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Mayor confident with his "Connections"

VOLUNTEERS FUEL CITY'S PUBLIC ACCESS SHOW

Posted by the Asbury Park Press on 03/9/07

BY CAROL GORGA WILLIAMS
COASTAL MONMOUTH BUREAU

STORYCHAT: [Post Comment](#)

LONG BRANCH — At most City Council meetings, Mayor Adam Schneider sits silently, as critics attack him for a multitude of what they perceive as his transgressions.

In his chair in a studio at the Jules L. Plangere Jr. Center for Communication and Instructional Technology at Monmouth University, as television cameras whirl, you can't shut the veteran politician up.

"It turns out to be a lot of fun and a great way to communicate," said Schneider who



(STAFF PHOTO : JEANNIE CLAUDIO)

Volunteer Ann Marie Cieri, 16, runs a camera for Long Branch Mayor Adam Schneider's "Community Connections," a public access show.

WHAT'S NEXT

"Community Connections" can be viewed every day of the week at 11 a.m. and 8 p.m. over the public access channel 20.

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since 2003 has been host of the 30-minute show "Community Connections," which is produced by the volunteer Long Branch Cable TV Commission.

The commission, headed by Don R. Swanson, chairman of the university's department of communication, produces about 10 shows a semester.

"I think they did a very good job," said Dr. Michael A. Goldfarb, chairman of the surgery department at Monmouth Medical Center, who along with Dr. Frank J. Borao, director of the hospital's minimally invasive surgery department and director of bariatric surgery, was a recent guest.

"Mayor Schneider puts you at ease," Goldfarb said.

Swanson said in his opinion, the most riveting recent show involved Schneider and Councilman Brian A. Unger, who was elected in November and is positioning himself as an "independent" voice on council.

"I found it very enjoyable," Unger said. "We talked a lot about public policy and governing. . . . It was actually a lot of fun."

Schneider does not favor a proposal that council meetings be similarly broadcast on public access, as Unger has suggested. Instead, Schneider and several council members say they would support televising the caucus or workshop portion of the meetings, in which public comment is not allowed because it is in those meetings that the real work of government gets done.

But Schneider said it is also a matter of cost.

"Community Connections" is free, staffed by student and community volunteers, and produced at the multimillion-dollar Plangere Center, whose facilities the city could never hope to duplicate, Schneider said.

"There is something major about seeing something on TV," he said. "You remember seeing something on TV. . . . It is in your living room."

Schneider has had no formal training, but Robin Kampf, a co-producer of the program who has produced numerous programs for different mayors, said Schneider is "excellent" as host.

"I'm a lawyer," he said. "I ask people questions all the time, and then you just listen."

Unger thinks the staffing could be handled by volunteers from Monmouth University. The two women staffing computer terminals during the most recent taping, Jackie

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Price, 21, of Berkeley and Bridget Shaw, 21, of Kensington, Md., receive college credit for participating, Swanson said.

Anne Marie Cieri, a 16-year-old student from Mater Dei High School, Middletown, gets no such credit. There might be a little nepotism involved, however: Her father, Kevin Cieri, is co-producer of the show.

"At first my dad asked me for my help," said the younger Cieri, who operates one of the three cameras that record the interviews. "I kind of like film stuff and editing, (so) I keep coming."

The elder Cieri produces the show with Kampf, who also is a Monmouth faculty member.

"It was just a way for the mayor to put the word out about community events and community service organizations in and around Long Branch," Cieri said.

They have done shows on the Valerie Fund at Monmouth Medical Center; affordable housing; restaurateur Tim McLoone, who plays with the local charitable band Holiday Express; the Long Branch Chamber of Commerce; and other groups and events.

Although producers have never conducted a study, they get the sense the show is watched by city residents.

"Most of the feedback we get is informal," Cieri said. "It is, usually, generally positive."

Kampf said Long Branch sits between New York and Philadelphia, the No. 1 and No. 4 television markets in the country, and public access programming "really provides the local flavor."

The commission is looking into other ways to communicate, including streaming the programming from Channel 20 over the city's Web site.

Unger said the cost for broadcasting meetings could come from Comcast's licensing fee, which represents about \$120,000 a year. That's how other communities fund it, he said.

While other officials are concerned the council's critics, who generally are the only ones attending council meetings regularly, would play to the camera, Unger believes the increased access "would be a step in the right direction."

The time is right, he said, noting the mayor and some city council members favor more debate at public meetings.

"With Web view coming into play and the Internet becoming a major news source, I think that is the direction we need to go in," Unger said.