



2020 LOCAL CONTENT AND SERVICE REPORT TO THE COMMUNITY: TV



“This unique capability of WKAR to communicate new ideas and engage the broader community is a vital resource for Michigan State University.”
Lalita Udpa, Professor
Michigan State University

Connecting people to powerful ideas that inspire personal growth, exploration of our world and positive change.



WKAR Television is a valuable part of Michigan’s Capital Region.

The station provides public broadcasting service on four WKAR television stations plus radio.

Serving a 19-county viewing area, WKAR is involved with those communities through a variety of activities including: Ready to Learn; WKAR Family, public community screenings and discussions; participation in community events and with station representatives on community boards and committees; and community support through student learning internships.

In 2020, WKAR provided these vital local services:

- Four Television Stations
 - WKAR-HD
 - WKAR-Create
 - WKAR-World
 - WKAR-PBSKIDS
- Three Radio Stations
 - WKAR-AM 870kHz
 - 90.5 WKAR-FM
 - 105.1 WKAR-FM
- Online Streaming of TV and Radio programming
- Educational workshops
- Community-wide family events
- Screenings/discussions
- National and local programming including news, public affairs, arts, health, education.
- 60+ hours of children’s programming per week.

WKAR’s local services had deep impact in Michigan’s Capital Region.

Through station partnerships with local schools and agencies, WKAR Family initiatives centered on PBS Kids and additional resources reached thousands of local children and their families to better prepare them for school.

Locally produced programs target issues of importance to the community, and our free public screenings feature speakers and panelists of local experts and MSU faculty who lead dynamic discussions with participants.



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Connecting people to powerful ideas that inspire personal growth and positive change is the mission of WKAR. WKAR serves that mission through broadcast services WKAR HD, World, Create and PBS Kids 24/7; through research partnerships at our host Big Ten university; through a rich digital presence across multiple platforms; and through educational outreach and engagement events across our community.

Technology

WKAR continued its work as a leader in **ATSC 3.0 broadcasting and NextGen TV innovation** to benefit public broadcasting in communities across the nation. WKAR launched the Media Innovation Lab on the campus of Michigan State University in September of 2019. The lab is a hub for exploring NextGen TV applications for public alerting, educational content and fundraising for public broadcasters. ATSC 3.0 is an opportunity for WKAR to showcase their technology.

Heading into January 2020, WKAR launched Apollo, a partnership to bring NextGen TV technology to PBS stations nationwide.

Education

WKAR Family is aimed at forming connections to help kids be resilient, lifelong learners. The initiative includes PBS Kids 24/7, video shorts offering research-based tips for parents and educators, and outreach to share PBS educational resources with parents and educators.

WKAR continued work through 2019-2020 to build a library of **WKAR Family** video shorts featuring research-based, helpful tips for parents and educators. The library of WKAR Family video shorts now exceeds 60 features available online and offered nationally for broadcast.

Early 2020 brought the conclusion of the three-year PBS Kids Playtime Pad project, which provided educational tablets to more than 3,000 students in the Lansing School District.

Spring of 2020 saw WKAR's education outreach events go virtual due in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Online offerings included several workshops, a book club and at-home learning resources.

WKAR's **At-Home Learning** initiative included TV schedules revised to provide additional educational programming on both the main broadcast channel 23.1 and WKAR World channel 23.2. Weekday noon hour broadcasts included WKAR's **Curious Crew**.

The WKAR **At-Home Learning** website was built to include broadcast schedules, Mrs. Pizzo's weekly FAQ blog for parents, and a **Curious Crew** Educator Toolkit. The toolkit features links to view all **Curious Crew** episodes plus activity guides for investigations at home. Online viewing of **Curious Crew** episodes through Spring 2020 increased more than 400% over viewing during the same period the previous year when schools were open.

WKAR had multiple book giveaways to local elementary schools. These included over 7,000 highly engaging books to help decrease the early literacy achievement gap.

The **WKAR PBS Kids 24/7** channel continues to offer free, over-the-air educational children's programming around the clock and WKAR's primary HD channel airs over 60 hours of PBS Kids shows per week during daytimes.



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The initiative also included the “**WKAR Family and PBS Kids**” daily newsletter to share tips, resources, and curriculum-based content for parents and caregivers to help children continue to learn at home.

The WKAR education and communications teams developed a virtual Book Club and a **Curious Crew** workshop series. WKAR provided free books to classrooms and partnered with community organizations to reach Head Start families. The **WKAR Family** video series continued its partnership with the College of Education to create new research-based at-home-learning tips for caregivers.

The educational series **Curious Crew** continues to challenge kids to explore science through hands-on learning activities. Episodes include **Curious About Careers** segments featuring young investigators exploring career possibilities by visiting women working in STEM-related professions.

Curious About Careers is also available as standalone shorts for broadcast and on-demand viewing online. **Curious Crew** and **Curious About Careers** are offered nationally each season through NETA.

The **Curious Crew Roadshow** visits neighborhood libraries, schools, fairs and community events to guide hands-on science investigations.

Political Coverage

Political coverage in 2019-2020 included the **2020 Michigan State of the State** address and the annual **Evening with the Governor** series. WKAR distributes these specials to commercial and public media stations across Michigan.

Off the Record has a history dating back to 1972 as Michigan's only statewide political talk show, with 52 new weekly episodes each season.

The **WKAR World** channel aired congressional hearings and other special coverage live and with primetime repeats in 2019-2020.

WKAR Originals

WKAR served as the presenting station for **J Schwanke's Life in Bloom** and **Food Over 50**. These two how-to shows are distributed through APT and air on **Create TV** nationwide.

BackStage Pass debuted its tenth season in October 2019. The season showcased musical performances including Joshua Powell, Brother Else, Tishmal and more. **BackStage Pass** is distributed by NETA and airs in TV markets across the country.

Community Engagement

In 2019-2020, WKAR connected with our community at events drawing nearly 7,000 fans of all ages.

Community screenings included the documentaries and films in the **Indie Lens Pop-Up** series, as well as several **PBS KIDS** events.



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PBS Kids Day at WKAR in January 2020 welcomed over 1,500 guests to celebrate PBS KIDS, explore hands-on activities presented by WKAR partners, and pose for photos with popular PBS KIDS character **CLIFFORD!**

WKAR could also be found in the community at the Great Dairy Adventure, MSU Science Festival, literacy events, Boys and Girls Club, school science fairs, teen parent workshops, book giveaways, and more.

When public events were curtailed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, WKAR moved in-person film screenings to virtual events via the online platform OVEE. OVEE allows audience members to interact with each other and panelists around each film.

Leadership - Local to National

WKAR is fortunate to have a leadership role to give our local community a voice within the public broadcasting system nationally. WKAR Director of Broadcasting and General Manager Susi Elkins serves on the PBS Board of Directors, on the board of America's Public Television Stations (APTS), the PBS Children's Media & Education Station Leadership Committee, and the MAPB Board of Directors. Additional WKAR staff members serve on national committees and share expertise through presentations at public broadcasting and industry conferences and exhibitions.

COVID-19 Response

In March, the COVID-19 pandemic reached Michigan. Michigan State University, home to WKAR, transitioned to online-only classes and directed those deemed as non-essential employees to work from home. WKAR's 24/7 broadcast and digital operations did not miss a beat. Within days, WKAR developed a production model that enabled production to continue while following health and safety guidelines set by MSU, the State of Michigan, and the Centers for Disease Control.

Essential on-site staff helped develop safety protocols and followed them to the letter. Other staff set up work-from-home spaces. Without missing a beat, WKAR was able to provide critical information and programming to reach the most vulnerable in our community - the elderly, the sick, the isolated, and children and parents who are home and struggling.

"COVID 19: Answers and Insights," hosted by CNN analyst and MSU faculty member Shawn Turner, debuted before the end of March. The new public affairs series provided context and critical resources related to the public health crisis. Guests were from the highest levels of leadership in the state.

WKAR also streamed live press conferences held by the governor and other Michigan officials as they provided updates on the state response to COVID-19.

In Conclusion

Collaboration, innovation and community support. These are strengths that, through routine days and times of crisis, WKAR television draws upon to fulfill its mission to connect people to powerful ideas that inspire personal growth, exploration of our world and positive change.



2020 LOCAL CONTENT AND SERVICE REPORT STORIES OF IMPACT



WKAR and VOCES

In the Fall of 2019, WKAR partnered with Latino Public Broadcasting to present broadcast specials and film screenings with community conversation around the film series VOCES.

Friday evenings in September 2019 featured broadcasts of four specials from the VOCES series: *Raúl Juliá: The World's a Stage*; *Porvenir, Texas*; *Adios Amor: The Search for Maria Moreno*; and *The Pushouts*.

On an evening in October that Fall, WKAR screened the film *American Masters - Raúl Juliá: The World's a Stage* for an audience of WKAR fans and supporters and MSU film students at WKAR's largest studio.

The evening was made possible with funding from Latino Public Broadcasting and local partners MSU's The Doc Lab, MSU Office of Cultural and Academic Transitions, and MSU Chicano/Latino Studies Program.

Following the film, the audience was treated to a Q&A session with Ben DeJesus, producer/director of the film. John Valadez, filmmaker and MSU professor of practice in the College of Communication Arts and Sciences, served as host and moderator.

The Q&A session was also streamed live, making it possible for people across the community to enjoy the discussion.

WKAR also partnered with VOCES to screen *The Pushouts* for a local high school audience. Martin Flores, who appears in the film, was in attendance and gave an inspirational speech for the students.

Following the presentation, WKAR hosted a small and intimate lunch for students with Martin Flores. Students also received a VOCES/WKAR water bottle and bracelet, as well as a free book.



WKAR Impact through Screenings and Open Discussion

During Fall 2019 and Winter 2020, WKAR presented a number of **Indie Lens Pop-Up** events, featuring Independent Lens films such as **First Rainbow Coalition**. This series allows WKAR to connect with our community by featuring films about diverse topics followed by meaningful community dialogue. Discussion panelists include experts from Michigan State University and community organizations. After the pandemic, Indie Lens Pop-up events were moved to a virtual platform.



Political Programs Offers Insight into Key Michigan Issues

Off the Record, anchored by Senior Capitol Correspondent Tim Skubick has a history dating back to 1972 as Michigan's only statewide political talk show. 52 new weekly episodes plus specials are produced by WKAR each season and offer viewers key insight as well as meaningful dialogue via social media. WKAR political coverage in 2019-2020 also included the **2020 Michigan State of the State** address and the annual **Evening with the Governor** series (pictured).

Curious Crew takes STEM on the Road and Goes Virtual

WKAR's original kids science program, **Curious Crew**, features Michigan students and host Rob Stephenson as they take a hands-on approach to investigating principles of science. **Curious Crew** took those investigations on the road to engage with the WKAR community at events such as local elementary schools and the Capital Area District Libraries. When public events were curtailed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, WKAR Director of Education Robin Pizzo created an online workshop series to continue to bring **Curious Crew** investigations to young learners.





This past year, WKAR helped children learn to read, get excited about science, and be ready for school.

We expanded our programs and specials to showcase Michigan Capital Region talents and professions, and we addressed timely issues.

We increased awareness around local issues, provided discussions, and featured world-class MSU researchers.

As a result, membership and viewership are up and our audiences are more diverse.

“WKAR is a highly valued asset to our community and we could not be happier to collaborate with WKAR”

April Clobes
President, Michigan State University
Federal Credit Union

“WKAR provides meaningful platforms that generate healthy community interactions. There is nothing more important to our work than developing strong relationships with community partners. I proudly served as a member of WKAR’s Community Advisory Board for several years and Consumers Energy recognizes the significant influence that WKAR has on our community. We treasure the opportunity to partner with this station. We are the proud sponsors of WKAR’s programming which helps deliver research-driven, curriculum-based content to our youngest community members.”

Caroline Bloodworth
Secretary/Treasurer,
Consumers Energy

“For almost forty years I have been supporting WKAR Public Media and have enjoyed being not only entertained but inspired by the impactful work of the station.”

Barb Sawyer-Koch
MSU Trustee Emerita

WKAR plays an essential role in Michigan’s Capital Region and at Michigan State University as a key source for quality children’s educational programming; as a showcase for local artists, musicians, and nonprofit community organizations; and offering a variety of engaging forums for community members to share their talents, interests, concerns, and cultural backgrounds.