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KYBU 96.9 FM :

Volunteers bring radio station to Covelo, seek to involve the entire community



Brian Manser/Ukiah Daily Journal

KYBU volunteers Emil Ferrara, Bill Cull, Emily Ellickson-Brown and Lew Chichester in the new KYBU radio station in Covelo.

By KAREN RIFKIN
for Ukiah Daily Journal

Radio station KYBU is temporarily housed in the utility room of the Covelo Library, but nobody is complaining. An entrepreneur, the collective that brought this to fruition is delighted to have a 24-hour-a-day radio station up and running and serving their small, rural town.
It's a story wrapped up in a building, community, goodwill and a group of dedicated volunteers. Lew Chichester explains, "For the past 20 years or so we have had a small library in town. A few years ago it became apparent that this building, the one where we are now meeting, would become available

for purchase. During a three-year period Covelo residents raised over \$1 million and the Friends of the Round Valley Public Library bought the building with the idea it would be developed into a community center.
"We remodeled it, creating a space for the library and turning the defunct restaurant into a community room big enough to accommodate 160 people complete with a stage. There's a commercial kitchen, a coffee shop, and a commons area with outside seating for parties and gatherings. The essential key in creating this was our community; we all shared the vision.

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Radio

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"We realized it was the perfect time to develop our idea around a radio station; we had a physical space and the sponsorship of the Friends."

Emily, Ellickson-Brown, Vassar graduate and community organizer, one of the key individuals helping to birth KBYU, says, "We didn't have to reinvent the wheel; we could operate under the Friends' 501(c)3 nonprofit status allowing us to run the radio station without titles; this way," she says modestly, "we are all volunteers. The Friends have been very supportive; they are a well-established, diverse group of civic-minded individuals."

"The idea for a station began when a group of us were sitting on the back porch sharing some food and drink; its realization has been a great achievement for our small diverse community."

Chichester, a valley resident for four decades, remembers, "The transition between what it was like here 40 years ago and what it's like now has been dramatic. We have no print media here and spotty radio reception. Now, the Internet connects Covelo to the rest of the world; information technology works for us allowing the station to be on the air 24 hours-a-day delivering pertinent community information and much more."

In May of 2011, Congress mandated the FCC to open a window for an application for a construction permit for a license for a radio station. The group began to hold weekly meetings open to all those interested. The window never opened.

Enter Emil Ferrara, another graduate of Vassar College. He heard rumors there was a permit owned by coast radio station KOZT, which had planned to transmit its signal to Covelo. The cell tower on the ridge to hold the antenna and transmitter was never built and the license was about to expire; Ferrara asked for help from the coast station and it donated the license to Covelo.

KOZT paid for the engineering and legal fees for the transfer of the title and the relocation of the transmitter from the ridge to downtown Covelo. Licenses are site specific.

"KOZT is our number one awesome sponsor; they are our godparents."
They had a deadline and had to move quickly to be on the air by November to prove they could transmit. They had just a few months to raise \$10,000, buy the antenna, transmitter, computers, a mixing board and audio and radio equipment. They did it.

Chichester says, "There is a very important element here. Due to the recent economic downturn there were a number of young people in their 20s and 30s who had returned home. They had been to college and had some professional experience in audio productions, film, radio or computer programming. We had the exact right combination of skills. We were able to do this without having to hire outside engineering; the local community provided the necessary resources. It's been like this the whole way."

In November, they transmitted their first test broadcast and were told that by December, 2011, they would be required to have ongoing, continuous broadcasting. They did that, too, and have been on the air ever since, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

KYBU recently received a \$3,500 grant from the Mendocino Community Foundation to purchase remote equipment allowing them to broadcast live events on site—football games, the Blackberry Festival, community meetings—enabling them to reach out to a more diverse population.

Currently, KYBU broadcasts online, pre-programmed shows. It boasts 13 locally produced music shows spanning all genres; Jay Leaky creates The Daily Almanac, covering serious historical events, birthdays of famous people, eclectic celebrations and words of wisdom; William Cull interviews residents developing the area's history. Other shows include a cultural affairs program, a library

report, weather reports, Round Valley Indian Health Center, a community calendar. They have volunteers who go around town to create a bulletin board show and there's a new radio theater troupe.

They stream locally and nationally syndicated programs. The Internet allows them to rebroadcast shows produced on other stations: Democracy Now, Radio Curious, National Native News, Free Speech Radio News. Previously, they had nothing.

Max Dunn provides technical support and oversees the programming, meets with the DJs and updates the weekly schedule of broadcasts. They have regular workshops with guests from other radio stations to train those who were interested in learning the nuts and bolts of running a community radio station.

"We have a lot of people involved; it is a very collective and democratic process; that works really well here. We are still growing and have a lot of room. We want more involvement and we are open to anyone who wants to come and help. Nothing is set in stone; we make changes in small steps."

"With 12 underwriters and over 200 members we are having our second annual membership drive on Sunday, May 5, with pinatas, Olga's Burritos, bands and camaraderie on the patio of the community building. Membership is the lifeblood of the station; that is how we will survive. Everyone can be a member," says Ellickson-Brown.

They are in the process of renovating a building, a short distance away, into a radio production studio where they will be able to transmit broadcasts with live DJs. They look forward to having Dan Roberts, Sheriff Allman, John Pinches in person and on the air. They plan on having call-in shows, swap and talk shows, mental health awareness programs, opportunities to implement new ideas brought forward by local residents. They'll do that, too.

KYBU 96.9 FM, 707 983-6677, www.kybu.org

