Northern Community Radio
Annual Report 2019/2020

John Bauer
Dan Houg
Seven months in, 2020 has been “different” in the way that some of us say, “That’s different” but mean something else. All of us – Northern Community Radio and everyone else – are getting through 2020 as best we can. In our case, it means without most of the volunteers who have always created so much of our programming, without some of the businesses that have supported us for years, and without being able to share the in-person connections and fun experiences that bring us together as a community. We miss all of our friends, all of the events, but we are OK.

When things changed drastically in March, the staff at KAXE and KBXE flew into action. Everyone who could operate the station took on-air shifts. Heidi Holtan devised and implemented an extra hour of the Morning Show. When Green Cheese trivia maxed out our web stream, Dan Houg made sure we had more capacity. We added Extra Cheese for kids and families during the stay-at-home order. Sarah Bignall devised ways to figure out technical operations from home. Brett Carter disappeared entirely, hosting literally everything from his house. He and Sarah put the programs our intrepid volunteers produced from home into formats we could use.

With help from the Blandin Foundation, Dan was able to purchase and install equipment to help us connect live from home into formats we could use. Even as we cope with the present, we are also making plans for the future. Our staff and board are engaged in a major strategic planning process with consultant Ann Glumac. The board has been meeting by Zoom and focusing on increasing its diversity.

Finally, a BIG THANK YOU! Through it all, members – who are also dealing with the pandemic in their own families and communities - have found time to give encouragement, participation, and financial support. Thanks for making it OK. We are sincerely grateful.

Maggie Montgomery
Maggie Montgomery, General Manager

Julie Crabb
Julie Crabb, President

Thank you so much!

Karen from Bemidji
We wanted to let you know how much we appreciate your contributions to our community! You are an excellent interviewer...our favorite! Your skills stack up with the very best. And you have been doing it for years. Thank the entire staff for us for keeping us informed and entertained. We listened to the Sunday Jazz show with David John. Not sure if that is the correct spelling but man, he can put on a jazz show. I guess I should figure out KAXE's website so I could tell him myself. I'm so slow to embrace the social media phenomen. In fact, I just signed up for Facebook and now I'm really scared! In short, YOU ROCK!!

Albert & Holly D. in Grand Rapids
I LOVE Kaxe!!! I'm listening right now to Katie Carter and the discussion about Build The Bridge Bemidji (sadly I only caught the end of it). So hopeful, positive, and energizing! Wonderful to have tools to work with to try to effect positive change. And the music choices are awesome too! Thank you so much!

Sharon M. from Grand Rapids Players
I can't imagine where our organization would be without the support you've shown us, all along our journey!
Social Media

Top 5 Web Posts

- A TRAVELING NURSE ON THE NAVAJO NATION IN ARIZONA: LISTENING TO KARLA THEILEN
- AREA VOICES: BLAIR TREUER, TEXTILE ARTIST
- MATT GROSE: A RURAL EDUCATION LEADER FOR UNCERTAIN TIMES
- FUNERAL DIRECTOR KEVIN CEASE ON GRIEVING DURING A PANDEMIC
- TEN FINNS CREAMERY IN MENAHA - 1ST MN FARM PRODUCING MILK W/ A2 PROTEIN ONLY

So many ways to keep connected!

In these times of physical distancing, social media has been a great way for us to keep connected to listeners and community members. We've picked up some followers over the past year as well.

Top COVID Posts

- ANDERSON FABRICS IN BLACKDUCK GEARS UP TO MAKE A LOT OF FACEMASKS
- DR. MICHAEL OSTERHOLM ON COVID-19: "WE WILL GET THROUGH THIS BUT WE'LL NEVER GO BACK TO NORMAL"
- COVID-19 AND 2020 GRADUATES: EMMA JOHNSON FROM GRAND RAPIDS HIGH SCHOOL
- CELEBRATING 2020 GRADUATES: NORTHLAND REMER VALEDICTORIAN/NATIVE LEADER

Morning Show Story
(focus by region)

- NE MN/KAXE Area 32%
- NW MN/KBXE Area 14%
- Brainerd Area 4%
- Ely Area 2%
- Everyone (all areas) 49%

Thank you KAXE for the ongoing coverage, and the extra work from all the staff during this extraordinary time. I especially enjoyed Brett Carter’s interview with Kevin Cease of Cease Family Funeral Homes. Very uplifting, informative, generous and kind.

I also enjoyed Heidi and John’s interview with state attorney general Keith Ellison. Helpful information from a knowledgeable public servant, delivered in a uniquely KAXE manner. AG Ellison was right on target when he talked about the vital role that KAXE is playing.

There is no doubt in my mind that the presence of KAXE improves the quality of life in our community in a wide variety of tangible and intangible ways. Thanks for all you are doing to keep us informed, grounded and connected.

2019 Green Cheese Royalty

Aitkin Chicken Coop (Roy & Donna Liljequist)

Simmon G. from Grand Rapids

Follower Gains over 2019

Facebook | What We’re Reading
+77

Twitter
+126

Instagram
+237

Facebook | General
+496

Facebook | Season Watch
+1,631
Member & Business Support

A note from John Bauer - Development Director

With all that's been happening in these last several months, you might think that our membership numbers would be down. However, we've seen the opposite. We just completed a low-key summer membership drive. We gained 31 new members, plus we heard from many renewing members and upgrading sustaining members. Looking at our monthly income versus last fiscal year, we have seen an increase nearly every month, with April being the highest gain, at 30% more income than the previous April!

Sustaining membership continues to be a big part of our contributions, with 45% of members choosing to give this way. We keep inching ever closer to our goal of having half of our members who are sustainers.

The financial numbers tell one story, but we've also heard our members' voices more than ever. Beautiful, hand-written post cards and letters, plus emails and comments on social media, telling us what KAXE/KBXE means to them right now.

I strongly believe we have become the voice for northern Minnesota. The response from listeners has been overwhelmingly positive and appreciative. I believe that businesses will now, more than ever, understand the important role NCR and beyond throughout this crisis.

There's no doubt it will set us back, but we must look at this as an opportunity. I am so proud of what Northern Community Radio has done for the communities we serve, and beyond throughout this crisis.

* cards from listener and members during COVID-19

News & Public Affairs Director

Kari Hedlund

Updates from News & Music Directors

Managing and creating The Morning Show at KAXE/KBXE is always a balancing act. Forgive my language but especially “in these times”. You thought I was going to swear, didn’t you? Believe me, I do a lot of that, just off-mic and not in print!

Since the pandemic hit in March there’s been, well, MORE. I don’t think I’ve ever learned more about Bemidji High School and the University of MNI. It’s a juggle between local content and NPR News that is producing incredible journalism right now. Balancing things like whether an uplifting local story will be better than another COVID-13 update reminding us to wear masks and wash our hands while we sing Happy Birthday three times. Both are important.

What gets to me, day in and day out, is not being able to do more. We have a dream to create a local newsroom so we could cover stories that are complex and need multiple sources, fact-checking and professionalism that takes time. What do I mean by that? After George Floyd was murdered and the country and world erupted in racial protests I really wanted to cover racism in rural places in depth. Interviews with people of color, with white people feeling threatened – with local protesters and organizations that work on issues of diversity, inclusion and equity.

We did our best with what we had but it could have been more local and more in-depth. We want to cover local government throughout our region and be the watchdog that media is supposed to be. But our region is vast and our staff is small.

I want to build a newsroom at KAXE/KBXE especially now – as local media is crucial. Statewide media tends to marginalize or think of rural stories as quaint. But how?

2020, what a weird year. This is normally the space we use to talk about our respective roles at KAXE/KBXE – but nothing about this year is the same. So, instead, I’m taking this opportunity to give a big ‘Cheese SHOUT OUT to all of my co-workers. Because of COVID-19 and family, I’ve had to step away in some capacity over the past months and I want to thank everyone who has consistently stepped in for me on the air – Katie, Jennifer and John, THANK YOU. It has been really fun to listen to their interpretation of New Music, as is of course different than mine. And isn’t that what’s awesome about KAXE/KBXE? At most other stations, even if the Music Director isn’t there, the playlists stay the same. But here, we have individuals hosting who each choose what they play, and that is one of the beautiful aspects of independent radio, my friends.

As far as music goes, there are two main conversations happening within the industry: the pandemic and the challenges it’s presenting for venues and musicians; and the inclusion in radio, or rather, the lack of. I wrote about diversity in last year’s annual report and how we work to consistently present a varied and representative playlist. This continues in 2020, and we are working harder than ever to be sure we are inclusive and doing what we can in our corner of the world to have equal representation. Going forward, we fully expect our fellow NonCommercial radio stations to do better as well. We can always do better.

Heidi Holtan

Music Director

Heidi Holtan

News & Public Affairs Director

Music Director

Kari Hedlund

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A note from Dan Houg - Engineer

Starting backwards from Saturday, July 18th, 2020, listeners in Brainerd, Ely, and the Iron Range noticed we were off the air after storms rolled through. A combination of 30 year old components coupled with a probably lightning strike destroyed a component deep inside the transmitter (photo). We had a spare and we back on the air by the afternoon.

Nationwide shortages of equipment used for remote broadcasting have slowed the procurement of our own equipment down but through a grant from the Blandin Foundation, additional staff can broadcast from home as well as do more audio production at home.

The tower project, slowed by administrative and legal dealings, is on track for construction in 2021. This coincides with a nationwide slowdown of tower construction crews for foundation and erection so the extension of the project to 2021 was inevitable.

Our signal from the Bemidji Studio out to the KBXE Transmitter located in Shevlin traveled over a microwave link using the Bemidji Federal Building as a high location for the microwave dish. That building is being decommissioned and so we have formed a land-based Studio To Transmitter link using new and rather expensive equipment. So far, that is working well.

I continue involvement with the national Association of Public Radio Engineers (APRE) and due to COVID we had cancelled the 2020 Public Radio Engineering Conference held in Las Vegas. The APRE is looking at alternatives to holding an in-person national conference for 2021.

Since our last annual meeting, we had the Great Sewer Back of 2019 whereby our crawlspace filled with 4” of raw sewage after a horizontal drilling company bored directly through our building sewer line as they laid fiber optic cable, perfectly intersecting the sewer line. This resulted in the building being pretty much evacuated due to the stench and significant loss of stored equipment and archival material.

These annual updates usually recount what’s happened over the past year and I usually start with saying “It’s hard to believe another year has gone by.” This year I will change that to “It’s hard to believe only one year has gone by.”

Prior to the pandemic, I was in charge of the day-to-day programming and scheduling of our on-air programs, web content and more! Since March, I have been doing all my regular duties at my home which means lots of emails, phone calls and zooms with staff and I am now creating a lot more on-air programming. While my kids worked on virtual school work (thank goodness the school year is over!) and our dog has wondered why we are all home all day and why is he going on ANOTHER walk. If you listen closely, I am sure you can hear my dog and kids making noise.

We know as COVID19 hit our state and the nation there was a role to play in providing factual information, comfort and a little entertainment as we navigated these unprecedented times. The decision was made to make drastic changes to our on-air programming. The biggest being at that of the content would change that to it’s hard to believe only one year has gone by. "This year I will change that to “It’s hard to believe only one year has gone by.”

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A HUGE thank you to Heidi for her tireless work on the morning show. Thanks to Jennifer, John, Katie, Maggie, Brett and Dan for stepping up with additional programming. Thanks to Kari for being flexible and patient as we figure out how to get programming created remotely. Thanks to Penny to taking over rundowns and logs for me and finally thanks to Peggy for posting all the great stories coming out of the Morning Show to our website.

While it has been ALOT of hard work and long hours, we find purpose and gratitude in the kind words we have been hearing from listeners. We have had so many meaningful and important conversations including speaking with state officials like Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan, and to recent college and high school graduates who’s senior years have been drastically different. All of these conversations big and small connect us to our community.

Other notable items from the past year. We put on our final Great Northern Radio Show to our website. Other important moments include speaking with state officials like Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan, and to recent college and high school graduates who’s senior years have been drastically different. All of these conversations big and small connect us to our community.

Noteable items from the past year.

This has been a different editing and production process and has been fun to be part of. The 1st two episodes are out with more to come in the future.

At the end of June, we launched our first intentionally produced podcast “Power in the Wilderness.” This is produced by Aaron Brown and Karl Jacob and tells the story of Hibbing Mayor Victor Powers. While we have had podcasts of our Morning Show segments, this is the first time we have created content as podcast series.

This has been a different editing and production process and has been fun to be part of. The 1st two episodes are out with more to come in the future.

Musings from home

Some of the voices on programs like Area Voices, Youth in Radio, Boozhoo Nana Boozhoo and more!
Northern Community Radio had a clean audit. Its financial condition is good. Net assets at the end of FY19 were $1,643,194, which is $49,054 less than last year.

Unrestricted net assets for the year increased by $13,560. Cash and cash equivalents decreased by $105,082. Cash and cash equivalents at the end of FY19 were $471,943. Operating revenue and expenses for the 2019 fiscal year were very similar to 2018. The full audit is available online at kaxe.org.

Maggie Montgomery, General Manager
Jennifer Barr, Member Services Manager
John Bauer, Development Director
Heidi Holton, News and Public Affairs Director
Dan Houg, Engineer
Penny Holcomb, Business Manager
Peggy Stevens, Development Associate, Legacy Coordinator
Sarah Johnson, Director of Operations
Brett Carter, Producer/Volunteer Coordinator
Katie Carter, Producer
Scott Hall, Producer/Senior Correspondent
Kari Hedlund, Music Director
John Latimer, Staff Phenologist
Julie Crabb, Meadowlands, President
Charlie Parson, Puposky, Vice President
Christina Brown, Grand Rapids, Secretary
Jack Shelton, Bemidji, Treasurer
Doug Baker, Grand Rapids
Chris Bergquist, Grand Rapids
Tom Legg, Aitkin
Kent Montgomery, Brainerd
David John Scribner, Bemidji

Since 1976
91.7 KAXE | Northern Community Radio | 90.5 KBXE

In a typical year, you hear volunteers on KAXE/KBXE every day as some of the best parts of our programming. And it will be wonderful to have our Green Cheese, Morning Show, and On The River and on America Avenue hosts leading the way again when the pandemic is under control. Until then, thanks so much to our volunteers who have continued to support us in their own ways, through cards and letters, through production of programming, through phone calls and messages, and through continued membership.

It’s amazing to have such an outpouring of positive comments from a group of people we’ve had to ask to stay at home. Covid-19 has also shut down our usual slate of events which means a lot of behind-the-scenes volunteers haven’t been called upon as usual, and don’t even look at the mess the music libraries have become. Almost daily, there are reminders of how much we miss our volunteers, and thankfully, almost just as often, we have some sort of safe contact that keeps us going.

Thanks for wearing your masks and physically distancing during the pandemic. The sooner we get through this, the sooner we will be happy to open our doors and show listeners how great our volunteers are.

2019/2020 Award Winners

Community Impact
Lt Gov Peggy Flanagan

Grant has been our staff photographer and has beautifully captured memories of Northern Community Radio event. His past pictures have been a warm reminder of good times.

2018/19 Winner: Sam Militch
2018/19 Winner: Not awarded

Online Artistry
Grant Frashier

Larry has worked tirelessly behind the scenes with Maggie and Dan to help legal council and documents for our new tower and transmitter project for KAXE.

2018/19 Winner: Dave Kne

Shining Star
Larry Kimball

David John jumped in with both feet to pick up volunteer shifts all over the place including producing programming from home. He joined the board of directors as well. David is also very involved in MANY other organizations in the Bemidji area.

2018/19 Winner: Kyle and Tracy Bartholomew

Volunteer of the Year
David John

Michael is a familiar voice to KAXE/KBXE. A couple of years ago, he started producing Stay Human. A program that is a combination of poetry, music and conversation.

2018/19 Winner: Not awarded

On-Air Artistry
Michael Goldberg

Michael is a familiar voice to KAXE/KBXE. A couple of years ago, he started producing Stay Human. A program that is a combination of poetry, music and conversation.

2018/19 Winner: Kyle and Tracy Bartholomew

Ampers Station of the Year