campus of Casa Grande High School in a facility that included offices, editing rooms, equipment, training and radio rooms, a reception area, and a fully operational television production studio and control room. The MOU with the Petaluma School District, however, was rescinded in February of 2008 and PCA is now located at 205 Keller Street, Suite 102. The studio, which permitted LIVE cablecasts, was unfortunately lost in the transition but cameras, sound equipment, lighting packages, editing stations and the Radio Project remain available for use by PCA members. The PCA Broadcast

Servers which transmit our three channels (signals) to the Comcast "head-end" were also moved; they are now located in the Petaluma City Hall booth where fiber connectivity to Comcast already existed.

PCA is extremely grateful for efforts on the part of the City of Petaluma to facilitate the physical installation of, and continued access to, our broadcasting equipment inside City Hall. The cost of installing fiber connectivity to any other location would have been a fatal financial challenge to an organization of our size and charter. That PCA is still functioning is a direct result of this vital gesture of City support.

The 3 cable channels programmed by PCA reflect the classic PEG format:

**PUBLIC** (cable channel 26) – Locally created programming, viewer sponsored programs (generally created elsewhere), and on-air bulletin-board announcements of public events and PCA information

**EDUCATION** (cable channel 27) – Petaluma School Board meetings (replayed from tape), programs of educational interest and training, educational material requested by the school district, broadcast feeds of satellite programming, and the PCA Radio Project.

**GOVERNMENT** (cable channel 28) – Live and tape replayed City Council sessions, Planning Commission meetings, County Board of Supervisors, community interest government programs.

A community Bulletin Board carrying announcements of local public events fills any gaps in the programming schedules for all three PCA channels.

PCA has enjoyed more than twelve vibrant years of member-produced and viewer-submitted programming on channel 26; many in Petaluma regularly view our broadcasts of government meetings on channel 28. The Education channel, however, has been generally underutilized by the schools over the years, and in leaving Casa Grande High School, we are no longer assisting with their film class. Channel 27 has thus been able to host satellite programming (NASA, UC CAL, FSTV, etc.), locally submitted or sponsored pre-recorded public information programming, and LIVE broadcasts of our Radio Project.

## **Mission Statement**

*" to promote freedom of expression in a public voice,  
provide access to communication tools, and  
foster the use of media "*

What this means is that PCA was established:

- TO develop and promote community use of the cable communications system and telecommunications media;
- TO provide individuals and organizations with the necessary resources and support to produce programming for the Public Access channels;
- TO help local schools and non-profit organizations serving Petaluma to reach viewers through our broadcasts;

TO engage the community with programming that most directly reflects the activities, concerns, and interests of the residents of Petaluma; and

TO cultivate viable sources of funding, and administer such funds, to maximize continued local appreciation and participation in PCA.

## **A New Profile**

On July 1, 2008, Petaluma Community Access entered its current Fiscal Year facing an almost overwhelming set of circumstances to resolve that ought to be accounted for in any history of the station. At the end of the last fiscal year, PCA was in grave risk of collapse. The majority of the previous Board and E.D. resigned on May 27. This is not the place for an accounting of their actions; an awareness of the problems posed in the current Fiscal Year, however, needs to be acknowledged in any practical Activities Plan for PCA.

The relocation of PCA from the Casa Grande campus to the Keller Street office is clearly the defining factor in all of the important changes imposed upon PCA by the turmoil in May - with both good and bad repercussions. The loss of the Studio that PCA enjoyed at its former location is a major setback, as is the loss of direct access for Casa Grande students. The new office space located at the edge of Petaluma's Historic Downtown area is much better situated for PCA's greater integration into Petaluma life. Embracing the challenge of this move, we have implemented a corresponding shift in our focus on the kinds of video production our members are able to pursue. Training programs have consequently been aimed at developing field and radio production techniques, and digital editing skills.

Our new proximity to the Phoenix Theater is also a promising factor made possible by our relocation, and attracting more young members from that popular youth center is a permanent priority. There are also new opportunities for PCA to involve itself more in local non-profit community. A movement to establish a network of local non-profits was launched by Mayor Torliatt in early November, 2008, and the resulting Petaluma Non-Profit Alliance has already turned to PCA to help define and address immediate marketing and communications needs. Streamlining our 3-channel Bulletin Board capacity to announce organizational events, and an energetic program to utilize our members or student Interns to produce PSAs for Petaluma non-profits, are the most immediate fruits of this project.

Probably the most painful part of losing our studio capacity was losing the ability to turn on the cameras and broadcast LIVE, reaching directly into our viewers homes. This capacity has obvious value; for example, broadcasting important information to viewers in an emergency. It also lends itself to call-in shows where the viewing audience can engage those in front of the camera in productive dialogue on community issues. Our new facilities do provide for a secondary LIVE capacity: using our DSL line into the City Hall booth, we have been able to directly broadcast the audio signal of our radio programming. We are exploring ways to expand this capacity for the broadcast of a rudimentary but acceptable visual signal. The necessary staging area to produce polished studio shows, however, doesn't exist in our new office.

The Radio Project is one of our most popular production opportunities, especially among Latino members, and restoring and renewing it was a top priority last Fiscal Year (PCA "radio" programming is televised audio content with a single graphic displayed on the TV screen). Given the technological limitations in our capacity to broadcast a LIVE television signal, we can only

make one channel available for such use. After careful review of current programming schedules and the programming obligations outlined in the Franchise Agreement, we have decided to present all such LIVE broadcasts on the Educational channel (27). Efforts to augment the submission of purely educational content for broadcast are being pursued as well.

## **Membership and Member Services**

It is in the services that PCA provides to our "Member Producers" that we find the primary reason for the existence of our organization. This is a fundamental premise: for the price of an annual membership, PCA offers access to the equipment and training needed for members of the community to produce their own television. Having three channels on the local cable system, reaching countless local viewers, is a rare treasure for the community. Indeed, the only obligation we enforce is that everything our Member Producers make with PCA equipment and support is eventually broadcast on PCA.

The parameters of our responsibilities take shape around this premise, as articulated in the PCA By-Laws and user Policies & Procedures. It is also this commitment to media democracy that animates the national structure of Public Access Television.

PCA is essentially a neutral conduit for media content; we don't censor or direct the shows produced or submitted by those in the community who choose to take advantage of what we have to offer. Our job is to keep the station open, maintain our equipment, and facilitate the productions of those who come to us. We have traditional obligations to cover the various parades and events in Petaluma, but we accomplish these tasks with the volunteer support of our members. We train and mentor their efforts "on the job" in order to enhance the quality of their own productions.

Perhaps the best way to grasp the true community service that PCA offers Petaluma, is to think of it as "media green space," a designated "area" where local citizens and cable subscribers can enjoy relaxed, unfettered and creative public access to modern media technology, a place rich in opportunities for self-expression and dialogue.

## **Staff & Board of Directors**

As an independent, non-profit organization incorporated in 1995, as a 501(c) (3) corporation in the State of California, Petaluma Community Access is governed by a Board of Directors.

The By-Laws call for a Board of Directors consisting of thirteen voting members. However, given the mass exodus of Board Directors in May, rebuilding the PCA Board to that level has not been accomplished. A serious effort to revise the By-Laws to reduce the number of Directors required to nine was undertaken in September 2008, as part of the annual PCA election process. It failed to achieve the necessary votes to pass, but the careful reasoning that prompted this proposed amendment urges another ballot.

The PCA Board has been notoriously hard on the dedicated citizens who step up to join it; simplifying and systematizing the various functions is one of the keys to making it a more productive and agreeable service.

The current composition of the PCA Board includes:

<b>Cindy Thomas</b> <i>Chair</i>	Elected 9/28/08 (3 year term)
<b>Bruno Marin</b> <i>Vice-chair</i>	Elected 9/28/08 (1 year term)
<b>Richard Squaglia</b> <i>Treasurer</i>	Elected 9/28/08 (3 year term)
<b>Marcelle Guy</b> <i>Secretary</i>	Appointed 11/18/08 (1 year term)
<b>Jorge Panana</b>	Elected 9/28/08 (2 year term)
<b>Eric Adams</b>	Appointed 11/18/08 (1 year term)
<b>Dave Rose</b>	School District Designate
<b>Tim Williamsen</b>	City of Petaluma Designate

PCA is currently staffed by a small crew of local media advocates:

<b>John Bertucci</b>	Executive Director ( <i>Salaried</i> )
<b>Rachel Moran</b>	Office Manager ( <i>Regular Part-time</i> )
<b>Francisco Morales</b>	Programming Director ( <i>Regular Full-time</i> )
<b>Zach Smith</b>	Production Manager ( <i>Regular Part-time</i> )
<b>Mary Rentzel</b>	Access Assistant ( <i>Introductory Part-time</i> )

Staff structure and assignments have been modified to fit our new profile, and the number of hours that PCA is open to the Public has been reduced to accommodate the stringent budgetary constraints resulting from the actions of the past Board and Director. For instance, three of the seven staff positions operating at the Casa Grande location were immediately phased out in the process of relocating to Keller St. PCA is no longer open on Wednesdays.

Guiding and enhancing staff performance is a dynamic sense of team spirit. PCA is definitely not an imposing cruiser or speed boat; it's more like a delicately balanced "sail boat," to be navigated by a small and sensitive crew. An attitude of making do with what we've got, interacting around our duties in a low-key yet enthusiastic way, has proven most conducive to meeting our members' needs at the present time.

New hires have become possible with the gradual resolution the financial issues confronting PCA when we moved to the new Keller St. location. Mary Rentzel was recently brought on as an Access assistant, after months of interning with Zach Smith who covers all City Hall and School Board meetings. Having an on-call technical contractor is perhaps the most urgent unmet staffing consideration at the moment.

Again, structuring PCA for operation by a light and nimble workforce operating at maximum efficiency was our primary objective at the start of the current fiscal year and, at this point in time, we can be proud that PCA is presently functioning with the required stability and impressive productivity.

## **Review of Fiscal Year 08/09**

Expenditures undertaken in the previous Fiscal Year were extremely damaging to PCA. In the month of May alone, nearly \$100K was dispersed from PCA's operating account at the Bank of Marin (which also politely asked PCA to find another bank). We continue with legal counsel to pursue an insurance claim on a \$50K settlement check made out to the departing Executive

Director, without much cooperation from those responsible at the time (a copy of the signed settlement agreement has not been made available to us).

The fruit of past priorities, we've also inherited a professional Mobile Production trailer, and a truck to pull it, that has not been easy to integrate into our current, member-driven production model. Nor can all of the Capital Expense funds advanced to PCA for these purchases be reconciled with valid receipts, leaving us with a shortfall yet to reconcile.

The 07/08 annual audit is close to completion and should clearly document the full scope of reckless and damaging fiduciary decisions made by the past Board and acting Executive Director.

It was only in the third quarter of FY08/09 that PCA was able to wait for the quarterly Comcast check without fear of being unable to meet Payroll. This proof of solvency demonstrates our success in reversing the downward spiral that threatened to destroy PCA last May. Relative financial stability has also permitted us welcome breathing room to devote attention and energy to reinforcing the operational stability of PCA, starting with an upgrade of our camera and editing equipment, and a gradual but comprehensive review our policies and procedures.

By restoring clarity and precision to its basic operating principles, and working to instill among staff and members an encompassing spirit of friendly collaboration, PCA has begun functioning again with productive momentum. Strong fiduciary controls for administering our present, evolving, and admittedly limited resources are likewise essential to our success in reaching any goal we set.

## Goals & Priorities

The dominant factor informing our goals for the upcoming year is the imminent transition of our funding stream from the terms of a Comcast/City franchise to the terms of Comcast/State franchise. Everything we do this year must contribute to positioning PCA in the most favorable light to accomplish this shift without being adversely transformed in the process.

Our current quarterly Comcast checks (funneling \$.25 mandatory charges and a \$2.00 optional donations to PCA) are quite sufficient to underwrite an extraordinary operation. They have allowed us to concentrate on serving the community without having to mount intensive fund raising campaigns. PCA's core revenue source is supplemented by a modest but steady income from membership fees, DVD sales, etc.; and we can still count on one more \$30K capital grant. This relatively comfortable grace period can be expected to persist for another full fiscal year.

The **first priority** we should thus adopt towards the goal of attracting new revenue sources is to fully exploit this finite "window of opportunity" to insert ourselves most deeply into the collective life of Petaluma. We must project and demonstrate a positive, invigorating confidence that our media efforts are a vital part of this community, a public resource of irreplaceable value. Those who are supporting us now in their monthly Comcast bills are going to have to find new ways to transmit their support to us when the present arrangement expires.

We intend to help them by initiating a coordinated set of initiatives to appeal for their individual donations and easy procedures to process them. If we assume that Comcast is only sending us the revenues generated by the mandatory and optional charges, then their \$57K check represent close to 7,000 viewers who are already sending us the full \$2.25 each bill. So one of our "new"

revenue sources may actually be our current revenue source, and we may only need to find a new way to access their generosity to keep us on the air after 2010.

The **second priority** attached to achieving our continued viability is to fully engage, guide and satisfy the media aspirations of our Member Producers. They are the lifeblood of the Access adventure, and the quality of their efforts reflects on us; the success of our efforts to constantly inspire and nurture a rising quality curve in our member productions is an integral part of our survival. This requires smooth, consistent office procedures, friendly training sessions and trustworthy equipment.

LIVE and repeat coverage of school and government meetings is likewise a primary responsibility, and our objective in this capacity is to provide smooth, reliable service. In line with contractual obligations to support Petaluma School District programming, PCA staff and members recently combined forces to cover four High School graduations. This volunteer appetite for PCA production experience in our membership often intersects with project ideas that come to us from various parts of the community, without producers.

Bringing people and projects together is then the **third priority** we must enthusiastically cultivate. Promoting creative relations with our community, and broadcasting shows that respond to what people want to see, helps citizens and local groups get their story to the public. For instance, PCA facilitated member coverage of the recent Dutra Workshop allowed those who couldn't attend to "be there too." PCA will also continue its vital participation in the Petaluma Non-Profit Alliance, working with other local public service organizations to cope with the same kinds of funding and identity issues.

Establishing broader, more transparent and friendly channels of communication with our membership and the community at large is another important consideration, working to overcome the unfortunate image of "problem child" that clings to PCA's past. We must project instead a brighter image, with an unqualified guarantee of open dialogue backed up with friendly technical support, making it clear beyond a doubt that PCA is an extraordinary creative opportunity for anyone in the community who might want to try their hand at making a TV show. And that it functions well, without undue drama, in dedicated pursuit of that goal is what wins our argument.

Anchoring our identity visually and emotionally is the **fourth priority** for us to address. The new colors of our logo, set on a white background have already given our PSAs, our Butter & Egg Days float, and our credit sequences a distinctive and fresh sense of style. Having a consistent graphic "look" enforces our identity, anchoring our image and the value of our activities. It should mark all of our promotional efforts, membership drives and good-will initiatives as well.

There is a basic quality of spirit that infuses any group dynamic and it is a cherished goal for this Fiscal Year that PCA percolate with focused, happy energy again. This starts in staff team spirit and expands outward to those who bring us their bright ideas. It depends on smart initiatives to increase public recognition of all that we do for them. With word-of-mouth spreading in wide and positive circles, we are extending a promise: there's always room at PCA for new members to participate in Public Access Television, making new shows for new Petaluma viewers to discover. PCA is a community resource we should all feel strongly about protecting and preserving.

## **Projected Budget for Fiscal Year 09/10**

Attached.

### **A few activities planned for Fiscal Year 09/10**

- 1) A free training for students age 12-18, complete with a premiere night event, offered in conjunction with the Phoenix Theater.
- 2) A renewed effort to amend the By-Laws for a Board consisting of 9 Directors.
- 3) The building of a portable production kit and set of procedures that members can use to cover multi-camera events.
- 4) Developing member proficiency in digital editing, with attention to graphic style.
- 5) A group of Board members and PCA members meeting to develop a range of possible funding sources: a target sum fund drive, project driven grants, underwriting of airtime, direct appeal to viewers for donations, etc. (an account line for Underwriting has been added to the attached Budget).
- 6) More PCA produced PSAs to be shot and edited, like the new Art Center PSA, or the recent Petaluma Bounty PSA; and we'll continue to keep Bulletin Board entries up to date and responsive to the community.
- 7) An eventual resolution to all the issues relating the professional Mobile Production Trailer purchase, intended for a different kind of PCA.

This list could go on... We trust that it confirms our sincere gratitude for the continued support and assistance of the City in the pursuit of our Access Mission.