PBS Western Reserve President’s Report

Summer 2023
Volume 17, Issue 3

The PBS Western Reserve President’s Report is published for the Northeastern Educational Television of Ohio Inc. Board of Directors, major funders of the station and other community members interested in the organization’s activities.

1 Production
2 Community Outreach
3 Educational Services
4 Staff News

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New local production tells of Akron’s role in rebirth of Ringling circus

A new documentary, RINGLING, AKRON & THE ’BLUE HEAVEN’ CIRCUIT, will premiere exclusively on PBS Western Reserve (WNEO 45.1 / WNEO 49.1) on Tuesday, Aug. 29, at 8 PM. Written and produced by independent producer and veteran journalist Fred Endres, it tells the story of Akron’s role in the relaunch of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey circus following a deadly fire in 1944.

The production finds Ringling Bros. in the aftermath of the worst fire in circus history, one that killed 167 people and injured hundreds more. The circus had lost its big top and much of its equipment. Where would it go to restart the 1944 tour? How would it perform without its massive, 19-ton canvas tent? Ringling officials needed to make decisions quickly.

“This is the fascinating story of how and why Ringling picked Akron to restart the season,” Endres said.

Murray Powers, an editor at the Akron Beacon Journal — and a huge circus fan — had nicknamed the new tour “The Blue Heaven Circuit.” That initial stand in Akron was for six shows over three days in August 1944, barely a month after the fire. It did not go particularly well, according to Endres.

“It was not the most successful appearance Ringling ever had,” he said, “but it was really important for the circus to get back on the road to start paying off the hundreds of fire claims.”

Students and staff from Kent State University and The University of Akron participated in the production. Veteran television broadcaster John Butte narrates the program.

For additional RINGLING documentary air dates and times and a production preview visit PBSWesternReserve.org/Luminus.
New projection system installed

PBS Western Reserve collaborated with Xtek partners to equip a portion of the TV Production Studio with a new projection and screen system with full HD resolution and 4K enhancement technology.

This project will enhance audio-visual presentations for both studio productions and staff meetings.

Production Department personnel news

On Aug. 1, Sophia Gillespie joined the Production Department in a full-time capacity after working here as an intern for more than a year.

Gillespie is the newly named associate producer—content and will continue producing content for PBS Western Reserve. She is a graduate of Kent State University and recently earned a degree in digital media production.

Ryan Donchess has assumed the duties of programming and production manager. In his role since October 2021 as production manager, he has been intrinsically involved in the creation of local programming and content, so it is natural for him to work closely with our programmer, Steve Graziano.

Community Outreach

CITY CENTRIC

Station to promote new CITY CENTRIC series at upcoming area events

CITY CENTRIC, the new flagship series for PBS Western Reserve’s “LuminUS: Stories About Us” collection, will premiere on Friday, Sept. 1, at 8:30 PM on PBS Western Reserve (WNEO 45.1 / WEAO 49.1), with each weekly episode featuring noteworthy individuals from one of the following cities in our region: Akron, Alliance, Canton, Kent, Youngstown and Sharon, PA.

To promote the series premiere, the station will participate in the following events:
- First Friday in Canton on Friday, Sept. 1
- Canfield Fair on Saturday, Sept. 2
- Art in the Park in Kent on Saturday, Sept. 9, and Sunday, Sept. 10
- WaterFire in Sharon, Pa., on Saturday, Sept. 16

Tuesday is for Toddlers continues

Tuesday is for Toddlers, held on the third Thursday of every month at Eastwood Mall in Niles, is proving to be a very popular event for families with young children. Warren-Trumbull County Library collaborates with PBS Western Reserve for this event.

Hundreds attend sneak preview event

More than 250 people attended PBS Western Reserve’s sneak preview of ENGINEERING TRAGEDY: THE ASHTABULA TRAIN DISASTER, held at Akron Civic Theatre on June 9. Pictured: Len and Patti Brown, the documentary’s producers, answer audience questions following the preview.

Daniel Tiger greets friends at Akron event

In collaboration with PNC Grow Up Great, Fred Rogers Production and Summit County Public Health, PBS Western Reserve presented “Be My Neighbor Day” at the Akron Civic Theatre on May 20.

Local festivals offer opportunities to promote services for children

PBS Western Reserve engaged with viewers at two recent festivals to promote upcoming programming and educational opportunities for children: Kent Heritage Festival on July 1 and Olde Canal Days Festival in Canal Fulton on July 6–8.
Educational Services

Project promoting writing skills is in the news
As a guest on WFMJ-TV on July 24, Jeff Good, chief education technology officer, informed viewers about “Everyday Writing with Coach Write,” a new PBS Western Reserve multimedia project that focuses on improving writing skills for K-3 students.

Organization participates in NEOMED conference
In June, Holly Cartwright (pictured) and Pam Oviatt staffed PBS Western Reserve’s booth at the Celebrate Your Mission conference hosted by NEOMED’s Early Childhood Resource Center. This event brought together educators, advocates, and organizations dedicated to supporting early childhood development.

Cartwright is presenter at ITIP Ohio Google Summit
Holly Cartwright, project manager, offered helpful information about the use of Google apps in elementary education to attendees at ITIP Ohio Google Summit, held in May in Sandusky.

New study group is part of professional development offerings
Staff member Holly Cartwright and colleague Jo Walsh-Cobb of I Promise School introduced Mindfulness Book Study, a study group providing a collaborative and engaging platform for educators to explore the benefits of mindfulness in education.

In addition, Educational Services offered 11 Summer Educational Professional Development courses to 46 educators.

All classes offered graduate credit through Kent State University.

Ohio Learns 360
Update on Ohio Learns 360
Activities for Ohio Learns 360, a statewide project conducted in collaboration with the Ohio Department of Education and Ohio’s public TV stations, continue. They included the following:

- Camp-in-a-Box materials focused on “All About Air” for Grades K-2 and “Flight Camp” for grades 3-5
- Virtual field trips with the Cincinnati Museum of Natural History and Five Rivers Metro Parks
- Three family webinars on the topics of developing healthy relationships, navigating stress and the importance of making music

Ohio Ready to Learn
Ohio Ready to Learn ends
The Educational Services staff wrapped up the Ohio Ready To Learn initiative with two trainings in May and four in June.

Funding for Ohio Ready To Learn has ended after 30 years of state support. However, PBS Western Reserve continues its support for early learning professionals with funding from the United Way of Youngstown and other grant providers.
Staff News

Station’s new President and CEO
David Rotterman dies unexpectedly

David Rotterman, newly appointed president and CEO of PBS Western Reserve, died suddenly on Wednesday, Aug. 9, of unknown causes. He was 59.

Rotterman was announced as the new leader of the organization on June 30 and his first day was July 17. The last day for Trina Cutter, retiring president and CEO, is scheduled for Aug. 31.

“We are stunned,” Cutter said. “Dave had quickly integrated himself into the PBS Western Reserve family with his kindness and sincerity, and we have lost a future of infinite possibilities with him at the helm. We are saddened by the loss. We are most fortunate to have a person with Jeff’s vast knowledge of PBS Western Reserve’s internal operations to step in.”

“We were all saddened to hear the news about Dave and extend our heartfelt condolences to his wife, Dawn, and two daughters,” said Romona Davis, chairwoman of Northeastern Educational Television of Ohio, the corporate name for PBS Western Reserve. “While moving forward will be difficult, the board members are confident that the team in place will continue to fulfill PBS Western Reserve’s mission.”

Rotterman, an Ohio native and former senior executive at Buffalo Toronto Public Media (BTPM), held several positions during his 23 years there and most recently served as senior vice president-chief content officer. Before joining BTPM, Rotterman was producer-director and senior producer for 11 years at KYNE TV, a part of the Nebraska ETV Network in Omaha.

Jeffery Good, chief education technology officer, will serve as interim general manager. He has served as a senior staff member of PBS Western Reserve for 17 years.

Madeline Myers joins staff

Madeline Myers joined our staff in June in the newly created position of communications specialist. She will help with communications initiatives including assisting with production of our member magazine, writing copy and producing board meeting minutes.

A native of Nashport, Ohio, she is a graduate of The University of Akron with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and a minor in creative writing.

Amander Silker joins Membership Dept.

On Aug. 7, PBS Western Reserve welcomed Amander Silker to the position of member services representative. She is responsible for ensuring a positive membership experience and handling in-house membership customer relations, data entry and membership database maintenance.

Silker comes to us from Avalon Holdings Corporation, where she served as administrative assistant. Prior to Avalon, she was a behavior care technician with New Beginnings RTC, where she was responsible for caring for at-risk residents seeking behavior treatments and providing support in day-to-day activities.