

Making waves

Vermont Public Radio's expansion plans may cause static

By Shay Totten
Vermont Guardian

Talk to any radio station owner in Vermont and they'll tell you it's not Clear Channel Communications they worry about when it comes to market dominance or competition for frequencies — it's Vermont Public Radio.

It's no secret that Vermont Public Radio (VPR) wants to provide a dual statewide radio network — one channel exclusively for classical music and one for news and information.

Getting there may take some

time, however, as there is a limited number of available frequencies in Vermont that can be used for non-commercial uses. That hasn't stopped VPR in the past from expanding its reach — in Bennington and Manchester the public broadcaster bought up commercial signals.

Unlike commercial owners, there is no limit to the number of frequencies that VPR can own in Vermont. FCC rules limit the number of commercial stations for most broadcasters. For example, in a market with 30 to 44 commercial stations, one owner can control up to seven stations. In a market with 15 to 29 com-

mercial radio stations, one owner can control up to six stations.

This year, VPR's talks with St. Michael's College to purchase the school's radio station was quashed after students raised concerns about losing access to the low-watt station. Currently, VPR has an agreement to air the BBC World Channel on WWPV (88.7 FM) whenever students are not on the air.

VPR had hoped to use that signal as a way to broadcast its new all-classical music station in the crowded Chittenden County radio market. Now, it will have to wait on whether it can get a construction permit

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DV in 3-D: Coordinating a community response

Editor's note: The Vermont Guardian is examining the complex nature of domestic abuse that often occurs in homes, but is hardly contained by their walls. This week, we examine how communities and businesses are responding to domestic violence.

By S.A. Troy | Special to the *Vermont Guardian*

It's a beautiful, sunny Vermont day in May. The last vestiges of winter have faded and in their place daffodils and shoots of grass carpet the earth. Most are drunk on spring, including the birds that flit carelessly by, as the winter's dearth has been supplanted by abundance.

On such a day, it is impossible to imagine what it must be like for someone to leave the person they've loved and lived with for years, who has, in between times of great joy and passion, abused them — psychologically, emotionally, and perhaps even physically.

What a leap it must require, to put one's faith in the community-at-large to help them and their children start over again, often without money, without love, and without understanding.

According to Judy Rex, executive director of the Vermont Center for Crime Victims Services, a victim of domestic violence (DV) who does not have enormous resources will connect with almost every social service society provides. These may include, but are not limited to, law enforcement, health care, family court for filing a Relief from Abuse Order, the state's attorney's office if there are grounds for a criminal case, Vermont Legal Aid for divorce and custody assistance, district court if a criminal case proceeds, victim services such as shelters and compensation funds, mental health services, housing, childcare, and state and federal public assistance for families, all the while confronting the reality that the risk to a victim of DV is highest during and after separation.

Because victims/survivors of DV come in contact with multiple services, Jill Richard, economic justice projects coordinator for the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence (the Network), said that without coordination between agencies, often the work of one system undermines the work of another. The goal of coordinated community response (CCR) then is to make sure that the services a survivor receives are informed and supported by each other.

This is not a new concept, nor is it specific to DV. Anyone with a need that requires interacting with multiple service agencies, such as a person with disabilities, benefits by receiving coordinated services.

As it applies to DV, the concept originated in the joint response

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that began in earnest in the 1980s from police and prosecutors. But according to Sarah Kenney, public policy coordinator for the Network, CCR's scope in recent years has broadened to include issues of economic opportunity as well as general community response.

"We've come a long way with systems, but systems only go so far; the community has to fill in those gaps. The longer I do this job, the more I realize how hard it is to make significant change without doing significant community education. We have to think about the way all of our systems and communities respond to survivors and batterers," said Kenney.

Response in action

For a small state, Vermont has many ambitious examples of CCR in action.

As a result of the Violence Against Women Act passed by Congress in 1994 and renewed in 2006, five counties in Vermont have DV units within the state's attorneys' offices, which include a DV prosecutor, a victim advocate, and often a DV investigator who is a specially trained member of law enforcement devoted solely to aiding in DV prosecutions. Rex claims that these teams have had a positive impact on conviction rates, and by having an investigator, often accompanied by a child advocate, visit the victim the next morning after the arrest, the investigation starts immediately.

"The quicker you can move, the more success you have," Rex said. "Now we need special DV units in every county."

In 2006, the Legislature passed a statute making money available to every community interested in creating Special Investigation Units within law enforcement that may be used to focus on DV or sexual violence, or both. While Chittenden County has had one for years, known as the Chittenden Unit for Special Investigation, a unit was created just last year to serve Franklin and Grand Isle counties. And, more are on the way.

Later this year, according to Judge David Suntag, the presiding family court judge in Bennington, the county will have one day a week devoted to an integrated DV docket, meaning that relief from abuses cases heard in family court will be heard along

with criminal cases. This should make it easier on everyone, Suntag said, to have resources available at the same place and same time, and to have the consistency of the same judge presiding over both cases.

Another example of coordinated agency response stems from federal funding that began in 1996, as part of the Rural DV and Child Victimization Grant, known as the Rural Project. For the past 11 years, the Network, the Department of Children and Families (DCF), and Vermont Center for Crime Victim's Services, have had extensive dialogues on how to best service children and families where there is an overlap of child maltreatment and DV.

Statistics range, but the consensus according to Amy Torchia, the Network's children's advocacy coordinator, is that when intimate partner violence exists, there is a 30 to 60 percent chance of child abuse as well.

The Rural Project allowed the state to establish an internal DV unit within DCF, a statewide position for a child advocacy specialist at the Network, and four child/youth advocates in four DV programs around the state.

In 2003, DCF finalized their DV policy, which makes it clear that it is in a child's best interest to have all family members be safe. Therefore, any specific DV policy and practice must be based on the following three principles: remove blame for DV from victims, hold offenders responsible for the violence and corresponding risk that violence poses to children, and examine and implement strategies that support victims of DV in providing safety and well-being for their children.

Torchia made clear that children have a range of responses to DV, and DV should not automatically be equated with child abuse or parental negligence. To take a child away from the non-offending parent, Torchia said, may end up being more traumatic for the child. It also makes victims and children less likely to seek help if they know that their family will be broken up. However, Torchia adds, there are situations where it is best to get a child into foster care.

Nationally it's estimated that 3.3 million to 10 million children are exposed to DV in their homes. In 2006, the Network provided services to 1,450 chil-

dren and identified 9,119 children and youth as having been exposed to DV in their homes. That's 7 percent of Vermont's children.

In the workplace

In 2000, Gov. Howard Dean issued an executive order that recognized the prevalence of DV in the workplace and the need for all employers to maintain a safe, secure workplace. In response to this order, the Attorney General convened a task force that created a brochure on DV in the workplace, a model policy, and trainings for employers.

Assistant Attorney General Amy Fitzgerald runs this program for the office. In the past several years, she has conducted trainings for many public and private employers in the state including Blue Cross and Blue Shield, the University of Vermont, the Vermont State Housing Authority, and most recently Burlington, which is in the process of adapting the model policy as their own.

Perhaps the most vivid example of policy adoption comes from the Burlington Police Department. On April 4, 2007, the civil commission that must review all police department policies approved a policy that takes a zero tolerance approach toward DV offenders on staff.

The brainchild of Police Chief Tom Tremblay, who serves as a faculty member on the National Law Enforcement Leadership Institute on Violence Against Women, discussed how throughout his 24-year career as a member of Burlington's police force, his mind has been full of images of violence, the majority of which were perpetrated against women by men. He often asks himself what, as a male leader in the community, he can do about this issue.

Using the attorney general's model policy as a starting point, members of the union, Mary McAllister, the department's victim advocate, and the chief drafted a policy that defines a zero tolerance approach toward offenders of DV who are on staff, including prevention and training efforts so that if there is evidence of troubling behavior help can be sought immediately, and a protocol for handling a DV call in which an officer is involved.

Tremblay acknowledged that some questioned the need for

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for some other licenses it has requested from the FCC. And, later this fall the FCC will open up the spectrum to non-commercial licenses for the first time in years, and maybe the last time for years to come, according to some industry watchers.

At that time, VPR will be able, along with perhaps other non-profit organizations, to make a pitch for new licenses in Vermont. But, getting a license is just the first step. Then, you've got to find a place to put a tower and make sure you're not interfering with any neighbors on the FM dial.

VPR is no stranger to the FCC licensing process. In the past several years, it has been granted more than a dozen licenses for translators — low-power booster signals — around the state, has bought up two commercial stations, and bought an unused signal in Island Pond.

In 1999, VPR bought WBTN-FM in Bennington and sold off its sister AM station to a local businessman.

In November 2006, VPR purchased WJAN-FM in Manchester/Sunderland, a former country station out of Rutland. The signal serves the Manchester area and the towns along U.S. 7, but reaches as far southwest as Albany and Saratoga Springs. VPR also broadcasts on a low-power translator, 92.5 FM in Manchester. In addition, VPR Classical, VPR's 24-hour classical music service, is heard via a low power translator at 106.9-FM in the area.

VPR has also been granted a license, which cost the station nearly \$150,000, in Island Pond but it has yet to find a tower site. That signal will serve Brighton, Newport, Morgan, Charleston, and other communities in that part of the Northeast Kingdom with classical music.

Building for the future

Despite what its competitors believe to be VPR's aggressiveness, the public radio outlet did not put a bid on any of the Clear Channel Communications stations in Vermont.

Instead, the Vermont stations were purchased as part of a 36-market deal valued at \$452 million with a new, Florida-based company called GoodRadio.TV, run by Dean Goodman, a former radio and television executive for Ion Media Networks.

To satisfy its growing listeners — estimated at 141,000 in 2003 but now topping nearly 160,000 listeners per week and 23,000 contributing households — VPR wants to build essentially two statewide channels, some of which will broadcast in high-definition (HD) radio, and some of which will stream live on the Internet.

Tinkering with a popular format is risky for any radio operator, and VPR managers are very aware of that fact.

"In the short run, it's risky because it changes something that is successful, but in the long run with two discreet services running 24 hours a day, each will build more loyalty," said Mark Vogelzang, VPR's president and general manager.

"It took 25 years to build the current VPR network to what it is and that has taken patient, loyal listener support and us filing applications to find the right frequencies at the right location," added Vogelzang. "I think there is some sense that we could make this happen overnight, but it will take some time and it could take a number of years."

Vogelzang said Internet broadcasting technology has improved greatly over the years, allowing VPR to reach listeners in all parts of the state — even if they don't have a high-speed connection.

"That's something that we didn't have 10 years ago," he said.

The use of the Internet, and HD radio — new technology that VPR can boast being the first radio station in Vermont to bring to consumers — may be ways to help bring their dual statewide services to Vermonters, said Vogelzang.

The "public" interest

Unlike commercial broadcasters, there is no limit on the number of licenses that VPR can own in the Vermont market, even if some of those signals were originally commercial.

For some commercial broadcasters, the concern begins to rise when VPR picks up commercial translators and stations.

"That's where it becomes squabble time because as commercial broadcasters you are operating under rules that limit the number of stations you can own and they are operating on a public radio frequency and

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what gives them the ability to buy these additional frequencies is that they have a huge revenue stream, and can afford it," said Dan Dubonnet, vice president of Hall Communications, which owns WOKO-FM and several other stations in the region.

Competing against VPR is not easy, notes Dubonnet, given their large listenership and substantial revenue stream. According to reports on file with the Internal Revenue Service, VPR had revenues of \$7.3 million in 2003, including a special gift of more than \$1 million to be used specifically for providing classical music, with expenses of \$5.2 million. A year before, they had revenues of \$4.9 million and expenses of \$4.6 million.

Dubonnet said those numbers are very big for the Vermont market.

"I don't know any station in this state that is billing \$4 million. None," said Dubonnet. And, few have their audience base either, he admits.

"They are a force because they have a large Vermont audience and per capita they have one of the largest public radio audiences in the country and they provide a service a lot of Vermonters want," said Dubonnet, who listens to VPR's jazz program.

Dubonnet, like other commercial broadcasters, marvels at VPR's annual budget, and its ability to continuously go to the well and meet fundraising targets and increase its underwriting.

One commercial broadcaster, while he marvels at it, also believes VPR is draining not only money from typical commercial radio stations, but from other cultural non-profit organizations.

"The thing that bothers me is that they strip mine the state asking for money while choral societies, orchestras, and youth orchestras are struggling to raise money and at a time when federal support for the arts is challenged. All of these organizations are trying to find a way to raise money, but it's hard out there," said Ken Squier, who owns the Radio Vermont Group, which includes WDEV-FM, a news, sports, and music station that services much of central Vermont and whose signal can be heard in parts of northwestern Vermont, and WCVT-FM, the state's only commercial classical station.

"We think what we do is better; it's local and we get a lot more local news in our broadcasts than they do and we don't have their resources," said Squier.

Clear Channel finds buyer for Vermont stations

COLCHESTER — A Florida-based company has agreed to purchase several Vermont radio stations licensed to Clear Channel Communications as part of a multiple-station deal that includes stations in 36 markets.

Dean Goodman, the owner of GoodRadio.TV, confirmed the purchase with the *Vermont Guardian*, but can say little more as the sale must be approved by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

Goodman, the former president and chief operating officer of ION Media Networks, is looking to pick up stations around the country as part of a \$452 million purchase deal, according to a May 4 filing with the Securities & Exchange Commission.

The FCC decision is not likely to be made until after August, said Tom Barney, Clear Channel's vice president and market manager in Vermont.

Barney said he does not anticipate any format changes among the existing stations, including Champ 101.3-FM, 96.7-FM "The Zone," and 92.9-FM.

"The stations are doing well and are profitable and that's what I think makes them attractive — these formats are working and working well here in Vermont," said Barney. "You can never say never, but I don't anticipate any major changes."

On May 4, Clear Channel officials announced they had entered into definitive agreements to sell 362 radio stations in 72 markets for roughly \$820 million. The company expects these transactions to close during the second half of 2007.

Clear Channel hopes to sell off 448 radio stations in 88 markets as part of an overall plan to take place the publicly-held company into the hands of private owners. That transfer has yet to occur, and has been delayed several times.

Clear Channel continues to pursue owners for 86 stations in 16 markets, according a statement from the company. None of those stations are in Vermont.

Before its divestiture, Clear Channel owned nearly 1,200 stations around the country and still boasts more than 110 million listeners each week.

Squier considers VPR a competitor in the market, not simply a public asset.

"They treat us as a competitor — at least that's what they've told us — which is different than what we thought public radio should be," said Squier.

Squier said VPR's popularity makes it hard for the public to turn a cold shoulder to their fundraising appeals. "You don't want it to go away because they really do provide services, there is no question about it."

But, he said with an increasing number of translators and licensed stations, many broadcasters call VPR the "Clear Channel of Vermont" because of their sheer dominance in the market, and their appetite for growth and expansion.

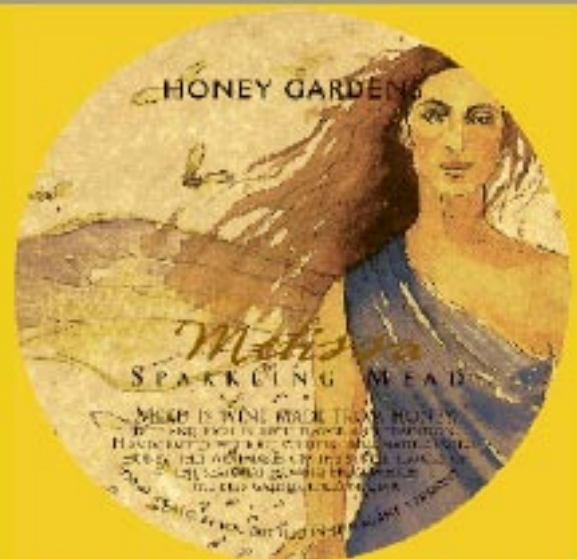
"They make us rethink all the time what we have to do and we consider ourselves a public community station," said Squier. "And, it wouldn't be so bad if they just had money coming in from the public, or the government, or from underwriting — but they're getting it from all

sides and that makes it difficult for us, and for all of these organizations in the community that also need support." ☹



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