Mission statement: MPT enriches lives and strengthens communities through the power of media.

Roughly nine months into FY20, a pandemic struck, changing the way MPT conducts business. Yet COVID-19 prompted us to develop new ways to work to fulfill MPT’s service mission – new methods of producing the series and specials MPT viewers rely upon; of staging important audience engagement events; and of interacting with members and viewers who count on us for entertainment and education. Factoring in an aggressive At-home Learning initiative and public affairs coverage on health and safety information, perhaps MPT has never before demonstrated its local value as it has under the cloud of the ongoing virus.

Whether it’s headed for streaming, over-the-air broadcast, a digital-first appearance, or an offsite screening event, content is the key service MPT provides. In FY20, traditional TV viewers were able to watch 201 MPT original, locally broadcast programs – in all some 104 hours of broadcast time. In addition, viewers saw programs that MPT acquired and presented in our regional broadcast area. When these regional acquisitions are factored in, the total number of local programs offered in FY20 increases to 229, and the total viewing hours grows to 188 hours of quality content. MPT also is known for producing original broadcast content for national audiences and for our role as “presenting station” of other productions for public TV stations nationally. Our national productions and presentations in FY20 consisted of 104 separate programs accounting for nearly 54 hours of broadcast time.

MPT launched At-home Learning for teachers, students and families within days of the pandemic’s start and adjusted production of our weekly public affairs programs to keep viewers informed about the day-to-day events – virus and otherwise – that impacted their lives. We intensified our use of digital-first, short-form productions to get informative, helpful content onto more platforms, but we didn’t neglect our traditional TV watchers; they were treated to landmark PBS fare and the home-grown MPT series they’ve come to relish for the local touch these programs provide. As evidence of local impact, MPT statistics reveal average monthly viewers in excess of one million, more than 10 million page views of MPT’s primary websites, and more than 480,000 video plays (streaming), to cite only three measures of success.
EDUCATION IN THE MIDST OF VIRUS

The coronavirus pandemic turned life on its head beginning in March 2020. The health crisis shuttered businesses, schools and daycare, cancelled daily activities, and disrupted routines, creating a new normal for everyone. For many, the home became both workplace and a school with the kitchen table doubling as a learning center. MPT made a pivot and found a meaningful way to support educators, childcare providers, and families during a chaotic time by providing at-home programming to fill the gaps and bring a continuity of learning into the home.

MPT’s At-home Learning initiative comprised three main components: an on-air educational broadcast schedule, online learning resources, and toolkits.

• **MPT broadcast:** MPT aired more than 600 hours of PreK-12 educational programs on weekdays from April through June from 6 am until 5 pm. Three program blocks supported early learners (PreK-grade 3), middle grade students (grades 4-8), and high schoolers (grades 9-12) with select programs in core academic subjects and topics. MPT collaborated with the region’s other public TV stations to coordinate the learning schedule of free, accessible programs to ensure equitable access to all students.

• **Thinkport:** MPT’s education website served as the centerpiece for digital learning content and viewing guides that connected each broadcast program with critical instruction. Each program was matched with either digital or hands-on resources to extend learning for children.

• **Online digital toolkits:** These were curated for both educators and parents leading to rich resource collections of articles, websites, tips, and strategies for supporting social and emotional well-being and a learning-at-home environment.

MPT’s education services were not limited to the At-home Learning project by any means. In the early childhood arena, for instance, MPT worked to ensure that professional learning continued unabated by COVID-19. For example, MPT staged a successful Edcamp during FY20 for early childhood educators to come together for conversation and sharing around topics central to the care and education of young children.

The network also gathered together (in pre-COVID days) some community partners in Baltimore City to offer family workshops and professional development using PBS KIDS programs and resources. As a grantee of the national public media early learning initiative Ready To Learn, MPT’s Education Division coordinates Family and Community Learning programs using PBS KIDS shows that promote science inquiry and literacy. Through child-centered activities and playful learning experiences, the sessions aim to foster healthy media habits, collaboration, communication, and problem-solving skills among family members.

Similarly, to support parents and early childhood educators, MPT gathered resources to help adults understand and take charge of media’s impact and influence on children’s learning and development. MPT began developing online courses, in-person workshops, and digital resources guided by MPT’s Media STEPS strategies. STEPS supports adults in identifying and using high-quality educational media, makes learning time active, and provides ample screen-free play as well. With screen time so prevalent in today’s environment, MPT’s strategies and resources to foster healthy media habits fills a great need.
In the K-12 arena, MPT also provided professional development opportunities by offering a catalog of credit-bearing, online courses in frequent sessions during FY20. Approximately 1,200 educators maintained their teaching certification with MPT in partnership with the Maryland State Department of Education.

Several multi-year projects, in partnership with Maryland Humanities and funded through the Library of Congress, have yielded “History and Civics Inquiry Kits” – a robust collection of digital resources facilitating the use of primary sources in inquiry-based learning. MPT’s Thinkport now features 24 units of study, 190 topics, and more than 1,000 primary sources supporting elementary, middle and high school students. Complementing the inquiry kits are 13 self-paced lessons guiding students through the research process.

ENGAGING A STATEWIDE AND REGIONAL AUDIENCE

At MPT, community engagement activities are designed to deepen the connection between the network and its members and viewers across the region. In fact, the COVID-19 emergency prompted virtual (online) activities that allowed many more MPT fans residing outside the state to participate as the usual face-to-face events were put on hold.

As examples, prior to the shutdown, MPT’s Audience Engagement Department and its Special Events & Community Engagement team hosted in-person Downton Abbey movie screenings, a record-setting third annual on-campus flea market, and community screenings with interactive panel discussions of documentaries College Behind Bars and BOSS: The Black Experience in Business. The MPT Travel Club, an ongoing engagement tool, hosted trips in FY20 (also pre-pandemic).

Engagement events at MPT also included enjoyable fundraisers that gave attendees a chance to rub shoulders with on-air personalities or do some armchair shopping. The MPT Fall Auction made items available to the public thanks to generous corporate and nonprofit donors; “Tea Time with MPT” gathered 124 participants for a sold-out “royal tea”; and an exclusive wine dinner gave the public a chance to bid farewell to the retiring on-air personality Rhea Feikin.

For the fourth consecutive year, MPT was on hand for the annual Baltimore County Power of Age Expo at the state fairgrounds in FY20; and MPT representatives visited the Oakcrest Retirement Community to give residents an up-close look at the how-to’s of TV programming. MPT was present in the kids area of FY20’s Artscape event in downtown Baltimore interacting with hundreds of families over the three-day event.

Audience engagement mainstays for in-person and/or online attendance in FY20 included
• Friday Freeviews, monthly gatherings that introduce attendees to new and upcoming PBS and MPT productions.
• Throwback Thursdays, for the COVID-19 sequestered, a weekly screening of classic MPT programs.
• More than 40 separate Indie Lens Pop-Ups, a neighborhood series that brings people together for film screenings and community-driven conversations.
• And MPT Travel Club preview events, designed to give the public an in-depth look at upcoming, MPT-sponsored trips.
Stories in the making

In FY20, MPT made strides toward the completion of two documentaries for national broadcasts about a pair of iconic Black Marylanders – Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman. Maryland Public Television contracted with Firelight Films in 2019 to produce these documentaries.

The compelling and inspirational stories of Tubman and Douglass beginning life as enslaved people and later escaping that life are important in terms that are greater than just Maryland’s local history. The films will also offer unique historical contexts that can also help all Americans better understand the complex birth and evolution of the United States as we know it today.

Firelight Films’ Stanley Nelson is a prolific, award-winning, highly respected producer of public television documentaries that capture the American Black experience. Nelson is overseeing the creative production of the Tubman and Douglass films in collaboration with MPT. Due to the pandemic, there was some delay in beginning active field production. However, some shooting is underway, and many of the shooting locations will be in Maryland.

Both films are scheduled for delivery to PBS in mid-2021. They will be broadcast on PBS in 2022. Both are funded by a major grant from the State of Maryland, as well as from foundations and corporate support.

Marking a national TV milestone

In FY20, the cast and crew of the national TV series MotorWeek launched plans and activities to mark the program’s 40th anniversary before calendar year 2020 ended. While the coronavirus emergency halted production briefly and challenged the producers to continue making a national TV program under unexpected and adverse conditions, nonetheless the work was accomplished to set the stage for a 40th TV season starting in September 2020.

As it marks this milestone, MotorWeek continues to bring entertaining and informative programming to what is now even an international audience. The team continues its quest to test, evaluate, and understand the evolving American appetite for personal transportation, despite major shifts in culture and the global COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 notwithstanding, people still purchase vehicles, and so reliable, impartial information is critical. While consumers are interested in learning more about electric vehicles, buyers are still concerned about their high price, range limitations, and the slow growth in the number of charging stations even along frequently traveled routes. These concerns are fodder for the clear-sighted information the program provides.

From hatchbacks to sport-utility vehicles, exotic performance machines to pickup trucks, MotorWeek’s team of experts buckle into more than 150 vehicles each season. With some 17 million new vehicles purchased in 2019, car buying clearly remains a priority with consumers. The series is produced and distributed by MPT and airs on 90 percent of PBS stations nationwide, airing in all of the nation’s top 25 markets. Winner of dozens of prestigious automotive journalism awards, MotorWeek is also seen on Discovery’s MotorTrend cable channel and on the V-me Spanish-language network.
In service to agencies of the State of Maryland

In FY20, MPT completed the formal establishment of an operating division known as the Maryland State Ad Agency (MSAA) and readied it for a July ‘20 launch date.

Set up as a division of MPT, the agency formation formalizes a work-for-hire practice that’s been in operation at MPT almost since the network was founded. In 2016, MPT expanded its services to include media planning, consulting, production of commercials and PSAs, media buying, and reporting. The first project under the expanded service format was for the Maryland Department of Health to assist with messaging to citizens regarding the opioid crisis. Now, the MSAA is functioning as a full-service advertising, marketing, communications, and media buying service.

As a bona fide service to State of Maryland agencies, MPT’s division has handled opioid-related work for the Maryland Department of Health’s Behavioral Health Administration and COVID-19-related assignments from the same department’s Maryland Emergency Management Agency (MEMA). In the spring, MSAA completed work on the 2020 census, commissioned by the Maryland Department of Planning. Other recent clients include the Maryland Department of Legislative Services and the Maryland Higher Education Commission. Certainly MSAA generates revenue for MPT in the form of fees charged for media planning and analysis, research, creative development, and other advertising-related tasks. But, equally important, state agencies now have a one-stop resource to help them deliver on their own commitments and obligations to serve the public where important civic, health, and community issues are concerned.

I’ll be sending ... a donation to MPT from here in Japan where I live. MPT was a highlight of my years in Maryland. Best wishes always ...  - Miriam A.

I must tell you how grateful I am for your public television service. ... (S)ince COVID-19 has made all of us homebound in Delaware, I am very happy that the signal coming through my antenna from Salisbury has never faltered. ... In gratitude, I am sending you an additional contribution for Giving Tuesday ...  - Carol L.

I’m enjoying the programming for the students. ... So not only are you doing a very great service for students and parents but for others like me here alone. ...  - Janet K.

I sure hope this finds you doing well, surviving the next “new normal.” My reason for this email is to say to MPT, WELL DONE, AWESOME, EXCITING programming over the past few months. ...  - Janet P.
One way to summarize MPT’s 2020 content for and service to its community is to share some relevant photographs that typify the mission-directed, daily work of the MPT staff. In these photos below, we illustrate how MPT continues to work as Maryland’s primary story-teller, as an important public safety partner, and as an effective convener of community.

Maryland Farm & Harvest’s Joe Ligo, producer and director, interviews Jeanette Rinehart of Walnut Ridge Farm in Flintstone, MD. The series visited the Allegany County farm to learn how it uses the internet to market its products, despite the challenges of unreliable connections in the hills of Western Maryland.

Tracy Gaspari (foreground) floor-directs February 2020 coverage of the governor’s State of the State address from the Maryland State House. Preparing for a live interview are (left to right) Jeff Salkin, State Circle anchor; Andy Harris, U.S. Representative for Maryland’s 1st Congressional District; Michael Steele, former Maryland lieutenant governor; and State Circle reporter Charles Robinson. Videographer Dave Earnest is behind the camera.

In February 2020, a young science enthusiast proudly displayed his floating device during the four-part Ready To Learn Family and Community Play and Learn Science workshop held at Liberty Judy Center in Baltimore. Families participated in the Ready Jet Go! learning experience.

Staff and students from The Harbour School visited MPT to present a Maryland-themed quilt that the students made to show their appreciation to MPT. For the past dozen years, the school has brought volunteers to MPT studios from among its student body, and MPT has supplied on-campus work opportunities for them. The Harbour School provides a rigorous, project-based curriculum to students with autism, Asperger’s syndrome, and other learning challenges.
Sometimes MPT’s commitment to community involvement brings an organization to the MPT campus. In FY20, MPT hosted a meeting for three dozen members of the Baltimore Public Relations Council and provided an information panel to respond to the members’ many questions about the network. Furnishing the answers on MPT’s behalf were (left to right) Joe Ligo, Sarah Sampson, Mark Keefer, and Linda Castrilli.

In FY20, the Baltimore County Commission on Disabilities presented an award to MPT as its “Volunteer of the Year.” MPT was nominated for the honor by Douglas Smith of The Chimes, Inc. For many years, MPT has welcomed clients of Chimes, The Harbour School, and Itineris for on-campus work benefiting many of its departments. On hand for the ceremony were (left to right) Baltimore County Executive Johnny Olszewski, MPT’s Larry Unger, and representatives of the commission.