

Schools offered diverse programming for franchise fee portion

I've been itching to get my two cents in on the ongoing cablevision controversy. From time to time I have read various Bedford Township board members' comments that they were not there when the 1998 agreement was made between the township and Bedford Schools for Bedford High School to house the local

origination studio for Buckeye Cable Co. Well, I was there.

In brief, the community needed a public access station, the schools were asked to provide one, and they did. At no time was there ever an agreement that the township meetings be televised on the cable channel. As a matter of fact, the original cable committee warned the township that it would take some time to get programming up and running. The township was only too happy to let the schools solve the cable origination problem.

Much has been made about the failure of the high school broadcast classes to cover township meetings. But let's take a look at what Bedford taxpayers did get for the township's annual \$20,000 contribution.

The first year, the school covered most of the home football games. We towed an ancient truck that had been abandoned by the previous cable franchise over to the old football stadium; the truck was far beyond being able to run on its own. Mike Murphy, who was a volunteer at the time, performed a technological miracle, and we got the first game on the air.

Since that first game, student journalists have aired most of the home football games, including the band halftime show, for the better part of eight years. In that time, boys and girls basketball, wrestling, volleyball, soccer and baseball games also have aired on local cable TV.

But sports were only part of the package. How about public service? High school classes aired the first Heart of Hope Telethon. They produced all-day live broadcasts of the trade fair, including live interviews with BBA members who had exhibits and shots of the talent performances in the cafeteria. They broadcast the Community Days parade twice. Last fall, Mr. Murphy traveled to Pass Christian, Miss., to record the community relief effort, and the classes hosted a live telethon called Benefit for the Pass.

The broadcast classes also got into politics. Twice they aired live public commentaries, during which township

board candidates, along with others, got a chance to address the community. Many of the township board members who are seated right now had the advantage of speaking on one of these programs. The classes also did a marathon election return show, again live, where they kept citizens up to date on current community races. And yes, they did televise some township meetings.

Entertainment was not overlooked. Teacher Karen Adamski hosted a cooking show, "Cooking With Karen," which shared some the favorite recipes from her Silver Spoon Cafe. Heck, we even had a fishing show, "The Michigan Fisherman," starring yours truly. (Okay, it can't all be quality programming!)

In addition, for most of the years, students produced a bi-weekly news show that covered events in the school and community. The broadcast program grew from being part of the journalism class to a three-level course offering introductory, intermediate, and advanced broadcasting. Mr. Murphy became a full-time employee, and hundreds of students have gone through the program. Some are now professionals in the broadcasting field.

With the township board withdrawing their support from the high school broadcasting program, who knows where that program will go? The school still can broadcast on Channel 69, so hopefully some programming will continue. But as almost everyone knows, funds are tight and the schools will have to make some tough decisions about which programs to support.

I guess what bothers me the most about this is the debate over whether the township board should honor its commitment. The schools kept up their end of the agreement, and more. The fact that the board discontinued support over one issue, the televising of its meetings, speaks volumes. Some board members admitted it was morally right to honor their commitment, while others wanted to bring in a lawyer to see if they could get out of it. I know which ones I'll be voting for next election.

And remember, the township is now the steward of your public access channel. Tune in and see if they match the productions provided by the high school students over the last eight years.



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