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Cable channel poised to expand programming

Move to Monmouth U provides secure location, technical support

BY CHRISTINE VARNO

Staff Writer



Monmouth University student intern Brian Specia works behind the camera at the Long Branch cable access Channel 20 (LBC20) studio.

Monmouth University in West Long Branch.

WEST LONG BRANCH — If you were to tune into the Long Branch cable access Channel 20 (LBC20) over the past year, you would have seen an evolving local station, according to the chairman of the Long Branch Cable Commission.

“Long Branch has had a long-standing cable access channel, but hasn’t done much with it because the facilities weren’t available,” Don R. Swanson, chairman of the cable commission, explained last week.

“We want people to know about the cable access channel and we’re trying to do more,” explained Swanson, who also is chairman of the Communications Department at

When Long Branch’s cable channel began servicing the city 10 years ago, it was a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week station that only had the capability to air a list of local events known as the “bulletin board.”

“The bulletin board on LBC20 is a community resource that carries information announcing a range of

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community events,” Swanson said.

“There was only a message [bulletin] board because there were no facilities to operate programming,” added Howard Marlin, a member of the commission.

Today, the cable channel is able to broadcast local programming such as the weekly summertime concerts held in West End Park and the biweekly talk show “Community Connections,” hosted by Long Branch Mayor Adam Schneider.

And, according to Swanson, the channel has the capability to do even more.

“The community bulletin is the basic thing,” Swanson said. “There are about four or five hours a day with programming and the rest of the time it’s the bulletin board.”

But the bulletin board is no longer just a list of local events. Now, a news ticker runs across the bottom of the screen along with the time and the local weather.

“Nonprofits that have special events will call and tell us about events so we can get them up on the bulletin board,” Swanson said.

“The next element we want is for people to know about the cable access channel and to submit programs that we might run, for example a Little League game,” he said.

He said the program schedule is not extensive yet, but the technology is now available to broaden the station’s programming capability.

“Somebody might sponsor a program and pay a videographer several hundred dollars as long as we put their name on the show and we can do that,” he said.

The access channel also can be controlled by emergency management officials in the event of an emergency, according to Swanson, who said officials could override the channel’s programming and broadcast news such as storm warnings.

“It’s important for cable access channels to serve as emergency access channels,” he said.

The Monmouth University facilities have allowed the station to grow, according to Marlin.



“The partnership with the university has made a major step in the progress of the channel,” he said.

The Long Branch Cable Commission, a nonprofit entity, has an annual budget of \$5,000 in funding from the city to produce the cable access channel, a tiny operating budget for a cable station, according to Swanson.

LBC20 was initially broadcast out of city hall, but when space there became too tight, the headquarters was moved to the basement of the Long Branch Public Library on Broadway.

“When you have sensitive electronic equipment, you need to have it in a temperature-controlled environment,” Swanson said. “There was just no place for it in city hall.”

The commission approached Monmouth University about two years ago with a dilemma – there was no place to put the cable station’s equipment, Swanson said.

The university invited LBC20 to move into the Jules Plangere Communications Center on the campus where the Department of Communications is able to provide the technical support needed to broadcast programming on the channel, Swanson explained.

“Monmouth University is doing this as a service to the community because part of the college campus extends into Long Branch,” Swanson said.

Student interns in the communications department assist in the station’s programming.

“Our equipment is now in a safe and secure location and we have technicians here [at Monmouth University] and a studio,” Swanson noted.

The commission’s main responsibility is LBC20, but it also represents the community and gathers information regarding any problems with cable connections throughout the city.

LBC20 is an EG — educational and governmental — channel and the commission’s mission is to assure that the programs aired on the channel are consistent with that criteria.

“The station is designed to be watched for two to four minutes at a time,” Swanson said. “You switch to the channel during commercials on other programming.”

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The next goal for the commission is to put on more programming, Marlin said.

“We are in the process of putting in a program that will list the upcoming programs that will appear for the week,” Marlin said. “We look forward to doing more programming.”

For information on posting events on the bulletin board, call Gloria Winnick at city hall at (732) 571-5645.

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