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New radio voice set to broadcast

By DEBORA GILBERT

HUDSON—WXCG, a new community radio station with studios in both Columbia and Greene counties is poised to go on air this fall. With a 3,300 watt signal it will have the potential to reach some 78,000 people spread in this part of the Hudson River Valley, with its pri-

mary coverage stretching from Windham in Greene County to the Taconic Parkway down to northern Dutchess County and up to Kinderhook and Coxackie.

"It will be all about our community in the river valley," said Hudson Talbot, an artist and author of numerous children's books and director of the Catskill Community Center.

The station is a project of the arts organization free103point9, will have studios in Hudson at 704 Columbia Street, in Cairo at the home of free103point9, which has been broadcasting on the web since last year, and behind a plate glass window at street level at the Catskill Community Center on Main Street.

"We're intent on balance and representation across the two counties, and

covering both the rural and urban," said Galen Joseph-Hunter, executive director of both WXCG and free103point9, in explanation of the need for three studios.

Cairo resident Tom Roe, program director of free103point9 and WXGC, and the founder of both organizations, said "We've long advocated for the people's access to their own airwaves." Mr. Roe thinks of radio space as being similar to national park lands as a resource that is owned by the people. "There's not any place around here that lets local people do more than a handful of radio shows. We try to practice what we preach."

"We envisioned a low power station for just Hudson; to get a full power community station, it's an incredibly rare opportunity. The Federal

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Communications Commission discovered this frequency was not being used, and said let's put them out there and see if there is interest," said Mr. Roe of the opportunity to create the station in a crowded broadcast market.

The project will soon get a boost of energy and expertise when the Prometheus Radio Project comes to Hudson to conduct a week long Amish style "barnraising" and fundraiser. It is expected to attract some 200 radio pros and technicians from across the country, who will descend on the WXCG's Hudson studio to work with volunteers from the community to install equipment, and conduct free training workshops open to all on radio skills ranging from how to operate a sound board or microphone to how to conduct an interview. Remote broadcasting, streaming and podcasting, community news and collecting oral histories will also be addressed.

The mission of the station is to build community by connecting a diverse group of local voices, and to give everyone in the community who wants them the skills to make radio programs. The organization's website describes the project as "re-envisioning radio as an innovative platform for local participation. 'Hands-on Radio' captures the essence of this project. WGXC's participatory environment will bring to life the idea that media is not something that is fed to us, but something we create with our own hands, hearts, and

minds." As part of its community building initiative, the station has invited people from both sides of the river to serve on its founding radio council, including Columbia County residents Max Goldfarb, the Hudson-based radio artist, Hosneera Kader, who works with Hudson Family Literacy, Christina Malisoff, a program assistant at the Hudson Opera House, Alan Skerrett, president of the Columbia County NAACP, and Andrew Turner, a Cairo resident and executive director for the Cornell Cooperative Extension of Columbia and Greene Counties.

Mr. Turner said in a phone interview that he is impressed by the operation and sees a need for local radio. "It's about giving a voice to people in the community; that's different from public radio. Greene and Columbia counties are caught between the media markets. We need something that is more local; there is definitely something missing."

Members of the community have responded with enthusiasm, submitting over 90 proposals for radio programs ranging from jazz to the visual arts. Kaya Weidman, the station's volunteer coordinator and Hudson station manager says she envisions panel discussions, interviews, and small bands performing right in the station's second floor offices at 704 Columbia Street.

The plan is for 24/7 programming, with a mix of live and taped material that includes some live broadcasts from locations throughout the two counties like the Hudson Opera House, Hudson Common Council meetings and other sites for lectures, concerts and shows.

Technological advances will allow for broadcast via cell

phone, obviating the need for expensive trucks with satellite dishes, said Ms. Wiedman. The station will provide recording equipment to trained volunteers who want to attend hearings and town meetings.

"WXGC should help to shed more light on local government and give local cultural institutions the coverage they lack, and will be a complement to the media we already have, with a range of reporting that will reflect the diversity of the community," said Ms. Joseph-Hunter.

"There will always be a way for members of the public to participate. Although we will have some syndicated shows including Susan Arbiter's 'Capitol Press Room,' and Amy Goodman's 'Democracy Now,' there's more room for the local and we'll be close on the dial," said Ms. Joseph-Hunter.

WAMC-Northeast Public Radio is at 90.3 FM, and WGXC could be seen as the competition for public support. But not so, said Alan Chartock, president, CEO and on-air personality of WAMC. "I have always said, and I certainly mean it, let a thousand flowers bloom. The more the better. This will certainly serve a local purpose, and we think that's great." He said he would invite WXGC on the air at WAMC if they ask.

Nor is Cruisin 93.5's Bill Williams concerned. "Anyone who is going to listen to them is not listening to us at the moment," he said.

"I listen to WAMC all the time, but we're always looking for something more pertinent to us," said Mr. Talbot.

The station's program lineup will be announced at the Saturday night of the barnraising weekend at Club Helsinki, where Meshell Ndegeocello



Debra Cilibert

WGXC, the new public radio station that expects to begin regular broadcasts soon from a transmitter in Greene County, has staff in Hudson, including (l to r) Volunteer Coordinator and Hudson studio manager Kaya Weidman, joined here by Executive Director Galen Joseph-Hunter and Sara Kendall, development coordinator. They're standing at the entrance to the studio at 704 Columbia Street, overlooking the park.

and friends will present a benefit concert. A welcoming party featuring spoken word performance, rap, poets and music on Friday and a Sunday event in which the station may celebrate going live will take place at the Cannonball Factory.

The barnraising represents the 12th such event conducted by the non-profit Prometheus Radio Project, which formed in 1998 to help communities take advantage of new at that time low power 100 watt offerings by the Federal Communications Commission. The Hudson event marks the first time that Prometheus has sponsored a barnraising for a full-power 3,300 watt station.

Fundraising is key to the success of the operation and probably the hardest part of

the start-up. The higher frequency station demands more expensive equipment. The group received a \$71,486 matching grant from the United States Department of Commerce to cover infrastructure, including FM signal equipment, studio consoles, and the tower equipment shed, backup generator, transmission equipment and antenna; \$25,000 remains to be raised for the matching grant, and another \$15,000 will be needed for equipment. The antenna has been ordered from a company in Italy but the rest of the equipment will be purchased locally. The station has started to sign up businesses to underwrite segments of programming."