

Parachute's community radio station fills information void

Heidi Rice / Post Independent |

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Anne Huber, board president (left), and Mary Lee Mohriang, secretary, visit in the small office of KSUN Community Radio located in the Grand Valley Recreation Center.

PARACHUTE — “Hello, this is Floyd McDaniel and this is your radio station at KSUN-101.1.”

With no local newspaper any longer, the station is an important way for area residents to obtain local information. The monthly Parachute Sun newspaper closed in late 2007 and was replaced with the monthly Grand Valley Echo in mid-October 2008, but it closed in May 2014.

KSUN remains. For more than 13 years, listeners from Parachute/Battlement Mesa and beyond have been listening to this small-town, nonprofit radio station staffed only by volunteers who do it because they love their community.

McDaniel does a live show at 7 a.m. Monday through Friday from the leased office space at the Grand Valley Recreation Center (formerly Battlement Mesa Activity Center). He has been a volunteer at the station since 2005.

“I’ve been with the station since a couple of years after it started,” McDaniel said. “I did a program on the history of country music, but now I do all the programming and we do mostly classic rock. Someone told me that in order to be successful, we should choose one venue — so we chose classic rock. Everybody seems to be able to tolerate classic rock.”

“We want to continue to serve our local listeners, but by moving to the 101.1 FM frequency and with the ability to broadcast at a higher frequency, we are able to reach and serve many more listeners in the Grand Valley.”

Mary Lee Mohrlang
secretary of the board and former board president of KSUN

Besides music, KSUN is where listeners can hear news reports, a local weather forecast and coverage of Grand Valley High School's basketball and football games. The station is equipped to handle emergency and Amber alerts.

McDaniel said he tries his best to give listeners up-to-date news, but would love to hear more input from listeners about what's going on.

"It's hard to get people to give information, and we would like to get somebody to do that," McDaniel said. "But we do report on town activities and what the town is doing."

The station is on the Internet, so it can be heard anywhere. To listen on line visit, <http://www.battlementmesacolorado.com/ksun-radio/ksun-fm> than click on the "Listen Live" link.

"You can listen to us in Timbuktu," said Larry Huber, the tech volunteer at the station. "People can listen to their grandkids' sports games, even if they're out of state or overseas."

HISTORY OF KSUN

A group of those involved with the Sun newspaper came up with the idea in 2000 of starting a community radio station.

According to Anne Huber, president of the KSUN board of directors, the idea for the station began with Jimm Seaney, when he heard that the Federal Communications Commission would be allowing an LP-FM radio license in the area. He ran the idea by Tom Beard, president of the Battlement Mesa Company at the time, who connected Seaney with Harlan Hansen, Jim Warren and Frances Rose, the publisher, business manager and editor of the Parachute Sun. The group decided to form a community radio station and enlisted the help of grant writer Terry Lynott.

A board was formed and contacted various groups in the community.

The station's call letters were initially KSBP-LP-FM (Sun, Battlement, Parachute) located at 101.1 on the dial. The station went on the air for the first time at 5:09 a.m. Dec. 11, 2002, as several of the board members and a couple of the technical guys all crowded into the tiny studio.

It had taken more than two years to pull it all together.

The station wanted to give voice to other local nonprofits and community organizations and approached groups such as the Storytellers, a group trained at the Rifle Campus of Colorado Community College in telling stories to small children; the Shale Country Players, an amateur theater group; the Sagebrush Singers, a choral group; Grand Valley Kiwanis, a group dedicated to working with students in the local school district; members of the local birding groups; the writing club; Friends of the Parachute library; and others.

Early programming included "The History of Country Music 101" by McDaniel, a run of old-time radio shows; "The Carmel & Fish Show," which aired popular music; and "Fric and Frac,"

hosted by Mary Lee Mohrlang and Lynott that evolved into Community Connections, a live Friday morning interview program.

CHALLENGES ARISE

It was on Sept. 25, 2007, when a representative from Grand Junction Cumulus Radio announced that it had purchased a nearby frequency (101.3), only two digits away. KSUN, as a “junior” license holder, would have to get another frequency. Fortunately, Cumulus offered an alternate frequency and the services of Cumulus’ high-powered attorneys in Washington, D.C., to assist.

However, in the early summer of 2013, the KSUN board of directors learned about an opportunity to acquire their former 101.1 FM frequency back, along with an associated license. On July 1, 2013, KSUN, through a loan from Alpine Bank, was able to acquire the KDBN license from Townsquare Media with an increased frequency from 100 to 500 watts.

“Cumulus had been taken over by Townsquare and then they decided they didn’t want it,” Anne Huber said. “The biggest difference between what was then and what is now is that we can run commercial advertising.”

The station maintains its 501(c)3, nonprofit status and continues its aim to provide quality programming to the community.

“During the past 13 years, KSUN has served the Battlement Mesa, Parachute and nearby area with quality programming, including eight weekly, locally generated programs,” said Mary Lee Mohrlang, secretary of the board and former board president. “We want to continue to serve our local listeners, but by moving to the 101.1 FM frequency and with the ability to broadcast at a higher, frequency, we are able to reach and serve many more listeners in the Grand Valley.”

PLANS FOR GROWTH

The station currently has about 15 volunteers and an intern from Mesa University. The current board, which has one vacancy, is made up of Anne Huber, president; McDaniel; Keith Lammey; Laurel Koning; Ann Kellerby; and Mohriang.

Current programming during the week includes “Floydmac and The Morning Show,” from 7-8 a.m.; “Ron and the Time Train,” “Momento Latino,” “Education Update,” “Rockin’ with the FOXX” and “Upbeat Tempo.” Saturdays include “Morning Coffee with Justin” and “Under the Hood,” and Sundays feature “Acoustic Cafe,” “Friends of the Blues” “Smooth Jazz,” “Blessing Up for Church,” “Sing Out,” “Art of The Song,” “Bluegrass Review” and “12th Street Jump.”

Plans include more live programming, getting an intern from Colorado Mountain College, increasing school involvement, more volunteers and finding a commissioned advertising person.

“I think radio is still important and I think it will continue to grow,” Anne Huber said. “We’ve got dedicated people here who really want to see this succeed and I think we can fill an information gap as we grow.”