

TVSea

Year 2000 In Review

Overview: Insights, Not Soundbites

The year 2000 was a busy one for TVSea. We worked hard to improve the quantity, quality, and variety of our programs, and tried to add value to our meeting coverage by incorporating more opportunities for viewer input. In addition to airing in excess of 400 different meetings, we initiated a new city video magazine, expanded video-streaming services, including simultaneous streaming of public meetings of special interest that are broadcast live, produced more than 40 programs in our studio, and created many other programs, both large and small.

A City Council meeting or a Mayor's press conference ends up as less than a minute on the evening television news and only a few column inches in a morning newspaper article. On TVSea, it exists in its entirety, unedited, for all to see and hear. And it airs many times. TVSea provides citizens with an open window on local government. It's a very big window.

During 2000 we taped 381 separate City Council events: full council meetings, every committee meeting, every public hearing, council "forums," ad hoc committees, and council retreats. The number of meetings on TVSea rises into the 400s when we include all the other meetings we tape ourselves or receive and air (e.g., the Citizens Technology and Telecommunications Advisory Board, Elevated Transportation Co., Seattle-King County Board of Health, Port Commission, Seattle Public Library and Puget Sound Regional Council).

One purpose of such extensive meeting coverage is to offer citizens the opportunity to be informed. But there's another half of the "teledemocracy" equation-- providing timely opportunities for citizens to share their opinions with public officials. TVSea is committed to finding new ways to encourage citizens to communicate back to their government. During this past year TVSea placed a strong emphasis on making our city council meetings more accessible to the public and more interactive.

In 2000, we not only aired more programs live but also integrated live telephone and e-mail input vehicles. Citizens could call or send e-mails during some public hearings and committee meetings and have their comments taken live on the air. Our commitment to teledemocracy was also demonstrated in a proposal we developed for expanding cable fiber links within the community back to TVSea and in an article published in a national government cable journal.

Video streaming is another way citizens can access TVSea programs. We now stream our air signal continuously; everything that goes out to air on TVSea can be watched through our web site at a computer anywhere at the same time. In addition, TVSea archives meetings and other programs on our web site through video streaming.

TVSea's program quality was well recognized nationally. In the two major competitions for government access channels, TVSea won the following awards:

National Association of Telecommunications Officers and Advisors (NATOA) **Government Programming Awards**

First Place, Children, "Global Reading Challenge"

First Place, TV Station Web site: "cityofseattle.net/tvsea"

2nd Place, Documentary, Social Issues, "Teen Music in Seattle: Dead or Alive"

3rd Place, Documentary, Event, "Voices of the WTO"

3rd Place, Outtakes and Bloopers, "Beyond the Badge"

Alliance for Community Media, Home Town Video Festival
First Place, Documentary Profile, “Longfellow Creek”
First Place, Informational, “At Their Fingertips”
First Place, Talk Show, “TVSea’s BookTalk: The Harry Potter Program”
Honorable Mention, Documentary Event: “Voices of the WTO”

In addition, Seattle Public Utilities transferred to film the excellent video we produced: “Longfellow Creek: An Urban Legacy.” This film is now airing regularly as a short at the Admiral Theatre.

These awards and recognitions are an independent verification that we truly gave viewers a reason to tune to TVSea for “more than meetings.”

And people are watching. The city’s Technology Indicators Survey reported that 57% of those with cable television have watched TVSea.

Following is a summary of the other “non meeting” programming TVSea produced in the year 2000.

Public Affairs

We continued our excellent, independent public affairs program, Seattle Citizen. Regular programs included live, uncensored monthly call-ins with Mayor Schell, a call-in with City Attorney Mark Sidran, two journalists’ roundtable discussions, and programs on the Aquarium expansion, election contribution limits, the Monorail, and Sound Transit. We taped 19 different hour-long Seattle Citizens in 2000.

We also made an effort to cover community events that were of a public affairs nature. These included debates on light rail and monorail transportation options, and a community rally against racism. We took our cameras to the City Club for some of their events, including an interview with Police Chief Gil Kerlikowske and a program featuring both Mayor Schell and County Executive Ron Sims.

When the first WTO misdemeanor case came to trial, TVSea was there. Utilizing the cameras-in-the court rules, we filed an application with the court and taped the entire trial, a four-day event. The six-person jury came back with a “not guilty” verdict.

We covered the Renter’s Summit and produced a short program on the importance of the Census. Prior to the November election we taped a studio program with Councilmember Nicastro and several citizens on the prescient topic Does Your Vote Count? Earlier in the year, we taped a studio program on Teen Dating Violence. And when a forum was held in the council chambers on Equity in the Post I-200 Era, we taped that, too.

Randall Robinson’s speech on reparations for African Americans was an important part of Human Rights Day.

All of these programs either directly involved a public official, an issue facing the City Council or Mayor, or were taped at the request of a city agency or department because it involved their work or related to their mission.

Video Magazine

In 2000, we began producing a video magazine. We turned out five editions of Seattle Focus. Among the first year topics: what Seattle is doing about global warming; local solutions to the bridging the digital divide; the all ages dance ordinance; transportation solutions; the anniversary demonstrations of the WTO;

and a video tour of the grand opening of the Experience Music Project. Shorter segments included History Link with Walt Crowley, Seattle Speaks – a “person on the street” interview segment, and News in Review.

We learned a lot from our first magazine experiences in 2000 that will benefit us as we move ahead in 2001 with a dedicated producer/host.

Studio Programs

In addition to the studio programs mentioned above in the discussion on public affairs programming (Seattle Citizen, Teen Dating Violence, Does Your Vote Count?), we also produced two studio series.

The Seattle Police Department continued their work with TVSea during 2000 and produced a monthly hour-long live program, Beyond The Badge, 12 in all for the year. For the anniversary marking two complete years of programming, we scheduled a 24-hour Beyond The Badge marathon and aired all the programs produced in their first two years.

Working with the Seattle Public Library, we continued and solidified our BookTalk series. Nancy Pearl, Director of the Washington Center For The Book, co-hosted along with Sharon Griggins, who produced the series. Each month brought a different topic and special guests. Topics in 2000 included Books Your Book Club Might Enjoy, Cool Books for Kids, The Classics, and Great Gift Books. Six BookTalks were produced in 2000; the series is funded through June 2001. The Washington Center For The Book worked with us to design a promotional bookmark, which was distributed at local libraries.

Salmon Information Television

TVSea played a key role in the planning, development and implementation of the Salmon Information Television Network, or SITV, which produced six editions of a monthly video magazine, The Salmon Exchange. This series airs on more than twenty different government stations in the Puget Sound region.

We remain an integral part of the steering committee of this unique organization, a collaborative effort of local government access channels and the Seattle School District’s Instructional Broadcasting Center. We provided the crew for several of the programs that were shot and edited during 2000. And we took a lead role in writing a large grant now pending with the Environmental Protection Agency to continue this series.

Cultural Programming

The unique and perpetually popular Clay Jenkinson returned to Seattle twice in 2000. We taped all five of his Living History performances: Thomas Jefferson (twice), Meriwether Lewis, Robert Oppenheimer, and Francis Bacon. We also produced a studio interview with him and dropped in footage of his performances where references were appropriate.

Seattle Arts! is a cultural series we initiated with 911 Media and the Seattle Arts Commission. The Arts Commission selected videos by local film and video producers, many of whom are referred by 911 Media. We created an open for the series, edit the programs together and air them on TVSea. In this way we have enlarged our programming to include videos about local artists and culture by local video producers. Four Seattle Arts! programs were completed in 2000. The series will continue in 2001.

Seattle, Way Back When is another cultural project we undertook. A staffmember worked with History House and re-mastered several old historical films and added a new voiceover. Two old historical films were preserved and now air as fillers: Seattle, History of A Young City and Norway Days. Several more will be completed in 2001.

Our BookTalk series, mentioned previously, also falls within the “cultural” programming venue.

In addition we taped a presentation by poet Philip Levine: Windows on The Writing Life and the Seattle's Favorite Poems Celebration. We recorded a presentation by a surviving member of the Tuskegee Airmen, a Black History Celebration, Randall Robinson's speech on reparations for African Americans and the Human Rights Day, the Seattle Neighborhood Arts Conference, an African-American storyteller, a Martin Luther King day banquet speaker, and an all day Art and Technology Conference.

New City Buildings/Architecture and Design Programs

Seattle is experiencing a boom in new civic construction, and TVSea was there to record the process. In addition to the video previously mentioned on the Experience Music Project, designed by Frank Gehry, we taped Rem Koolhaas' presentation on his plans for the new Downtown Library. (Koolhaas won the Pritzker Architecture Prize this year, architecture's equivalent of a Nobel Prize.) We also recorded several presentations on the new Civic Center, including ones on design concept, civic plaza design, and public spaces. The architect's presentation of their design for a new Seattle Aquarium was another video TVSea shot and aired.

Other Programs

Following is a partial list of additional programming produced at TVSea in 2000:

12 Mayor press conferences
a New Employee Orientation video
a video on the Neighborhood Matching Fund
the Seattle Works! Awards Ceremony (TVSea's Jerome Gates was one of the award recipients!)
The Mayor's Scholars Awards
The Global Reading Challenge
A video tour of the status of the Cedar River Watershed Education Center
Events at the Yesler Community Center, the Rainier Community Center,
The Star Center Open House (an adaptive technology computer lab)
The Seattle Community Technology Alliance opening (and a special video created for the opening describing the partnerships the alliance forged with Microsoft, Cisco, the Seattle Public Library, and others)
A community meeting on police chief selection criteria
Chief Kerlikowske's Swearing-In Ceremony
The Kids Town Hall for Take Your Daughters To Work Day
The Habitat Conservation Plan Signing Ceremony
Salmon Friendly Gardening
Many other video projects for Seattle Public Utilities
Healthy Buildings
Dozens of videos for Seattle City Light, who helped by having a staff producer
PSAs and short pieces such as a promo for TVSea, Zoo Babies, the Big Help, Chip Seal, Artworks

Personnel Changes in 2000

Nick Cirelli retired in February after a long career with the city. A new employee, while still in her probationary status, quit in the Spring. C. R. Douglas, our popular host for Seattle Citizen, told us that it was time to move on to other projects. He produced 70 Seattle Citizen programs during the four years he contracted with TVSea. We were fortunate to be able to lure John Giamberso away from King County Civic Television. John was their station manager and now is our Operations Director.

Summary

At TVSea we are often balancing competing interests—a desire to deliver highly produced videos, the budget implications of those videos, and the need to have other projects produced simpler and with a faster turn-around time. We feel that we did a complete job of covering the City Council, created some innovative programming to let citizens communicate back to government, and produced an incredible amount of other programming that was responsive to community interests and issues.

We have an excellent crew of dedicated professionals, who have learned to work as a team, take on new responsibilities, and juggle a multitude of different tasks. It takes a lot to run a 24 hour/day, 7-day/week-television station and to produce so much programming with so few people. Whatever success we experience is a reflection of the ability and commitment of the TVSea staff.

Looking Ahead...Changes, Challenges, Improvements in 2001

Relocation

TVSea is being relocated to the basement of the Municipal Building while the new Civic Center is built. This move will cause temporary reduction and disruption of services but should also lead to some technical improvements. For the first time, we will have two control rooms, one for council meetings and another for the studio. Our new studio will be significantly larger. The equipment layout will change and should enhance efficiency. There will be an opportunity for our engineers to troubleshoot and fix some nagging technical problems in the edit systems.

Video Streaming

We will improve the web site organization, and the quality and quantity of our video streaming in 2001. Later this year we intend to offer a 3rd streaming option—real-time streaming of whatever we are taping in the City Council chambers. This will allow viewers to watch and participate in meetings while they are happening, whether or not they are being broadcast live.

Teledemocracy/Electronic Town Meetings

Our commitment to teledemocracy remains firm. We hope to implement some new “electronic town meetings” during the year. We believe that the key to the success of these interactive events is twofold: having an issue that piques viewers’ interest and successfully publicizing the opportunity to have input.

Programming

Our programming continues to expand. This year we have already taped Bill Moyers both in our studio and in a presentation for the library. We taped a lecture by Arthur Schlesinger. We have several poets lined up to tape. We taped a Blacks In Government Martin Luther King Day Banquet speaker and have sold more than 40 copies of that program. TVSea staff also were the videographers for a PSA with Bill Nye on energy savings shot at the request of the Governor’s Office.

We’ve experimented with some shorter, quick turn-around video pieces in a “Council Review/Preview” pilot. We’re going to continue and expand on that concept and will be hiring, on a part-time basis, a writer/producer/reporter with a news background to do this work. Our magazine, Seattle Focus, is continuing, and will also benefit from a permanent, part-time host/producer. And we are hiring someone new to replace C. R. Douglas as host of Seattle Citizen, and to expand our public affairs programming.

Hap Freund
Station Manger, TVSea
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