

Brattleboro Reformer

Turn up the volume

By HOWARD WEISS-TISMAN, Reformer Staff



Zachary P. Stephens/Reformer

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BELLOWS FALLS -- The voice of community radio in the village is looking for some more volume.

Since supporters of Black Sheep Radio, WOOL 100.1 FM, broadcast their first show in June 2005, the sounds of music, political discussion and culture have filled the airwaves within Bellows Falls and in some areas along the Connecticut River that can pick up the signal.

Now the Black Sheep board of directors has decided to apply for a new full power broadcasting license with the Federal Communications Commission.

The license would allow the station to increase its output and reach communities as far south as Brattleboro and all the way up to White River Junction.

The station still has a long way to go before the FCC grants the station a license to increase its signal.

Along with the stacks of papers to fill out, and conferences with lawyers and engineers to schedule, volunteers with the community radio station will need to raise some money to see the plan through.

This Saturday, beginning at 7 p.m., WOOL is hosting a party and fundraiser at Bocelli's in Bellows Falls.

The evening will feature a full slate of some of the best known musicians from the area, all of whom have appeared on the station's Sometimes Live show.

"The Connecticut River Valley has always seemed like a natural community to me, and community radio is one way to tie it together," said Gary Smith, one of the founders of the Great Falls Community Broadcasting Company, and the volunteer who is spearheading the FCC application process. "We are very excited about getting a stronger signal. Those people who live along the river are the ones we want to reach."

Great Falls Community Broadcasting Company applied for a low power FM broadcasting permit in 2001, and received that permit in February 2004.

The FCC recently announced that it was going to open an application period for the high powered licenses and Smith said WOOL is ready to make that leap.

It is going to take an estimated \$20,000 to purchase equipment and meet the requirements of the FCC, and Smith said that it will likely be a few years before they find

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out whether or not the license is going to be granted.

But at a station that began without a license and as only a possibility, and is now a viable source of information and music on the radio dial, Smith said it is time to start preparing for the next step.

"A lot of people have worked very hard to get us where we are today. We have a very fine studio and this next move should be seamless," Smith said. "It feels like we are a part of the community and that is exactly what it was supposed to do."

Maya Costley is one of the hosts of the Sometimes Live show, which is also celebrating its first anniversary at the fundraiser on Saturday. Sometimes Live features area musicians who play live in the studio and then sit down with Costley and fellow host Tony Elliott to talk about song writing and performing.

Since going live last year, more than 50 guests have performed and about 20 are going to be on hand to play at Bocelli's.

The scheduled music is expected to go until 11 p.m. Saturday, with a final hour of open jamming that will carry the evening to midnight.

"There are a lot of talented people around here. They have been supportive of WOOL and the station has supported them. We wanted to do a special show and a lot of the people we contacted were happy to do it," Costley said.

Since going live, Costley said the station has become a central place where disparate parts of the Great Falls area can come together.

Some shows feature old jazz and others modern rock. Politicians talk about issues and nutritionists talk about health.

It might be a few years before the station finds out whether or not it will be able to increase its signal, but Costley said the disc jockeys are going to continue providing a platform for anyone in the community with something to say.

"A full power signal will allow us to broadcast to a wider audience," she said. "We will continue to be an independent radio station featuring local news and programming. The mission has always been to amplify the voices of the community and we are going to keep doing that."

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