



Annual Report 2015

Hello,

Vermont PBS is on a mission. With our 50th anniversary approaching and with the media landscape changing dramatically on an almost daily basis, it is our mission to increase our engagement with and relevance to all Vermonters. In essence, we aim to welcome you to a new Vermont PBS.

It's not a small goal. It involves re-energizing our commitment to local content; increasing our community engagement activities and educational services; and building on our numerous digital resources to greatly enhance our delivery of the Vermont experience to viewers. We are building on our role as Vermont's visual storyteller and its only statewide public television service – a public platform open and available to all. We take that role seriously.

Public television creates a rich visual experience that inspires and connects with viewers in a way that other media simply can't. Our goal is to inspire our community through a visual experience of Vermont – her opportunities, unique people, traditions, ideas and inspiring landscapes – and thereby create a shared experience of Vermont in our lives. Vermont is as much an aspiration to live in a place where nature meets community as it is a state on the national map. There is no better medium to experience Vermont than a visual one. That is the foundation on which we must build.

Every day Vermont PBS interacts with and reflects a wide cross-section of Vermonters – and Canadians. As the “free media with a social responsibility,” we share in Vermonters' challenges and hopes. Visual storytelling provides images of what is now and what could be in a changing community, work we do for the greater good of our neighbors. We have a responsibility to Vermonters to do more than entertain – which we do pretty well. We strive to inspire, educate, inform and connect Vermonters. To share fun and discovery, of course, while also providing information important to an informed society and creating a model for civil discourse around difficult topics.

Over the past year we began to re-evaluate our status in the community and our mission. As we developed a wider network of partnerships across the state and brought Vermonters a richer store of local and regional programming, we learned more about the role of public television in Vermont as a “doors wide open” sharing platform. We built a process for receiving locally-made films, showcased local filmmakers, and leveraged individual performances on the statewide stage of Vermont PBS, shared with every household. We also expanded our reach into Vermont communities, with even more free community screenings and discussions of films that explore important social topics, and with increased family and children's activities in communities across the state. Crossing generations, mountains, counties and cultures, we found ways to connect Vermonters with one another.

We initiated steps to enhance our educational offerings to Vermont's children, building on what is already the most extensive source of free children's educational content available *in the world*. To that end, we've formed recent partnerships with Champlain Valley Head Start, the YMCA and National Life of

Vermont’s “Life Changer of the Year” program to improve access and resources for the state’s preschool children and their parents. And we’ll soon be offering Vermont PBS-produced educational content to teachers and students across the nation – through the incredibly rich online educational resource, PBS Learning Media.

At the same time we were finding the joy of more local programming, we were celebrating the richness of our PBS legacy. British comedies, food and travel, new nature and scientific programs (did you see “Big Blue”?), the searing documentary-style coverage of **Frontline**, and of course that Sunday evening staple, **Masterpiece**. Whether on broadcast television, your favorite streaming device, from our website, or on your smart phone, we delivered quality programming reliably, every day, in every way. This past year saw growth in our use of social media, and our programs on web-based services. More of that to come, to be certain!

As we evaluate our foundation and build on our strengths, we are looking at the changes in how we finance station operations. Our funding sources are becoming increasingly about how we engage with “viewers like you” – and viewers who are not at all like you – reaching out into the community in whole new ways. As we keep the mission up front, we are looking for new approaches to delivery of a viewing experience that is unbiased, credible and valuable. We are making real progress in embracing change – while building a stronger relationship with viewers and growing a valuable public resource that helps build better lives for all Vermont’s residents and our viewers.

That is where we’re headed, and 2015 was the foundation year to take us there – together. We are growing a robust view of all that is Vermont, while bringing the world’s best programming to Vermonters. We aim to be the best local station in the nation.



Holly Groschner
President & CEO
Vermont PBS



Community Activities Benefitting Vermonters.

We know that Vermont PBS' future lies in its ability to knit together communities, supporting Vermonters at every level. Recent and ongoing endeavors that exemplify that commitment include:

- A partnership with **Vermont Headstart**, to bolster its' mission of expanded early educational opportunities for Vermont's children –working with the parents of preschoolers across the state to more effectively use PBS children's educational programming as a tool for success in school .
- With support from **National Life Group's "Life Changer of the Year"** program, we'll soon be integrating Vermont PBS-produced content with the robust –and free – online resource for teachers and students, **PBS Learning Media**. The online venue hosts hundreds of thousands of educational resources –videos, lesson plans and more – used by teachers and homeschoolers across the country to supplement their curriculum. Soon, those educational assets will be bolstered by informative segments from **Emerging Science, Poets & Their Craft, Outdoor Journal** and other Vermont PBS productions.
- 2016 marks the third year of our annual commitment to broadcast and webcast the Vermont finals of the national **Poetry Out Loud** competition, as Vermont high school students return to the Vermont PBS studio. Ten finalists, out of a starting field of about 5000 students, recite great poetic works, with the winner going on to the national competition. Great works of art delivered with passion... and a spotlight on some talented young Vermonters.
- **InnoVaTe**, a newly launched online series that puts a spotlight on Vermont's creative business community – and is already helping to spread that message far beyond Vermont's borders. The six-episode online series taped in the fall of 2015 and launched in January, 2016. A second season is already in the planning stages.
- A just-premiered 14th season of **Outdoor Journal** which, partly through its long partnership with Vermont Fish & Wildlife, helps to promote the virtues of the state's varied outdoor recreational opportunities – and to help grow the pool of Vermonters using those resources.
- Every month, Vermont legislative leaders at both the national and state level take to our airwaves to answer Vermonters questions on live call-in editions of **Report From Washington, Report From Montpelier** and **Ask the Governor**. The programs give Vermonters direct access to the state's decision makers, offering opportunities for civic engagement that residents of many states never enjoy.
- Friday evenings, a large swath of Vermonters get their weekly news wrap-up from **Vermont This Week**. The long-running program offers weekly insight and commentary on the state's top news stories, direct from some of the state's top analysts.

- Vermonters also enjoy a more light-hearted look at their state on **Connect**, launched in July, 2015. Each week, **Connect** introduces us to interesting folks from across the region with profiles and interviews that give viewers a deeper look at the life and culture of our region.

Community activities keep us connected.

Highlights of some of our community events in 2015.

- The programming juggernaut that is **Downton Abbey** will draw to a close in 2016, and audiences across the country have been rabidly addicted, including Vermonters. For four years running, we've offered those dedicated viewers a gala event and online community that does much more than celebrate a TV show: it offers a wide spectrum of Vermonters a chance to join together around a shared passion and to feel inspired by history and one of the highest rated dramas to ever grace the television screen.
Average yearly attendance: 400 Downton Abbey devotees.
- In 2015, we also offered Downton fans a chance to get a sneak peek at the final season, hosting five free screening events of the first episode before it premiered – at locations around the state. As with anything related to the *Masterpiece* blockbuster, the screenings proved highly popular, drawing in crowds, kudos and a strong sense of camaraderie.
Total attendance at five screening events: 585.
- Vermont lovers of British programming also share their passion each spring at our annual **Britcom Tea** gatherings. It's a great opportunity for like-minded folks to feel a sense of community around something they love – and to give us their input regarding upcoming programming choices on *their* public television station.
Average yearly attendance: 435 loyal public television supporters.
- Our statewide **Community Cinema** series brings important films to communities across Vermont for free screenings and discussions of societal issues. Films from **Independent Lens, P.O.V., local filmmakers** and other sources give Vermonters a chance to connect on issues that are important to them and to feel engaged in their community.
See below for a list of Community Cinema highlights from 2015.
- Some of our free statewide screenings cater to kids, as well. Our **Vermont PBS Kids Film Series** brings PBS Kids programs to community libraries and other venues across the state. Featured episodes often focus on particular issues such as the environment, social skills, etc. – all explored through the prism of fun, entertaining characters from award-winning PBS Kids programs.
- Of particular note is our **Kids Film Series in St. Johnsbury**, in partnership with Catamount Arts and Head Start. The monthly event draws large crowds from across Vermont's Northeast Kingdom.
Attendance in 2015 totaled 358 children.

- In December, 2015, we enjoyed a visit from PBS fitness guru **Miranda Esmonde-White**, who spoke and gave a yoga demonstration to a small crowd of about 40 devotees. Beyond the health benefits, events like this allow devoted members to participate in something beyond a television show and to engage one-on-one with their public television station.
- Each October, Vermont PBS engages with a host of young Vermonters and their parents at our annual **Spooky Saturday Halloween Party**, with a yearly average of about 500 attendees, split into two sessions. The kids have a ball – many come dressed as their favorite PBS Kids character – and their parents seem to appreciate having a fun-filled, safe environment for celebrating Halloween. As we like to say, “It’s not TOO spooky.”
2015 attendance: 573 kids & their families; 62 volunteers, including 35 high school students.
- In Spring, 2015, we also hosted a special day for children of Vermont military families at our **Sid-athon for Military Kids** – recognizing the *Month of the Military Child*. Because there are no military bases in Vermont, children of military personnel are spread all over the state. Families had a chance to come together, share stories and resources, and strengthen their community network. The kids enjoyed games, treats and a free showing of a new feature-length film from **Sid the Science Kid**, focused on nature and the environment.
In attendance: 120 kids & their families, from seven counties.

Community Cinema highlights from 2015:

Topic: Health

Films: Ken Burns’ *Cancer: Emperor of all Maladies* / *The Opiate Effect* / *Mimi & Dona* / *Autism in Love*

Attendance: 664 attendees in 12 Vermont communities.

Topic: Military/Veterans

Films: American Experience: *Last Days in Vietnam* / WETA: *Debt of Honor* / Vermont PBS: *Noble Hearts: Civil War Vermont*

Attendance: 706 attendees in eight Vermont communities.

Topic: Diversity

Films: Independent Lens: *American Denial* / American Experience: *Freedom Summer* / POV: *15 to Life: Kenneth’s Story*

Attendance: 560 attendees in 11 Vermont communities.

Topic: LGBTQ

Films: Independent Lens: *Limited Partnership* / America ReFramed: *A Self-Made Man* / Frontline: *Growing Up Trans*

Attendance: 231 attendees in six Vermont communities.

Topic: Women & Girls Lead

Films: Independent Lens: *A Path Appears* / America ReFramed: *The Perfect Victim*

Attendance: 236 attendees in seven Vermont communities.

In total, 2015 saw us host over 150 community events, covering all 14 Vermont counties, and forming new partnerships with more than 50 different organizations. In all, those events allowed us to connect directly with over 7,000 Vermonters!

Some important facts:

- Vermont PBS kids programming is available to nearly all Vermont preschool children for free, over the air and online – no cable access, transportation, or teachers required – and it’s been shown that preschool children who utilize PBS programs are better prepared for school by 30% in reading comprehension and math readiness skills.
- Vermont teachers, homeschoolers and students have free access to more than 100,000 curriculum-aligned digital resources through PBS LearningMedia.
- Tens of thousands of older Vermonters, many of whom can’t afford to participate in – or can’t physically reach – the arts by any other means, depend on Vermont PBS for information, education and entertainment. Last season alone, PBS offered nearly 600 hours of free arts and cultural programming.
- Vermont PBS programming and community outreach helps provide a venue for civic discourse, and the basis for a civil society. Our live call-in programs provide Vermonters with direct access to legislators and decision makers, supporting the values inherent in a civil, informed electorate.
- For 12 consecutive years, PBS has been rated as the most trusted institution among nationally known organizations. Vermonters turn to Vermont PBS for quality, unbiased news, information and entertainment that they can’t find anywhere else.

We are Vermont’s visual storyteller – here to inspire, inform and connect Vermonters as only a visual public medium can.

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