

# Northern Colorado BUSINESS REPORT

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## Channel 97 gives Fort Collins public true access

By Kay Rios

"Public access" is more than just a label to Eddie Arthur. For the program director for Fort Collins Public Access Network Channel 97, it must be a true description of what's on TV.

"I lived in Manhattan for a couple of years and the public-access stations were fantastic," recalls Arthur, who also owns The Computer Guy. "It reflected what was going on locally and provided a variety of opportunities for everyone who lived there. That's the model I brought to FCPAN. I want to give as much access as possible to the whole community."

The organization was formed in 2004 but only after the local cable franchise was renewed with Comcast in 2006 did it become the city of Fort Collins' official public-access provider. Requirements built into agreements between Comcast and the city required a fee - the Public, Educational and Governmental access fee or PEG - be levied on subscribers. In return, Comcast provides the public access to broadcasting equipment and covers other capital costs. That's how Channel 22 was born and, a year and a half ago, it became Channel 97.

Channel 97's funding comes primarily from PEG monies and donations but, according to Arthur, "we're looking for new avenues of funding. The city has been incredibly supportive and has provided us with shared space (in the city's Channel 14 studios). But, eventually, we'd like to have our own studio space and offices so we can provide more. We'd also like to be able to have a couple of paid staff members on board. Right now, everyone is a volunteer."

### Eliminating barriers

The effort is also about eliminating barriers for community members and organizations whose messages may otherwise not be heard. There is a standing invitation to anyone who has something to say regardless of politics, popularity or likeability.

Nonprofits may submit public service announcements about upcoming events and local independent filmmakers can submit their work, whether it's a video about a local musician, a guest speaker at an event, a poetry reading, or even ordinary citizens. There is no time limit for the videos that Channel 97 will run as long as the films are non-commercial. The only stipulation is that it be about Fort Collins. (Actual guidelines are available at [www.fcpan.org](http://www.fcpan.org)).

Artwork is also welcome, Arthur said, as is poetry and prose, and Channel 97 will be filming some of the upcoming Tri-Media Film Festival.

"It's a fantastic opportunity with so much potential," he added. "There are just so many great things you can do."

It offers viewers an alternative as well as an outlet for alternative views, which are often overlooked. "TV is such a wasteland," Arthur said. "I feel it's my duty to put cameras in people's hands and let them tell their own stories. We have so much diversity here and we'd really like to do more soapboxes. We'll just film you yapping."

Such opinion pieces do have to be short, however - between three and five minutes.

Channel 97 also offers exposure for local nonprofits, Arthur said. "If they have videos of their activities or just want to show off the organization, we have lots of room for that. We can also help them create those

videos very easily."

And it's cheap. "On a small scale, we have been selling our service to produce videos and we can do that at a fairly inexpensive price and then they have something they can use anywhere," he added, which provides another small income stream.

For a \$40 fee, nonprofits can be trained to use the camera and edit the video. They then have access to the equipment for a full year. In lieu of the fee, interested parties can receive training if they agree to film two events and volunteer for an additional ten hours beyond that.

Local content joins Channel 97's lineup of regular shows. For example, "Democracy Now" airs every weekday, live at 6 a.m. and repeated at 10 p.m. "GRIT tv," a one-hour news and arts discussion show with Laura Flanders, can be seen most days also in two different time slots. "The Petting Zoo: The Curious, the Rare, the Avant Garde" runs from midnight to dawn, and a variety of other shows air through the week with listings on the website.

#### Creative Commons

"With the changing copyright landscape, there's a growing variety of content available through Creative Commons licensing," Arthur explained.

This allows entities such as Channel 97 the means to share, remix or use videos. "There's an incredible wealth of things to draw on if you are a program director. What I want to do is balance that with local material and that's my challenge. I'm looking for more local input."

He's also looking for more volunteers.

"We fight for volunteers," he said. "The lesson I learned is that volunteers don't always just come to you. You have to be out there looking for them. We need people to staff our booths at events, to learn how to train. We've got some great opportunities here for them and it's really a lot of fun."

Arthur, who has a longtime involvement with local media - including KRFC radio and The Bullhorn weekly newspaper - has been with Channel 97 since 2006. "I came to a meeting and they were looking for help so I jumped in. As usual, I ended up putting in more time than I planned, but I love it."