We are moving forward with our partners on this fall’s The Idaho Debates. Like with the primary debates, this fall’s will be different than usual due to the coronavirus pandemic. Again, we will be doing one-on-one interviews with the candidates asking similar questions of each candidate and then editing their responses together so viewers can see the responses from all the candidates for that seat together. As a reminder, we only air debates for the stateside races, not individual legislative or local races. And candidates must demonstrate that they are conducting an active campaign, per our established rules. The three races we are planning are the 1st Congressional District candidates for Congress, the 2nd District Congressional candidates for Congress, and the U.S. Senate candidates for the position currently held by Senator Risch. As in the past, our partners in this project are League of Women Voters Education Fund, Idaho Press Club, McClure Center for Public Policy Research at U of I, BSU School of Public Policy, and ISU Political Science Department.

Each program will be broadcast on Idaho Public Television and available online at https://www.idahoptv.org/idahodebates.

- The 1st Congressional District debate is scheduled to air Friday, October 9, at 8 p.m.
- The 2nd Congressional District debate is scheduled to air Monday, October 12, at 8 p.m.
- The U.S. Senate debate is scheduled to air Friday, October 16, at 8 p.m.

PBS NewsHour provides coverage of the debate between the two major-party presidential candidates on October 15, 2020 at 7 p.m. Mountain time/6 p.m. Pacific time. Tune in or stream online.

Awards

IdahoPTV was recently awarded the 2020 Regional Edward R. Murrow Award for Outdoor Idaho “State of Change” in the News Documentary category. Way to go Bruce and the Outdoor Idaho crew! This month we will find out if it wins at the national level.
Congratulations to our talented team of videographers who were honored with 2020 Videographer Awards! Here are the programs that won and the people whose terrific work was honored:

**Awards of Excellence**
Idaho Experience “Out of the Shadows” – Documentary – Andy Lawless
Outdoor Idaho “Living With Wildfire” – Public Affairs – Forrest Burger

**Awards of Distinction**
Idaho Experience “Albion Normal” – Documentary – Aaron Kunz, Tammy Scardino, Forrest Burger, Troy Shreve
Idaho Public Television “Kent’s Story” – Image Spots – Troy Shreve
Science Trek “Mountain Goats, How to Count ...” – Educational/Children – Jay Krajic

**Honorable Mentions**
American Graduate TRIO – Educational/Institution – Andy Lawless
Idaho Reports “Race and the Gem State” – Talk Show – Melissa Davlin, Tammy Scardino, Al Hagenlock
Memorial Day: In Honor of Our Heroes – Video Production – Aaron Kunz, Jeff Tucker, Marv Hagadorn
Outdoor Idaho “Sawtooths on My Mind” – Information – Jay Krajic, Forrest Burger, Lauren Melink, Peter Morrill

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**In the Community**

**Personal Development Webinars for Teachers**
IdahoPTV and MontanaPBS have joined together for “Tech Talk Tuesday,” a monthly virtual discussion about teaching and learning with technology. The webinars are hosted by Kari Wardle and Nikki Vradenburg, public media educators who are tech nerds and former classroom teachers! Webinars are held the last Tuesday of each month and feature teachers from both states sharing strategies, tips and tricks, and real world solutions for integrating technology in your classroom. Tech Talk Tuesdays are all about teachers talking about teaching and learning with technology! All Tech Talks will be recorded and archived on YouTube.

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**3rd Annual Age of Agility Online Summit**

In this time of rapidly changing economic standards and education delivery methods, business, education and policy leaders from across the state will share insights and innovations to ensure Idahoans thrive in our future workforce. The featured speaker is Governor Brad Little.

IdahoPTV producer Bill Manny will be moderating the City Club of Southern Idaho’s (Magic Valley) event on October 19 called “The Role of the Media in a Polarized Society.” Panelists include IdahoPTV producer Melissa Davlin, long-time journalist and publisher of the Ridenbaugh Press Randy Stapilus, and Times News publisher Matt Sandberg.

“Barns of Idaho”

—Airs Thursday, October 15, at 8 p.m.

When the Outdoor Idaho staff kicked around the idea of doing a show about barns in our state, we had no idea what kind of reaction we would get from our viewers. So, we decided to put a feeler out on Facebook. Boy, did we ever get some great feedback. Because, like preservationist Frank Eld says, “Everyone loves a barn!”

Forrest Burger says, “The response to the idea was almost overwhelming. And, more importantly, there were some great tips we got about barns that we’ve been pursuing ever since.” Idaho was built on agriculture and farming, and barns have always played a vital role in that history. Although we’re not able to highlight all of the outstanding barns in our great state, we’re doing our best to focus on some interesting ones and the stories that surround them.

In new video shorts, host Joan Cartan-Hansen tours our solar “neighborhood” to discover facts about planets, moons and exoplanets, and to measure the length of a day on planets other than Earth. Each month, Science Trek explores subjects with short videos available on the Science Trek website (scienctrek.org), YouTube and PBS LearningMedia. The Science Trek website has facts, games, links and lesson plans.
Idaho in Session Gets Technology Upgrades for New Legislative Session

It may seem a little early to think about the upcoming legislative session (which officially starts in December with the organizational session), but Idaho Public Television tech staff are already hard at work on major upgrades that will allow for coverage of the 2021 session in new and better ways. Our partners at the Idaho Legislative Services Office included us on an emergency COVID-19 audio/video request upgrade at the Idaho State Capitol. They’re preparing for a historic legislative session during a pandemic. Besides handling everything needed by the legislators to get their jobs done, they also handle all the technology inside the Capitol, including the audio systems. We follow the legislative action with our cameras and stream the meetings out to you. The upgrade includes more cameras in hearing rooms that were once audio only and the use of video conferencing for folks who can’t, or choose not to, appear in person. For us it will mean more people in our control room to cover the action in the hearing rooms. But for you it will mean being able to see your legislators whether they’re in the building or in a remote location. It will also allow for remote testimony via video conferencing. Idaho in Session is a service that is well used. We hear this over and over again from viewers and state officials. In fact, in a typical year we log approximately 1,000 hours of coverage of the Legislature and other meetings. We’re proud of our continued partnership with the Idaho Legislative Services Office. Our generous sponsors help offset our operational costs of the service. They include: Idaho State Broadcasters Association, the Boise State University School for Public Service, the Associated Taxpayers of Idaho, University of Idaho McClure Center for Public Policy Research, Union Pacific Foundation, Idaho Cable Broadband Association, and Association of Idaho Cities with additional support from the Friends of Idaho Public Television Foundation.

Our Production Update

By the IdahoPTV Production Team

Joan Cartan-Hansen: The Science Trek crew is going above and beyond to finish the October topic, “Planets.” As happens once the season starts, we are all working on three or four shows in various stages. Al Hagenlock is editing “Planets” and “Satellites.” I am finishing “Climates” and starting on “Fish;” and Cassandra Groll is amazingly working on all of the above.

Jenessa Carson and Janna DeLange are adding additional supporting educational material for a number of topics on PBS Learning Media. Speaking of Learning Media, Science Trek materials had been viewed more than 40,000 times in July and August. It will be interesting to see where viewer numbers go once school starts everywhere.

Aaron Kunz: Log drives on the Clearwater River ... as some wag once opined, that’s when men were men and the trees were nervous!

I’m currently gathering material and writing the script for an Idaho Experience that looks at Idaho’s last log drive and how it plays into the Idaho we have today.

The log drives on the Clearwater began in 1928 and continued until 1971. Those drives were so impressive that hundreds of people would line the river banks to watch the men make sure every piece of valuable timber made it downriver.

I don’t have to tell you that logging is a big part of Idaho history. It’s an industry that built towns and drove the economy. We were lucky to actually interview some of the men who worked those long-ago log drives. And, boy, do they have some incredible stories to tell of life on the river!
Lauren Melink: After hiking into the backwoods for several Outdoor Idaho shoots this summer without a drone operator, I decided I should just get my license. So I took and passed my FAA drone pilot certification test this week.

Having only flown drones a few times before, videographer/editor Eric Westrom has agreed to show me the ropes of drone photography.

Along with that, I’m working on an Outdoor Idaho show about female hunters in Idaho. I have several women interested in being part of the show — including a Bighorn Sheep trophy hunter, a bird dog trainer and hunter and a self-taught archer. We’ll begin shooting in the next few weeks.

Also in the works is our March 2021 show, “Off the Beaten Path,” (we still need a winter path!), as well as a show about Idaho’s potato industry. Additionally, I recently accompanied Bill Manny and Jay Krajic on an Outdoor Idaho shoot for a show about Idaho’s 12ers. Here’s a photo of me atop Donaldson Peak. “Idaho’s 12ers” will air in early December.

Lastly, the Outdoor Idaho YouTube channel continues to slowly and steadily gain subscribers.

Troy Shreve: Between Idaho Reports, the Daily Coronavirus Updates, and a couple other small tasks, I managed to escape the rat race and make my way to Stanley Lake last Monday to meet Bill Manny and hike into Bridal Veil Falls to shoot some aerial video for an upcoming Outdoor Idaho episode.

It was nice to get away from the city, even though the air was a bit smoky; you can’t escape that this time of year. The hike was nice, the views were spectacular, and the drive was ... longer than expected.

On the way home a plume of smoke in the horizon seemed a bit concerning as I headed back to Boise via Hwy 21. Just a couple miles later I was met by a road block. The Trap Fire had started while we were hiking in the hills.

The long story short is my short drive home turned long. Had to head back through Ketchum and Mountain Home. At least I made it home safely. Being that close to a breaking forest fire was a bit eerie. From the distance, it was very quiet. The color and the movement of the smoke was mesmerizing, but knowing the destruction it would leave was heartbreaking.

And ironically, I remembered a few signs on our hike that basically warned this area had burned before, and to be careful of the ever changing landscape. Be safe out there.

Bill Manny: One of the beauties of Idaho Public Television is that we have the time and the staff that let us get out to look at Idaho issues, people and places from multiple angles. We try to do that in different ways with our 37-year-old Outdoor Idaho series and our new Idaho Experience series.

And these days, our drone operators can give us a bird’s-eye take on scenes that we usually only see from the ground. This week, videographer Troy Shreve flew a drone over Bridal Veil Falls in the Sawtooth mountains for our Outdoor Idaho March 2021 show on places that are “off the beaten path,” which will give viewers one more way to appreciate this hard-to-get-to Idaho landmark.
Kris Millgate: Two things to consider when shooting aerials for an upcoming Outdoor Idaho show about Idaho potatoes: size and smoke.

Size – I’m the size of a crumb compared to a combine. Not the whole combine, just its tires. They’re taller than me and the dust cloud trailing those tires is massive. That’s why I keep my distance when shooting harvest footage and I give my lens even more distance.

My drone records beautiful aerial images within a device that’s about the size of my foot. I pop its four, skinny, leaf-shaped propellers 10 stories high when a colossal combine comes at me. Keeps my camera clear of the crop dust and the farmer’s windshield. I don’t want my drone smacking that huge front glass like a fly on the freeway.

Farmer Ron Lovell of Ririe, who welcomed me into his field in early September, wouldn’t want that either, so I keep my bird way back.

Smoke – Bruce Reichert promised me bonus points if I shot footage of a field with the Tetons in the background. Clen Atchley has that angle at his farm, so from Ririe to Ashton I went.

The smoke went with me. Wheat fields with river on the fringe and pivot down the middle are stunning in evening light. The Tetons from the Idaho side are also stunning in evening light.

I think. I know for certain they’re still there and they’re indeed in my shot, but you won’t see a speck of those peaks. The Tetons are hidden because the evening light is filtered by fire. I still get bonus points, but none of us get to enjoy a ridgeline scene. Crop dust + wildfire smoke = 0 peak visibility.

I’m shooting fall harvest on the heels of my summer project, “Ocean to Idaho.” I followed salmon migration 850 miles from the Oregon coast to the Idaho wilderness. You can catch up on that adventure here.

Nicole Sanchez: The Resilient Idaho Team is wrapping up filming and starting the editing process. The biggest challenge now is to somehow fit 40 interviews into a one hour documentary! The interviews are truly amazing, and we can't wait to share with everyone what we have learned about severe childhood trauma, called Adverse Childhood Experiences or ACEs.

I’m going to be very transparent here: some of these stories are so raw and heartbreaking, I couldn’t help but tear up during a few of the interviews. I’ve worked in television for more than 20 years and this was a first for me. I even get goosebumps watching some of the interviews. That’s how powerful these stories are.

The lifelong effects of ACEs can be toxic and cause many long-term health problems. In some extreme cases, ACEs can actually reduce someone’s life expectancy by up to 20 years. Think about that for a moment; that is shocking and should prompt all of us to look more into this topic.

But there is good news: ACEs don’t have to define someone or predict their future. Research shows if a child has a stable and caring adult in their life, that is a key protective factor that can help promote resilience. They can learn to bounce forward after trauma and avoid permanent health effects. We have some great examples of people here in Idaho who have experienced ACEs and have been truly resilient. Their stories can inspire all of us to rise above trauma.
Bruce Reichert: When you work on a show for 30+ years, the doors open freely if people like the program. The problem for me lately has been finding the right program. I’ve always been attracted to broad public policy shows “50 Years of Wilderness,” “Silver Valley Rising,” “Idaho Headwaters,” “State of Change,” going as far back as the 1993 two-parter, “Empire of the Snake,” Outdoor Idaho’s first regional Emmy.

Combining an issue-oriented show with the incredible talents of our shooters and editors just seems to me a winning and valuable combination.

But I’ve been at a loss lately to find the next big topic. This year’s “Sawtooths on My Mind” was grand and fun because of the people I got to work with … primarily Jay Krajic, Bill Manny, Lauren Melink, Peter Morrill. There were enough public policy angles to raise the show beyond beauty and love for one of the world’s special places.

But what about this coming year? And then it hit me. Let’s explore the culture that has grown up around Idaho’s potato industry! Do you know they still let students out of school to work on the October harvest? I thought that only happened for COVID and 20 below blizzards!

My friends are surprised that the lowly spud has finally grabbed me, after more than 30 years with the show. I’m kinda surprised myself. But a chance to explore a big topic with colleagues Lauren and Manny, Jay and Kris, Forrest and Peter and others fills me with excitement and anticipation. I wanna see if we can tell a story that resonates with the rest of Idaho. Besides, it’s really about more than potatoes, as the photo suggests.

And the fun part will be trying to give it the Outdoor Idaho “Palouse Paradise” treatment. (Oh, and we’ll keep you updated about this show and all the others, on our Outdoor Idaho Facebook page.)

In the News

Classroom Idaho fall session broadcasts free lessons for home learning
Idaho Public Television Sep 9, 2020

Access to the internet is difficult in Idaho and that’s why, with COVID and online learning, IdahoPTV is bringing the classroom into viewers’ homes with Classroom Idaho: Learn@Home.

Last spring when schools across the state shut down and moved to distance learning, IdahoPTV knew there were thousands of parents and students without internet access and/or devices to access high quality instruction. In response to that need, we launched Classroom Idaho, a free over-the-air broadcast service that connects students with certified Idaho teachers.

Classroom Idaho fall 2020 is available for FREE across the entire state via over-the-air antenna. Fall school sessions will air on IdahoPTV’s CREATE Channel. Additionally, many cable providers broadcast the CREATE Channel in area’s around Idaho.

Lessons are taught by certified Gem State teachers, and are aligned to Idaho content standards. Hourlong K-6 modules will air Monday through Friday, beginning at 8 a.m., Sept. 14 through Dec. 18.*
Hourlong English language courses (ELL) will air on Mondays and repeat on Fridays at 3 p.m., Sept. 14 through Dec. 18.* These courses will be for both children and adults.

College and career readiness sessions will be offered on Mondays and repeated on Fridays at 4 p.m. These courses will be taught by academic advisors and help prepare students and parents for college and career. *

*There will not be classes during Thanksgiving week.

During the 14-week fall session, K-6 students will be given standards-aligned direct instruction from a certified Idaho teacher. Students in grades 7-12 can tune in directly after Classroom Idaho for quality PBS programming; secondary teachers can find links to corresponding teaching resources on our website at idahoptv.org/classroomidaho.

IdahoPTV’s over-the-air broadcast channels are free to receive. All you need is an antenna. Our signal is available to over 99 percent of the households in Idaho. For information on where to find our CREATE Channel and other free channels in your area, or how to re-scan to find our channels, visit our website.

Our full channel lineup is also available on many major cable outlets around the state. Check with your local cable provider.

Idaho Public Television General Manager Ron Pisaneschi shared the station’s enthusiasm for the project, noting that “We are pleased to partner with the Boise School District, Jannus, Idaho Digital Learning Alliance and the State Board of Education to use the power of public television to deliver these lessons to students and families in homes throughout Idaho. PBS has always been America’s largest classroom, but now we are bringing Idaho’s teachers and their lessons directly into students’ homes.”

Classroom Idaho is a partnership of Idaho Public Television and Boise School District, the English Language Center and the Idaho Office for Refugees (projects of Jannus), Idaho Digital Learning Alliance and the State Board of Education.

PBS offers home learning lessons
By The Messenger Sep 16, 2020

Idaho Public Television is helping families with in-home education while many students are attending school remotely.

The Classroom Idaho: Learn@Home project was developed in response to last spring’s decision to shut the state down to slow the spread of the coronavirus which meant students were in online and remote learning settings. Idaho Public Television officials knew many Idaho families did not have internet access or devices to use to continue their education. So, the classroom project was launched, IdahoPTV Education Manager Kari Wardle said.

It is a free, over-the-air broadcast service that connects students with certified Idaho teachers, Wardle said. It’s available to anyone with a TV and an over-the-air TV antenna on IdahoPTV’s CREATE channel. IdahoPTV is available to 99 percent of Idaho households, she said. More information about how to receive IdahoPTV and how to re-scan your TV to receive the stations is available online at https://www.idahoptv.org/watch/#findUs.
One-hour modules for students in kindergarten through sixth grade air weekdays beginning at 8 a.m. Students will receive standards-aligned direct instruction from a certified Idaho teacher, Wardle said.

English language courses for children and adults will air at 3 p.m. Mondays and Fridays. College and career readiness sessions will air at 4 p.m. Mondays and Fridays.

Programs run from Sept. 14 through Dec. 18. No classes will be offered during Thanksgiving week, Nov. 23-27.

“We are pleased to partner with the Boise school district, Jannus, Idaho Digital Learning Alliance and the state board of education to use the power of public television to deliver these lessons,” Idaho Public Television General Manager Ron Pisaneschi said. “PBS has always been America’s largest classroom, but now we are bringing Idaho’s teachers and their lessons directly into students’ homes.”

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**Upcoming PBS documentary to feature Greg Carr**

By SALLY KRUTZIG skrutzig@postregister.com Sep 15, 2020

Idaho Falls native Greg Carr will soon appear in PBS’s new documentary series “The Age of Nature.” Carr, who has spent years restoring Mozambique’s Gorongosa National Park, features prominently in the first episode.

In the documentary, Carr shows off the different ways in which the animal kingdom is thriving in Gorongosa. In one scene, he looks out from the cockpit of a small plane trying to catch glimpses of animals from the sky. In another, he flips over a rock to reveal a nest of termites and explains their importance in the ecosystem.

“I remember they wired me up with a mic and they wanted me to kind of wander around. They said, ‘Wander around and talk, Greg.’ So, I did. And you know you never know what they’re going to use. They film you for hours and you end up being in five minutes. So I have no idea what they’re going to use or if I’m going to look goofy. I hope they make me seem sort of reasonable. But it’s a lot of fun,” Carr said.

The series is intended to explore the ways in which damaged ecosystems can be rehabilitated to benefit both nature and humans. It’s a message near and dear to Carr’s heart.

“Here’s the message that’s always on my mind: we really need to see one picture. People and nature in one unified home benefiting each other. It’s a false dichotomy to say ‘Well you know, Greg, you’re going to have to choose. You either have got to cut down all these trees and build condominiums or you’re going to have to let the elephants live here. What do you like better, Greg? Elephants or people?’ I think that’s a silly dichotomy. Humans need a healthy, natural world for our own well-being,” Carr said.
Gorongosa National Park works double as a public land preserve and a livelihood for local people. The park has thrived in recent years after decades of abandonment by the Mozambican government due to the civil war that took place there between 1981 and 1994.

Carr got involved in the park in 2004 when the government of Mozambique invited him onto the project. He has since committed to a 30-year restoration of Gorongosa that involves developing the communities in and around the park and rehabilitating the wildlife in it.

Carr built his wealth in the technology field. After receiving his master’s degree in public policy from Harvard University in 1986 he started Boston Technology with a partner, which in four years became the nation’s No. 1 voicemail provider for telephone companies. He sold the company at the end of the 1990s.

Carr has been involved in multiple Idaho projects as well, including being a driving force behind the Museum of Idaho.

He is hoping that his projects educates people on the importance of our natural environments.

“I think as we move forward for the rest of this century it’s going to be more and more obvious to everybody that nature blesses us, so let’s protect nature. I don’t think that’s a really complicated concept,” Carr said.

The Age of Nature will premiere at 8 p.m. Oct. 14 on PBS. The trailer can be viewed at pbs.org/video/preview-iqzbbc/

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Opinion

Happy Birthday, PBS. Please Save Us. Next month will mark 50 years of television that aims to educate and unite.

By Margaret Renkl
Contributing Opinion Writer
Sept. 27, 2020

NASHVILLE — On Oct. 4, 1970, the Public Broadcasting Service entered the airwaves with an episode of “The French Chef.” I was not quite 9, too young for Julia Child and too old for “Sesame Street.” PBS became the television constant of my life anyway.

I was still a child when I watched “The Six Wives of Henry VIII” on Masterpiece Theater and developed a lifelong love for British period drama. Shows like “Downton Abbey,” “Call the Midwife,” “Last Tango in Halifax” and “Wolf Hall” are still my favorite form of escape, public television’s version of a guilty pleasure. When “All Creatures Great and Small” airs next year, it will be appointment television for me.
My conservative father had no use for Tudor bedroom drama, but he loved the political drama of “Firing Line” and could do a fair imitation of the show’s longtime host, William F. Buckley Jr. This was the sardonic voice Dad deployed to question political pronouncements he disagreed with. At our house there were many: All three of my father’s children grew up to be liberals, and just as inclined to fierce debate as he was.

But “fierce” never meant disrespectful. It was founded in a conviction that the person voicing the opposing view was neither stupid nor mean. Perhaps that was the real gift of “Firing Line”: It set a standard for civil debate, for engaging rather than dividing.

During the summer of 1973, when the United States Senate investigated the Watergate break-ins, PBS aired the complete hearings, all 250 hours of testimony. The television at our house was tuned to PBS for every one of them. My parents had voted for President Nixon, but Dad saw the Watergate committee’s Republican co-chairman, Howard Baker of Tennessee, as a true hero: a Republican unafraid to seek the truth about a Republican president and protect the rule of law.

PBS’s unprecedented complete coverage of the Watergate hearings was anchored by the journalists Jim Lehrer and Robert MacNeil. Two years later, the station began airing “The MacNeil/Lehrer Report,” and Dad never missed it. Today the show is known as “The NewsHour,” and my husband is the one who never misses it. From the very first notes of the show’s theme music, a feeling comes over me that thrums of safety. Of home itself.

Our sons surely feel the same way. When they were still children, the strict screen time rules in this house tended to be less strict where PBS was concerned. They grew up on “Sesame Street” and “Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood,” the same programs my baby sister watched from the very earliest days of PBS, but also “Reading Rainbow,” “Kratts’ Creatures,” “Zoom” and “Bill Nye the Science Guy” — educational programs all.

PBS is the successor to National Educational Television, and its roots in education still anchor it today. There’s now a 24/7 broadcast just for children, as well as a website that extends educational programming beyond the airwaves: PBS Kids offers educational games, podcasts and videos, as well as advice for parents. PBS Learning Media, for classroom teachers, links to programming that is both grade-appropriate and searchable by state and national curriculum standards.

These resources are especially crucial to families without access to broadband internet, and it has been a huge boon during the Covid quarantines. It’s not too much to say that PBS was “built for the pandemic,” as the documentary filmmaker Ken Burns put it in a phone interview last week. “We had the materials. We had the relationships. We didn’t have to retool.”
Public television today enjoys unmatched public trust — at a time when those two words have become almost an oxymoron — perhaps because PBS is an inherently democratic institution. The United States is “a big, complex, contradictory, controversial, majestic republic,” Mr. Burns said, “and at PBS we’re trying to include everybody.”

But not by glossing over differences. As with its comprehensive coverage of the Watergate hearings, PBS is not afraid to address the most contentious divisions of regionalism, race, class, religion and politics. “The NewsHour” is not just an in-depth rundown of the day’s events; it’s also a careful exploration of the full panoply of issues surrounding those events. “Sesame Street” is not just an entertaining way for small children to learn numbers and letters; it’s also a way for them to find out about the many cultures that make up American life.

Perhaps the clearest picture of our communal experience comes from Mr. Burns’s own films. From their wide-ranging subjects (the Brooklyn Bridge, the Civil War, baseball, jazz, the Dust Bowl, national parks, cancer, the Vietnam War, country music, etc.) to their diverse central figures (the Roosevelts, Mark Twain, Huey Long, Jackie Robinson and others), this body of work is, collectively, nothing less than the story of the country itself. And it could have found a home only on PBS. “I’ve been making films about the U.S. for more than 40 years, but I’ve also been making films about us — that is to say, the lowercase two-letter plural pronoun,” Mr. Burns said. “And when you fully invest in that, you understand that there’s only us. There’s no ‘them.’”

In a time when so many other forces are pulling us apart, this understanding of what it means to be American, of what it means to be human, underlies virtually every program on PBS: children’s shows, documentaries, news reports, even an updated version of “Firing Line.” By aiming to unite, not to divide, public television might be what saves us yet. Happy birthday, PBS. We have never needed you more than we need you now.

Margaret Renkl is a contributing opinion writer who covers flora, fauna, politics and culture in the American South. She is the author of the book “Late Migrations: A Natural History of Love and Loss.”