

#150 WJFF RADIO CATSKILL TURNS 20

Every day we are becoming more aware of how important it is to take personal and collective action to change the conditions that shape our daily lives and future. From our inability to extend health care to all or even conduct a public debate on this vital issue without rancor and deceit to the ever widening economic gulf that erects degrading political and social barriers in our communities, the quality of life we experience is far below what could and should be available to all.

In our efforts to develop a greener life, a more sustainable life, we will need many institutions that combine the environmental, economic and social realms of society in more democratic arrangement.

A local example of such an institution is WJFF Radio Catskill in Jeffersonville. From its 20 years of community service, we can learn valuable lessons for the work that lies ahead to turn towards a better future.

WJFF Radio started with the idea of bringing additional cultural opportunity to our area that would be offered free, would be powered by the natural, clean energy of water flowing over a dam, and would be run by volunteers. That was truly a superb beginning. The public was invited via an open letter in local newspapers to a meeting to discuss the project. The room was filled with people. Thereafter, leadership and wide spread commitment was evident in the refurbishing of the hydro plant, the construction of several buildings, writing of grants, fund raising, training of volunteers who would produce programs and recruitment of members of the governing committees including the Board of Trustees, Program Committee and Community Advisory Committee. A look at these committees yields many important lessons for the new and reformed institutions we must forge to gain our sustainable future

Committees have members from Pennsylvania and New York and from several counties. All elect their officers. All meetings are open to the public, meet once a month and publish minutes. All correspondence and public comment is considered. A summary of important decisions is provided in a newsletter to all subscribers. Rules governing each committee are developed by groups of volunteers who include non-committee members. Volunteers are included as full voting members of the Board of Trustees which determines its membership and selects paid staff. Paid staff receive periodic reviews and attend meetings of the other committees. This practices provide a high degree of transparency, accountability and familiarity within the WJFF community who perform the myriad tasks of running a public radio station.

The Program Committee conducts peer review of each on-air host and producer, assists in the development of new programs and decides program schedules. Staff attend these meetings but volunteer committee members decide. Few radio stations of any size in the nation have as wide a scope of programming as WJFF. Its attention to weather, school closings, lost and found animals, public service announcements promoting every civic event that seeks mention, is second to none.

The Community Advisory group continues the work of embedding WJFF Radio through out the many geographic areas and constituent communities of the region.

WJFF sustains itself financially through grants, public funding, donations, fund-raising events and memberships.

From its broadcast of music programs and public affairs produced by local volunteers and the wide variety of news perspectives available to the community, to the environmental, economic character of its governance and operation,, WJFF showcases every day many attributes of the institutions that are essential to the GREENING of SULLIVAN.

There are many other local institutions leading the way to a more sustainable future that will be the subject of columns in the future.