“State Circle is a model of quality, locally produced programming.” This opening line of a 1991 review by the Baltimore Sun television critic David Zurawik could comfortably be tagged with “The End.” In that sentence, the reviewer had described the original reason for public television and provided an example of it at work.

State Circle’s forerunner, launched in 1978 under the title State House Forum (1978-81), was the brainchild of Executive Producer Everett L. Marshburn. When State House Forum ended, a legislative affairs unit was set up and its first product was a 15-episode State Circle, a magazine format show that made its debut on January 8, 1982, and aired on Fridays during the legislative session. Most of the content was shot on location in Annapolis.

“Local news always covered the legislative session as news stories broke. I saw a need to provide more in-depth discussions about legislation and the impact specific pieces might have on taxpayers. That seemed like something we should know,” Everett observes.

The program concept was to give viewers a review of the action taking place on bills which might become law during the Maryland General Assembly session and to talk with the people who were impacting the prospective legislation. A September 1981 Maryland Center for Public Broadcasting Network News article cited State Circle’s other mission: show what Maryland is doing to resolve various challenges “turned back to it by the federal government.”

Marshburn hired local freelancer Hillary Mazer Stishan to produce and further develop the series. She notes, “The Maryland Center for Public Broadcasting was already producing video coverage of the State of the State address and the governor’s press conferences. We were equipped and ready to be more expansive in providing legislative information to our viewers.”

Former local newscaster Ron Canada was tapped to be the host of the new program as he had done for State House Forum.
“It was a kind of a Meet the Press format,” Canada recalls. “Among our first interviewees were then-Governor Harry Hughes and Majority Leader Ben Cardin. We quickly established ourselves as fair and honest information seekers with no axe to grind. It has been interesting to follow the careers of some of those early guests as they have become powerful, influential national figures.”

Canada was joined by reporters Jeffrey Cole and Donna Martin with Steve Thomas providing some features. In later years, the following were on the reporting teams, many of them going on to larger roles in regional and national media:

- Birchard Allen
- Karen Allyn
- John Aubuchon
- Brad Bell
- Lou Davis
- Linda Falkerson
- Annette Gibbs-Davis
- Lily Hamer
- Nate Howard
- Sue Kopen
- Mindy Mintz
- Jim Nash
- Liz O’Neill
- Diane Richards
- Charles Robinson
- John Rydell
- Yolanda Vazquez
- Nancy Yamada

At the end of the second year, a new microwave link allowed coverage by reporters and interviews with notables in Annapolis to be carried live from both location and the studio. After three seasons, Ron Canada turned over the anchor’s chair to Joe Krebs; subsequently, Dave Durian took the helm and was followed by Jeff Salkin, the current moderator.

The team of show hosts and reporters may have changed during the run of the series, but the quality of the reportage has remained consistently respected by lawmakers and viewers alike.

Producer Mazer says, “The programs were often the legislators’ source for what was going on.” That early pattern continues to be the case these four decades later.

Broader interest from the public and increased supportive funding allowed the State Circle production team to become more expansive with its coverage of each year’s Maryland General Assembly season. The team was on hand at 11 p.m. for close-of-the-session reviews. It recapped and dissected annual gubernatorial State of the State addresses. It hosted special editions on important topics. Many of its programs were open to the public for Q&A with guests from a variety of state offices; a feature called “Opinion Poll” allowed viewers to phone in responses to a poll question.

Among the most notable of its specials was perhaps the out-of-this-world interview with Baltimore-born astronaut G. Reid Wiseman when he was aboard the International Space Station.

Reflective of the growth of State Circle was that the original, seasonal legislative coverage became, in 2003, a year-round weekly Friday night series. For years viewers could find State Circle in heady company at 7:30 p.m., immediately following the MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour and the Nightly Business Report and just before Washington Week in Review and Wall Street Week With Louis Rukeyser. Today it airs Fridays at 7 p.m.

Four decades since its inception … still local, still quality, still the source for State House information … still State Circle.