

WTTW COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD

MINUTES of the
PUBLIC MEETING of the
WTTW Community Advisory Board (CAB)
Tuesday, April 22, 2014
WTTW Studios
5400 N St. Louis Avenue
Chicago, Illinois

The Chair called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

Introductions were made by the following present members of the Community Advisory Board:

Joseph Morris, Chairman
Ava Holly Berland, Secretary
Yvette Brown
Jeff Berkowitz
Helen Bracey
Yvette Brown
Susan Buckner
Leatrice Campbell
Barbara Cragan
Kimberly Frost
Linda Jackson
Dr. Ron Kurzejka
Lennette Meredith
Sharon Meroni
Mary Lou Mockus
Heather Penn
Donna Rook
Maggie Steinz
Renee Summers
Rita Tandaric
Felicia Townsend
Christopher Vaughn

In addition, the following persons were present and introduced themselves:

Dan Soles, Senior Vice President of WWCI and Chief Television Content Officer
V.J. McAleer, Senior Vice President of WWCI for Production and Community Partnerships and Management Liaison
Michael W. Gonzalez, Trustee of WCCI
Yvonne Davis, Administrative Assistant to Chicago Tonight and Staff Liaison

Finally, the following members of the public were present:

Nneka Erundu
Annette Kurzejka
Matthew Rarey

Mrs. Kurzejka, proud mother of five, stated that three of her children are graduating this year.

Finding the presence of a quorum, and noting that this is the annual, and the bi-monthly, meeting, the Chair called for the election of CAB officers and members whose terms were expiring.

Annual Election of CAB Officers

Lennette Meredith, Chair of the Membership and Nominating Committee, reported the nomination of Joseph Morris to serve as Chairman. There were no further nominations from the floor. Dr. Kurzejka moved to close nominations; Mr. Vaughn seconded the motion; and Mr. Morris was unanimously elected.

Ms. Meredith reported the nominations of Sharon Meroni, Mary Lou Mockus and Christopher Vaughn to serve as Vice Chairman. There were no further nominations from the floor. Ms. Cragan moved to close nominations; Ms. Steinz seconded the motion. The nominees spoke; members cast their votes, which were tabulated by Ms. Cragan and Dr. Kurzejka; and Ms. Mockus was elected.

Ms. Meredith reported the nomination of Ava Holly Berland to serve as Secretary. There were no further nominations from the floor. Mr. Vaughn moved to close nominations; Ms. Steinz seconded the motion; and Ms. Berland was unanimously elected.

Annual Election of CAB Members (9 Seats)

Ms. Meredith reported that nine members' terms were expiring in 2014 (Helen Bracey, Susan Buckner, Barbara Cragan, Linda Jackson, Sharon Meroni, Maggie Steinz, Donna Rook, Norma Sutton and Dr. Dorene Wiese).

Given the resignations of Ms. Rook and Dr. Wiese (as well as Jim McClure, whose term will expire in 2015), the Chair stated that there are three vacancies. Ms. Meredith reported that there are three pending applications, which the Committee will review and report on at the next meeting.

As for the seven remaining incumbents -- there were no objections, and they were elected to serve another term.

Approval of Minutes

The Chair requested approval of the March 2014 Minutes. Ms. Meroni moved the minutes be approved; Dr. Kurzejka seconded the motion; and, the minutes were adopted unanimously.

Revision and Adoption of the Agenda

The Chair requested revision and adoption of the Agenda. Ms. Cragan so moved; Ms. Mockus seconded the motion; and, the Agenda was revised and adopted unanimously.

Discussion with Dan Soles, Senior Vice President and Chief Television Content Officer

The Chair introduced Dan Soles, and asked him to address the station's programming decisions and acquisitions.

Mr. Soles initiated the discussion by stating that he was born and raised in New York City on public broadcasting fare, and that for the past 19 years he has been in Chicago -- which he described as a "kinder, gentler NYC." Mr. Soles stated that he has worked in public broadcasting since 1992, and at WTTW since 1995.

Mr. Soles stated that programming is carried on a variety of web-based platforms, and, of course, is carried on WTTW's main channel (11). Channel 11 has been on the air since 1955, and thus will celebrate its 60 year anniversary in 2015. Mr. Soles further stated that programming is carried on three digital sub-channels. The sub-channels consist of WTTW Prime (which appeals to mature audiences, competes with other broadcast and cable programming, and is an alternative to the children's daytime schedule of Channel 11), WTTW Create/World (which during the daytime hours, provides lifestyle programming, such as cooking, instructional and travel shows; and during the evening hours, provides independent and non-fiction documentaries, including the recent Local USA), and WTTW VMe (which provides Spanish language children programming in the morning, public affairs in the afternoon, and period dramas in the evening).

As a DirectTV subscriber, Ms. Mockus stated that she felt "deprived," because she cannot access WTTW's digital sub-channel programming. Mr. Soles explained that, unlike cable providers Comcast and RCN that carry all of WTTW's channels, the satellite providers' national agreements only require the carriage of a single digital channel. The only solace Mr. Soles could offer -- raise the issue with the satellite provider.

As a public broadcasting station, Mr. Soles explained that WTTW pays PBS annual dues (4.5 million dollars) for common carriage rights, which include 12 hours of children programming during the day, and 500 hours of, and a la carte, prime time programming. Such arrangement ensures that all public broadcast stations air prime time fare, such as Antique Roadshow and Masterpiece Theatre, at the same night at the same time. Unlike prime time, however, WTTW has the discretion in scheduling children programming.

In addition to PBS programming, Mr. Soles explained that he and V.J. McAleer collaborate in considering other programming sources (*e.g.*, American Public Television and BBC), as well as deciding on the viability of independently produced programming. In contrast to produced programs/series, Mr. Soles explained the difficulties in considering and promoting programming "ideas" (the timing and funding it takes to bring such concepts to fruition). In this regard, Mr. Soles noted "Nature Cat" as an example, which will be produced by local Spiffy Pictures and has received PBS' green light for funding. According to Mr. Soles, that series is still in its infancy (the first complete manuscript is not yet finished). Nevertheless, despite the difficulties, Mr. Soles stated that some ideas do eventually get produced and aired. Ms. Campbell can attest to that. She stated that, in the 1980s, she presented an idea to WTTW management for programming regarding family life on the lakefront. She further stated that WTTW thanked her for her idea, and that the station later produced and aired programming that captured her idea.

In response to the Chair's question as to whether there was a philosophy or strategy in programming selection, Mr. Soles explained that selections are driven by an "explorer" model (*i.e.*, programming that sparks viewers' curiosity and inspires them to think about and engage with the world about them).

The Chair asked Mr. Soles if any written guidelines/ground rules exist for public broadcast programming. Mr. Soles and Mr. McAleer answered that, in 1988, WTTW prepared written journalistic guidelines and ethical principles that are still in effect and have “withstood the test of time.” At the Chair’s request, Mr. Soles promised that copies of which will be provided prior to the next meeting.

Ms. Rook raised with Mr. Soles the CAB’s Violence Proposal, developed by the Program Committee and adopted by the full CAB, which included recommendations of videos as well as potential panelists. Ms. Campbell and Ms. Summers spoke of CAB’s sense that its Violence Proposal was ignored by management and urged Mr. Soles to understand CAB’s concerns that violence, self-defense, the protection of rights and related topics are on-going and urgent. Mr. Soles stated that he would review the proposal, particularly with respect to the inclusion of 30-minute videos. Ms. Cragan added that the proposal was balanced and designed with flexibility, to include full programs as well as segments on “Chicago Tonight.”

Mr. Berkowitz’ asked about the annual budget and audience numbers for “Chicago Tonight” and “Check Please. Mr. Soles stated that “Chicago Tonight” costs several million dollars and averages 50,000 homes. (Mr. Gonzalez added that the 50,000 figure does not capture viewers who access programming segments through web based platforms.) Mr. Soles stated that the 13 “Check Please” episodes are far less expensive to produce, that costs vary with each show, and that each show averages over 50,000 on Fridays and over 55,000 on Saturdays. In response to Ms. Frost’s question regarding the web-based costs, Mr. Soles indicated that the above figures do not include such expenses.

Responding to Ms. Summer’s question regarding program submissions, Mr. Soles reiterated that presenting programming ideas is “tricky” given the variables and potential costs. Mr. Soles stated that it is far better to present developed program material, which if WTTW determines is viable and meets its “explorer model,” its staff can work with and massage. In this connection, Mr. Soles recognized that Ms. Summer has done just that and has recommended developed works in the past.

Ms. Campbell stated that CAB has accomplished and talented members who are representative of the viewing audience and could make a meaningful contribution to WTTW. Ms. Campbell, and Ms. Summers later, expressed their frustration, in not feeling a “connection” and not “knowing their role.” Mr. Soles stated that CAB provides and should continue to provide its valuable insights, which are and will be considered carefully by management. Mr. Soles added that, as a self-governing body, it would be inappropriate for him to assign CAB specific roles. The Chair noted that, notwithstanding CAB’s independence, it would welcome the management’s referral of questions on which management seeks CAB’s advice and would give serious consideration to putting such questions on the CAB Agenda.

Ms. Townsend asked if WTTW takes its programming into and engages the community. Mr. Soles stated that the station presents screenings with discussions at various locations, including monthly such programs at Chicago’s Cultural Center, all of which are listed on its online calendar. Mr. Soles stated that the station is enhancing its community outreach and engagement efforts, and hopefully will increase such events.

Finally, in response to Mr. Berkowitz’ question whether he would be troubled *if* the hosts of “Chicago Tonight leaned left, Mr. Soles stood by their credible and journalistic integrity who strive to present unbiased and balanced reporting and who invite those with opposing viewpoints.

Trustee’s Liaison:

In Barbara Proctor’s absence, no report was presented.

However, Trustee Michael W. Gonzalez was present and introduced himself. Mr. Gonzalez stated that he is an engineer, business owner, community activist, and that he has served on the Board of Trustees for the past nine years. As a member of the Board of Trustees, Mr. Gonzales stated that he has found the experience to be “most interesting and challenging;” and, as a consumer of WTTW programming, Mr. Gonzalez stated that he enjoys viewing programs over and over again and regularly texts friends, family and associates to alert them of upcoming programs. Mr. Gonzalez also stated that he appreciated the discussion about satellite providers’ unwillingness to carry all WTTW digital sub-channels, and encouraged subscribers to express their frustration and lodge their complaints with their providers.

In response to the Chair’s question regarding the status of the Board of Trustees’ leadership, Mr. Gonzalez declined to give details.

Finally, Mr. Gonzalez stated that he would send CAB’s regards and warm wishes to Barbara Proctor, and that he would be willing to attend future CAB meetings, if invited, as he has always enjoys his interaction and dialogue with CAB. The Chair assured Mr. Gonzalez his presence will always be welcome. The Chair added that he would send Mr. Gonzalez the Agenda in advance of the June meeting.

Management Liaison

V.J. McAleer stated that he did not have much to add following the discussion with Mr. Soles.

He added that he looks forward to the April 25, 2014 premiere of “My Chicago,” following “Check Please.” (At the March CAB meeting, Mr. McAleer described the series as a talk show in a car that will explore Chicago in a format similar to “Check Please,” with various residents showcasing their neighborhoods/areas of interest.) Mr. McAleer added that April 24, 2014, marks the 30th anniversary of “Chicago Tonight.”

Reports of Officers and Committees

1) Membership and Nominating Committee

The Committee did not present a report.

The Chair asked Ms. Meredith to again chair the committee; Ms. Meredith agreed; and CAB unanimously approved her appointment.

2) Program Committee

The Committee did not present a report. Although the committee generally does not meet formally, Ms. Cragan stated that it would schedule a meeting for July 22, 2014 to discuss ideas for 2014-15. (Yvonne agreed to inquire about meeting room availability.)

The Chair asked Ms. Cragan to again chair the committee; Ms. Cragan agreed; and CAB unanimously approved her appointment.

3) Outreach Committee

The Committee did not present a report. Ms. Rook, though resigning due to other commitments, expressed her support for and willingness to work with her successor. She further encouraged CAB to seek more diverse and increased participation, by bringing the survey to local campuses and other public sites.

Given Ms. Meroni’s experience with and ideas about social media and outreach, the Chair asked Ms. Meroni to chair the committee; Ms. Meroni agreed; and CAB unanimously approved her appointment.

4) Technology Committee

The Committee did not present a report. Ms. Brown, however, asked that the June/August Meeting include time for a Facebook discussion.

Ms. Brown stated that the "Response to Violence: Communities in Crisis," which she produced, will air on May 18, 2014 at 2:00 p.m. (Congrats and hats off to Yvette Brown, mark your calendars to watch or record.)

The Chair asked Ms. Brown to again chair the committee; Ms. Brown agreed; and CAB unanimously approved her appointment.

5) Committee on Cultural Research and Development

The Committee did not present a report. Mr. Berkowitz, however, stated that the Committee will schedule a meeting in May. If interested, contact Mr. Berkowitz at jbcg@aol.com.

The Chair asked Mr. Berkowitz to again chair the committee; Mr. Berkowitz agreed; and CAB unanimously approved his appointment.

6) Committee on Education

The Committee did not present a report.

Ms. Steinz, however, thanked all who attended the Midwest Robotics Competition, and noted that CAB submitted a proposal to include a program on such competition three years ago. Mr. Soles responded, stating that "Chicago Tonight" has aired segments on the competition. Ms. Mockus suggested that it would be interesting to follow a team/teams from the inception as they develop their robots through their participation in the competition.

Ms. Steinz stated that many members on the committee have extensive educational experience, that all other members are welcome to join, and that a meeting will be scheduled in the near future to discuss interesting projects (including an expansion of Spanish language closed captioning).

7) Secretary

The Secretary moved to adopt the revised December 2013 Minutes, copies of which were distributed prior to and at this meeting. She explained that the revised Minutes corrects those that were approved and adopted at the March 2014 meeting, which inadvertently omitted Ms. Frost who had been present at the December meeting. Ms. Mockus seconded the Secretary's motion, and, the revised December 2013 Minutes were adopted unanimously.

8) Vice Chairman

Newly elected Ms. Mockus stated that she was honored and happy to serve as the next Vice Chair. The Vice Chair committed to preparing an updated committee membership roster.

9) Chairman

The Chair commended WTTW's recent airing of religious historical documentaries, noting that religion is an important aspect of peoples' lives -- and though a difficult subject to present, WTTW has successfully found a way to shed light and build bridges with its programming. The Chair noted that he just completed watching the ten-hour series on Catholicism, and that WTTW was judicious in selecting the four hours to broadcast. He also noted that he enjoyed and found enlightening the recent five-part series "Simon Schama's The Story of the Jews." Mr. McAleer noted that the complete five-part series will air on June 1, 2014.

The Chair reminded CAB members of its responsibility to assist WTTW in fulfilling its mission to inform, inspire and meet the cultural and educational needs of its audience, and that everything it achieves ultimately culminates in

producing a better, more useful Annual Report -- which according to Mr. Gonzalez, the Board of Trustees carefully reads and considers.

Finally, the Chair reminded members that "Chicago Tonight" Executive Producer Mary Field is invited and will attend the June meeting. The Chair noted the difficulty in scheduling Hosts Phil Ponce and Carol Marin, given that CAB meets during the broadcast, and suggested we might need to meet on a different day or at a different hour to accommodate their schedule.

Old Business

None

New Business

The Chair called up the Chair's Resolution, introduced at the previous meeting, cautioning against the Federal Election Commission's regulation of broadcast candidate debates and election-related journalism. Ms. Meredith seconded the motion to adopt the resolution. After discussion in which Ms. Cragan, Ms. Berland and Mr. Berkowitz took part, the resolution was unanimously adopted.

Good and Welfare

As mentioned above, Dr. and Mrs. Ron Kurzejka will be celebrating three graduations.

The Chair and Mrs. Morris will celebrate their 20th anniversary on April 23, 2014, "sharing" their anniversary with Wrigley Field's 100th and the 450th anniversary of William Shakespeare's believed to be birthdate. The Chair reported his delight visiting yesterday the Newberry Library's new exhibit on Shakespeare in Chicago when Mrs. Morris pointed out a poster showing that that the cast of the very first production of what is now the Chicago Shakespeare Theatre, "Henry V," in August 1986, included Tony Mockus, Jr., the CAB's Vice Chair's son. Mr. McAleer noted that WTTW, as part of its contribution to the celebration of the 450th anniversary of the Bard, will air a program on "Shakespeare in Chicago."

Leatrice Campbell's daughter, whose home was destroyed by fire, moved out of the hotel into a temporary townhouse, while her home is reconstructed.

Susan Buckner's grandson, and Helen Bracey's grandnephew, graduated and will be pursuing his Masters, and her daughter and niece, respectively, has been named Dean of the City College of Nursing. (Susan and Helen are sisters, who knew?)

And, finally, Sharon Meroni hitched a ride to the meeting in a patrol car with Chicago's finest.

Next Public CAB Meeting: June 17, 2014 at 6:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Ava Holly Berland