

3...2...1... Roll 'Em!

Join us as we take a behind-the-scenes look at Sun City's own Channel 79 *by Phyllis Moses Photos by Mike Gadell*



Okay, I'll admit it: I'm a celebrity junkie! I always have been. So, when I had the opportunity to write this article for the Sun Rays, I grabbed it; I was so excited... not just because I'm a fan of Judy Weckerly and Kay Hester (I knew I'd get a chance to sit down and interview them) but I'd get to see all that really neat technology - cameras, lights and props. That's the part of show business I love: all the stuff behind the scenes. Besides all that, I'd get to watch the cameraman film the shows. Maybe the producer would say,

"Places everyone. Now - lights, camera, action." I love show biz!

So I packed up my notepad, pen, and my tape recorder. Away I went. Kay, Judy, Jim Hester and I met for the interviews, and there I was with those three celebs - but I soon learned they're just like I am - Sun City residents, volunteering to broadcast information to residents of Sun City.

In the beginning...

In 2004, Sondra Carlton approached the Theatre Group about forming a production company to develop a TV show for Channel 79, the local community access cable channel. (News and Views now functions as part of the CA Communications Department, with Sondra as Editor.) At the time, the broadcast consisted of simple screens, music, trailers, and nothing more. A survey of the residents indicated they wanted considerably more than this. Judy Weckerly jumped at the opportunity, and that's the way the new format for Channel 79 was born. They found an old camera somewhere, dusted it off, and went to work. The Sun City Singers were scheduled to do a concert, so they were the first celebrities who appeared on the program. In addition to that, Judy did a commercial for the Village Store. She donned a big red hat and assumed a British accent. Thus, the first commercial was broadcast from the new Channel 79 crew. Because the broadcast was live, when the cameraman needed to change the scene between the Singers segment and the commercial, he

just placed his hand over the lens, faded to black, and then removed it to make the transition from one scene to another.

Judy laughed about the early days. Actually, going 'live' was part of the problem. It was dif-



Judy Weckerly

From its inception three years ago, Judy, as Producer, has been instrumental in shaping and developing the look and feel of News and Views.

icult at best to pace the show and make the interviews and the time allotment come out right. It was just a matter of time before it was determined that taping the show was a better option than going live, and would be critical to the show's success.

Call in the reinforcements!

Soon, Judy called Kay Hester. Kay was a perfect choice to be the co-producer. Kay's degree from UT was in journalism; acting on camera was also a dream and goal for Kay. She even appeared in one episode of the TV show, Walker, Texas Ranger. So the "smell of the grease paint



Kay Hester

With a background in journalism and acting, Kay was the perfect choice for the position of News and Views Associate Producer.

and the roar of the crowd" was an undeniable attraction for Kay. Besides that, her husband, Jim, with a background in electrical engineering, also was interested in becoming part of the team. They

recognized the value of the concept of Channel 79 and its possibilities. So, it was a dream come true.

Jim makes an enormous contribution to the overall production of the show. He's always available and his years spent in engineering give him the skills required to fix almost anything that can break or fail during the course of their tapings. Jim outlined his vision for the future of Channel 79 in simple terms: "We can always use new volunteers, those who will commit their talent and time to this project. It's a lot of fun and quite rewarding, but, it is definitely a commitment of time. We need a film editor, and we can always use additional help in other areas."

It's all about teamwork

As the producer of the show, Judy is dedicated and hard-working. Her strength lies in the detail work the show demands; she devotes a tremendous amount of time to that. "The entire crew is dedicated to this work," explained Judy. "Their unwavering commitment is unquestionable. They're here to work; we all live our lives around our shooting schedule." On taping days, they set up and plan to shoot two shows, one right after the other. That way, they only have to tape every other week. But on taping days, the entire crew, without exception, is there. Kay said, "It's such a commitment. Lots of people say they'd like to help, but it's important to note that they have to be here on taping day."

From Super 8 to News and Views

Cameraman Don Snapp volunteered two years ago to help produce "News and Views." However, his total experience in filming was using a "Super 8" camera while his family was growing up. Now, he's a veteran of the program. In addition to filming, he also provides the live feed of CA events to Channel 79 as well as making DVDs for playbacks.

When asked where he would like to see Channel 79 in the future, Don responded, "We hope Channel 79 will be one of the largest communication tools to the residents on cable. Also, we might convert

Checking the equipment:

Cameraman Don Snapp and Production Manager Jim Hester do an equipment check before filming begins.



some of the shows over to the internet to use the Web Portal to a greater advantage in reaching more residents who rely on the internet."

Don also indicated he would like to see more volunteers step up and take some of the pressure off the few who do the work. He explained: "The work is not that complicated. I know there are residents who are experienced or familiar with TV productions. We just need to appeal to them. Another need is a studio where we can have different backgrounds and settings for the show. We could do more with a two-camera setup, which would make our programs more professional."

What's a Key Grip, anyway?

Arnie Skjelbostad joined the troop about two and a half years ago. Jim Hester asked him to help him with "News and Views." As Arnie said, "It's just one of the many fun opportunities that we have here in Sun City. I've tried many different jobs in the crew, but I'm now a stagehand. It's my job to set up the signs, tables, chairs and lights. During the taping, I stand near the door to control traffic. I have to make sure all cell phones are turned off and everyone is quiet. Then, after the taping, I put everything back in place."

Memorable shows

Arnie continued, "There have been many memorable shows, but the 94-year-old piano player, and the lady who was one of the Radio City Rockettes made the deepest impression on me. They both had so much energy and they both live in Sun City."

According to Judy, there have been many magnificent shows through the years, but one stands out in her mind as that "extra special one."

"It was on Memorial Day, May 2004," she explained. "We had five people on the show. The first gentleman was a retired military resident whose father was in WWI as a bugler. He brought his father's bugle to the show. The second person was my father, who is still living; he's 91 years old. The next three people were retired military, two generals and one lieutenant colonel. Each had something historic and interesting to discuss during that program. The tears flowed, not just from the audience, but from me on the stage as well. They were such heart-warming stories. Because my Dad was on this show, and because it was such a meaningful one for Memorial Day, it stands out as one of my favorites."

Judy also observed, "There are many residents here in Sun City with so much energy and such positive attitudes. That's my focus: to have them on the show for the benefit of the residents."

Those screens and crawlers!

If you look in the dictionary for the word "Volunteer," Betty Hayne's photo will not be there; however, the definition of the word volunteer is there: "To offer or bestow voluntarily; without solicitation or compulsion. To enter into or make an offer of one's free will." Certainly, that defines the volunteer roles of the entire crew of "News and Views." It also defines Betty Hayne, ten-year resident of Sun City. Eight years ago, she offered to volunteer in the Communications Office; she has been busy ever since.

Betty posts the rotating on-screen information on Channel 79.

Heeeeeeeeeeeeee, Sun City!

That unmistakable voice and effervescent personality belong to Beverly Emran, News & Views Announcer and Producer's Assistant.



Events, seminars, and any other pertinent Sun City information flash on the TV screen, changing every 15-20 seconds. A scroll line across the bottom of the screen is used when timely information needs to be communicated to residents.

In addition to her Channel 79 "duties," Betty proofreads copy for the Sun Rays, prepares the RSVP Sheet which is used by residents to purchase tickets, prepares the tickets for events (with help from other volunteers), and prepares Newcomer Packets for distribution to new residents by Neighborhood Reps and/or Block Captains.

Her work with the CA office has become her most enjoyable "hobby." One of the benefits of working so closely with the communication staff is the pleasure of meeting many talented residents. She would like to see more "programs" on Channel 79 so that all residents of Sun City could enjoy all the interesting aspects which have transpired in the lives of our residents.

Betty Hayne

Posting information on screens and crawlers is part of Betty's job.



Betty believes strongly in volunteerism and recommends it to everyone who is not already participating. She and her husband, Walter, enjoy day trips around Texas. Genealogy has been a passion for both of them, resulting in many trips to archives, libraries, cemeteries, and family gatherings. They have spent many hours compiling the data and writing their stories.

Channel 79's Future

As we came to a close in our interview, Judy and Kay emphasized the whole crew is a team. Crew members are Jim Hester, Production Manager and Video Editor, Don Snapp, Cameraman; Arnie Skjelbostad, Key Grip; Thelma Marshall, Calendar/Email Coordinator; Beverly Emran, Announcer; Rohi Emran, Cameraman/Video Editor; Pattie Fludd and Cheryl Wills, Producer's Assistants.

Coincidentally (or maybe not), each member of the crew wants the same outcome for the future for Channel 79. They would like to see the programs take on a more polished look; maybe converted to "streaming" on the web portal. This way, more than 90% of the residents could access this channel; as it is now, no more than about 50% view it weekly.

As of September, they have done 175 shows and will be celebrating their 200th show in March 2008. As to the future of Channel 79, Judy said, "We will continue to do our News and Views, and we will continue to interview extraordinary people who live ordinary lives right next door to us."

For, after all, that is the real show business. ■