New digital project explores local arts during COVID-19 crisis

During this COVID-19 pandemic, so many people could benefit from the beauty and inspiration offered by the arts; however, most Northeast Ohio arts organizations are closed and many are struggling to survive.

On June 3, PBS Western Reserve launched its first digital project, “The Arts & COVID-19: What Now?” It examines on multiple platforms the creative ways that local artists and arts organizations are staying relevant during the pandemic. Through short videos, podcasts, blogs and social media posts, the project will tell the stories of Northeast Ohio artists and organizations who are facing challenges and creating opportunities in the face of adversity. All features are accessible via the station’s website, PBSWesternReserve.org.

“The pandemic has had a devastating impact on Northeast Ohio’s arts sector, resulting in cancellations, closures and reduced staff,” said Trina Cutter, president and CEO of PBS Western Reserve. “Because we sincerely care about these artists and institutions, we want to help shine a light on their projects and initiatives.” Topics covered include how an art therapist is addressing COVID-19; what local art advocates are focusing on to help artists survive economically; how a local theater company is taking its summer workshops virtual; and new ways individual artists pivot to thrive.

Social media bolsters reach of local documentary

Social media support of the May 1 premiere of EAST LIVERPOOL: MY TOWN offered an excellent example of the tool’s marketing potential. Utilizing Facebook and Twitter to promote the production (35,500 reached organically; 25,200 views), plus a specially created web page, we were able to reach and engage an audience within our broadcast region and beyond.

Our Facebook premiere gave viewers an opportunity to watch online simultaneously across digital platforms, and the dedicated web page provided additional information as well as a link to the production for viewing. We successfully reached new viewers and built our community with a local production, plus we learned new skills through the experience.
Community Outreach

Station responds to community’s needs during pandemic

PBS Western Reserve quickly responded to the COVID-19 crisis and the related closing of schools by providing a variety of information and remote learning resources. Following is a synopsis of our efforts since mid-March.

At-Home Learning programming

On March 30, we began carrying PBS At-Home Learning programming on PBS Western Reserve (WNEO/WEAO-HD) weekdays from 10 AM to 2 PM. This special programming ensures that all children have access to educational instruction amid school closures. Also on March 30, we began carrying PBS At-Home Learning programming on Fusion (WNEO/WEAO-SD2) weekdays from noon to 5 PM.

In support of this content, we have offered the following:

- Three locally produced spots that run frequently on air and on social media.

- Text to Resources for viewers with low or no internet access. Promoted on air, viewers can text the word “Start” to receive daily texts that include resources related to the At-Home Learning broadcast schedule. They can also receive the resources daily via email.

- Half-page flyers of the At-Home Learning schedules distributed digitally to all area superintendents, who can then print them out, to be added to lunches being delivered to students.

- Program descriptions posted weekly on our website.

Press conference coverage

Since March 16 we have carried live broadcast coverage of Gov. Mike DeWine’s COVID-19 press conferences on both our PBS Western Reserve and Fusion channels, and also on our website.

Resources for viewers

Eleven locally produced 30-second videos offered helpful information about economic support, wellness, Social Security, Medicare and more. These ran on air and on social media. We also included the information in our member and viewer newsletters.

In addition, we aired informational spots on PBS Western Reserve and on social media from national organizations such as American Red Cross and National Association of Broadcasters.

Finally, PBS Western Reserve created 15 on-air spots in support of local arts organizations that closed during the pandemic. These also ran on social media.

Resources for educators

In collaboration with Ohio Educational Technology Agencies, we produced 30 videos for educators to support remote learning. Through OETA, teachers could also access virtual office hours and phone-in support to aid them in the transition to remote learning, plus they could earn continuing education certification.

Our Educational Services Department facilitated Zoom meetups conducted by the Ohio Department of Education that offered helpful information for accessing at-home learning resources.

Educational Services also created these online newsletters in response to the COVID-19 crisis and the closing of Ohio’s schools:

- Connected Educator—Focuses on resources to support online learning. It has been delivered daily since March 19 to over 5,400 educators across our service area.

- Connected Early Learning Educator—Offers resources to support online learning for early learning educators. It has been delivered on Tuesdays and Thursdays since March 31 to 150 family child-care providers.
He also presented an award that recognized an Ohio teacher multimedia project “Teaching with Tech—Ohio’s New Standards.” at the Ohio Educational Technology Conference in Columbus in PBS Western Reserve unveiled new booth space and resources various innovative ways. Computer science is becoming as essential to the learning standards for Ohio Department of Education highlights lessons from teachers in grades K-8 better integrate the learning standards for computer science, it is being completed the way much of the world is functioning today—with remote interviews using tools such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom.

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken students out of their schools but it is not stopping PBS Western Reserve’s efforts to advance computer science in Ohio’s classrooms through a new multimedia project, Computer Science for Your Classroom. Designed to help teachers in grades K-8 better integrate the learning standards for computer science, it is being completed the way much of the world is functioning today—with remote interviews using tools such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom.

The project with the Broadcast Educational Media Commission and Ohio Department of Education highlights lessons from teachers who are bringing computer science concepts to their students in various innovative ways. Computer science is becoming as essential as math and writing for our future workforce.

Videos help educators incorporate computer science concepts

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PBS Western Reserve welcomes new employee

On March 9, Fred Barrett began work with us in a part-time capacity as emerging media manager. He comes to us from Kent State University, where he provided instruction for 14 years in visual communication and multimedia storytelling. He also worked for the Akron Beacon Journal as an online and print marketing specialist and graphic designer for 12 years.

As an independent video journalist, Barrett provided coverage for professional sports across Northeast Ohio for the Associated Press and Perform Group, a sports outlet in London. Barrett earned his bachelor’s degree in journalism from the University of Memphis and graduate degree in media management from Kent State University. A native of Memphis, Tenn., he currently resides in Akron.

Meet our new summer intern

Luke Walker, of Canton, is spending the summer as an intern in our Production Department. He is attending the Scripps College of Communication at Ohio University, looking to graduate with a Bachelor of Science degree in communication in May of 2022. His major is integrated media production with a minor in marketing.

Walker is interested in all aspects of video content creation, especially directing. He will attend field shoots for digital series, work on editing and help with podcast development.

WNEO is now broadcasting on a new frequency; final adjustments pending

As part of the FCC’s Spectrum Auction Repack, WNEO (serving Youngstown) began broadcasting on its newly assigned frequency on March 13. An interim side-mounted antenna was installed to complete the transition by the March 13 deadline, along with a new digital transmitter for the new frequency. The tower will require extensive modifications to allow for the installation of the new top-mounted antenna and main transmission line for the new frequency. A six-month extension to WNEO’s construction permit was granted by the FCC to allow time for this work to be completed.

Staff News

IT/Engineering

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