

The man behind the scenes of Community Connection

Long Branch — "That's a wrap, folks!"

And with those words, another episode of Community Connections is "in the can."

The local TV show, which has aired on Long Branch Cable Television (channel) 20 for the last seven years, is a public affairs program hosted by Mayor Adam Schneider, and produced by the Long Branch Cable TV Commission in association with the Monmouth University Department of Communications. The show airs daily at 11 a.m. and 8 p.m.

For the past three years, Kevin Cieri has been producing the show.

"For as long as I can remember, I always wanted to be in this business," recalls Cieri, 50, who has been on the commission since April 2005 and co-chair since November 2007.

Cieri's first encounter with the media came when he attended St. Jerome School in West Long Branch back in 1972 and went on a class trip in seventh grade to the NBC Studios in New York City, where they saw the taping of "To Tell The Truth," hosted by Gary Moore.

Cieri recalls he sat on the end seat on the left side of the studio, right between the stage and the control room, which was located behind where the audience sat.

"I found myself watching the director in the control room barking out orders to the stage crew through his 'comm link,' then turning back to the stage and seeing the floor manager convey the director's orders to the camera operators and audio technicians. I was turning around back and forth in my seat so much that one of the teachers told me to sit still or I'd be taken outside," Cieri remembers fondly.

"I was hooked right then and there."

After graduating from St. Jerome, Cieri contemplated a

career as a radio disc jockey. While a sophomore attending Shore Regional High School, an opening came up as the public address announcer for the varsity football games. Prior to that, teachers were the only ones who were announcers at varsity events.

"From what I understand, since I graduated, the PA announcer's job has always been done by students. That was over 30 years ago. It's nice to know that I started a trend," Cieri said.

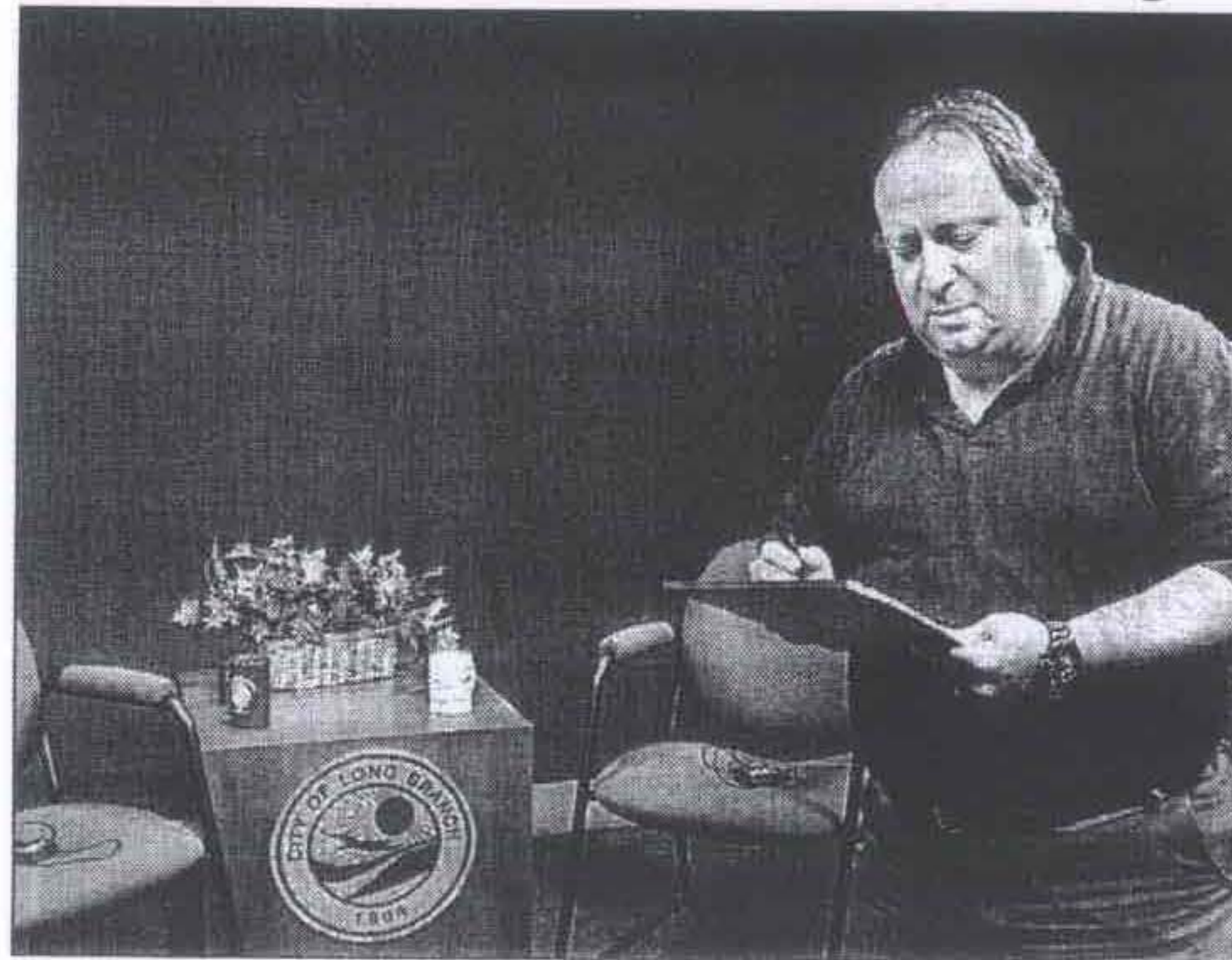
He also took another job, hosting his own cable radio show on Futurevision channel 8 (the cable provider that eventually would become Comcast), whose studios were located in the community room of the Monmouth Shopping Center in Eatontown (now the Monmouth Mall).

"I'd spin records and talk up Futurevision while the bulletin board carousel spun around with business cards from area businesses that sponsored my show. No computer-generated graphics back then.

"Unfortunately, that job lasted only a few months because gasoline prices rose to around a dollar a gallon and my mom had to drive me back and forth to the studio every day. Eventually, I had to give up the job because it cost more in gas to get me back and forth than what I was getting paid by Futurevision."

Upon graduating Shore Regional in 1977, Cieri attended Glassboro State College, majoring in communications. "GSC had one of the best media communications programs in the country for such a small state college and still does. I was very fortunate to attend school there. I learned so much about the business."

After graduating, he gravitated back to television as a career choice and was offered two jobs at the same time. One was as a page with CBS in New York City,



Kevin Cieri prepares the set of Community Connections.

and the other was as an audio/visual technician in the corporate video department at NJ Bell in Newark. He chose CBS because "corporate TV was kind of in its infancy at the time."

Unfortunately, after working for CBS for almost four years and being passed over numerous times for promotion, Cieri resurrected his old contacts with NJ Bell and changed jobs in December 1986.

At NJ Bell, he got his hands dirty, working on location in and around northern NJ, and then editing his footage using NJ Bell's multimillion dollar in-house corporate video production studio. He also ran the company's video teleconference center (VTC).

At the same time, he started his own small video production company, "Network Video," shooting weddings and corporate videos for small businesses in and around the Monmouth and Ocean County area.

In September 1987, Cieri left full-time TV temporarily, accepting a position as a contract spe-

cialist with Fort Monmouth. Two years later, Cieri got back into TV, accepting a position in the fort's Directorate of Information Management as a video teleconferencing production specialist.

In 1995, Cieri was promoted to Video Teleconferencing Services Manager and assistant audio visual manager, overseeing the base's entire VTC network, several hundred conference rooms, and the photography, graphic arts, media presentations, and TV production departments.

In 2003, "information assurance" — a combination of software applications, computer hardware, and network security — was a growing field in the government, so his director appointed him the installation's information assurance manager.

"Once I got this new job, I never thought I was going to work in television again."

That was until 2005, when Long Branch City Council member Anthony Giordano asked him to become a member of the city's Cable TV Commission. In April 2005, he was appointed to the commission.

— audio, floor manager, and graphics, as well as the assistant director's and technical director's positions.

In July 2006, Levin left the commission, opening up the producer's position on the show. Cieri asked Don Swanson for the job, and he's been there ever since, coordinating the guests, the studio time, the crew, and doing follow-up work to ensure the show airs in a timely manner. Approximately 20-30 shows are produced every year.

Cieri enjoys his role as producer for the show, as well as being co-chair of the commission with Swanson, a position he was elected to in November 2007. As co-chair, Cieri sets the agenda, maintains the commission's website, and runs the meetings for the commission, every third Monday of the month at 7 p.m. in the Plangere Center, Monmouth University.

Cieri gives credit to the commission members and Monmouth University students who come to tapings and shoot the show. "If it weren't for them showing up at every taping, there would be no show," Cieri states.

He is especially appreciative of Robin Kampf, the commission's secretary and a Monmouth University adjunct professor in the Department of Communication who directs the show every week with him, as well as Eric Reisher, the university's broadcast engineering associate who edits the show and prepares it for air on LBCTV20. "They are both my right hand people on this show," Cieri said.

Even his family gets into the act every now and then when it comes to the show. Cieri's daughter Anne Marie, a freshman at Cabrini College majoring in communications (just like her dad did), spends her break time from school helping out behind the camera, and son Christian, who is in the eighth grade at St. Jerome

That September, Cieri got his first glimpse of the Community Connections TV show.

"Robin Levin, who was the commission secretary at the time, was producing the show for Adam using the TV studios at Monmouth University, and she asked me if I would be interested in helping out."

Cieri started off as a camera operator, and then quickly began learning the other crew positions

School, helps out as assistant director.

"I truly enjoy producing Community Connections for channel 20," states Cieri. "It's probably one of the best community access public affairs shows around, as well as a great marketing tool for the city."

For more information, the cable TV commission's e-mail address is LBCTV20@aol.com. The commission's website is LBCTV20.angelfire.com.