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MAKING WAVES ON AIR
The community behind community radio

STORY AND PHOTO MEREDITH KESTEL  DESIGN MIKAYLA LARSEN
On a Thursday night in December, Blake Delaney and Phoenix L’Amour sit in a dimly lit room with a colorful disco ball spinning in the corner; the sound of a record by The Cars plays. For them, this is a normal Thursday night, working as volunteers at KHOI. The pair host a show together called “Ghost In The Machine.” Every Thursday night they come in and play alternative ‘80s vinyl. Their show is just one of the many diverse and unique programs that make up the community station.

KHOI is a community radio station in Ames, Iowa. With a variety of shows and an even more diverse set of volunteers, KHOI embodies the definition of community radio. The sense of community is apparent immediately when a person walks into the station headquarters. An older gentleman sits at a table and makes small talk to whoever walks through the door and a mural depicting cohesion and helping others spans the top of the wall — lines of hands helping one another. Displayed beneath are images of people helping put the station together. While there, a person can hear the soothing voice of a man talking. In the back of the room, a person can look through a window and see the man himself as he talks on-air, a radiant 89.1 KHOI sign hangs on the wall above.

KHOI started as a project in 2006. In 2009 the Federal Communications Commission gave KHOI a permit to construct, meaning they were allocated a frequency and then had permission to build a radio station. After this, they were given a deadline, like all stations are, to get on the air. A station has exactly three years, down to the second, to start using their frequency or it goes dark. In August of 2012, one week before their deadline, KHOI went on air and was given their license.

“It (KHOI) has gone from a project that people didn’t even really understand what it was, and definitely didn’t feel that they wanted to support it, to a station that now has a large number of radio hosts and a
1. Blake Delaney preps to go on air during his show
2. Records are set and ready to be played on air
3. 80’s Alternative is played on “The Ghost In The Machine”
4. Delaney rocks out on air guitar in the studio at KHOI
5. Phoenix L’Amour tests headset volumes during the show
6. Blake Delaney adjusts volumes and outputs for the show

Ruedenberg is the station manager at KHOI, and is also one of the founders. The station has 37 different scheduled weekly shows, according to in-house records. The base of each show varies. On Sunday afternoons there is “Classical Sunday: Film Scores with Tom Beell,” then there are shows such as the “Teen Zone” show which features 18-year-old host Maxwell Eness.

“We would talk about things like social media, or political things happening on a nationwide basis. We would make jokes about the news, but we also made up like Onion stories,” says Eness, a senior at Ames High School. “KHOI takes it back to the idea of a small press, it brings what is happening in Ames, to Ames. It is changing the way people live in Story County.”

Aside from local talk radio and classical music, some shows are strictly based on music, such as Delaney and L’Amour’s show, “Ghost In The Machine.”

“I am an ‘80s kid at heart. I do this show because you never hear this kind of stuff on the radio anywhere you go. Minneapolis has alternative stations, but that is a mix of old and new alternative. This show is to be just ‘80s alternative that you won’t hear anywhere else but KHOI,” says Delaney.

Delaney, 49, is the owner of the local coffee shop Vinyl Café, where he sells records and coffee alike. He and L’Amour have been volunteers at KHOI for seven months.

KHOI is not just about variety and diversity in what they do. Something very important to those at the station is the fact that public radio is a right that American citizens own. “It is an exercise in what they call participatory citizenship. Democracy and community radio always go hand in hand. It is a basic principle of democracy, free press and the ability to communicate. In many parts of the world community radio is playing a huge role in democracy and human rights movements,” says Ruedenberg.

As manager of a community radio, she travels to various conferences.
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Smith uses a braille watch to tell time without needing sight internationally. Ruedenberg describes going to conferences in other areas of the world and meeting people she has nothing in common with — except their passion for community radio. The manager says that this passion draws them together and they are no longer strangers from different worlds. Delaney says, “KHOI brings those together that might not have been brought together without community radio. It embodies such a unique and eclectic group of people, which I think represents Ames as a whole quite accurately. It really is amazing.”

But Delaney and Eness aren’t the only examples of diversity at KHOI. If you listen to the station on Wednesday mornings you can hear the work of Bob Anders, a retired man who spends his time making his own postcards out of magazine clippings and testing out his 8-tracks. Sit down with Bob and you could find yourself talking with him for hours. Anders thought about his show for almost a year in advance of actually starting. Having a background in radio, he claims he wanted to put a show together that was unique. “I was fascinated when I first started planning this show by the 8-track technology,” says Anders, “I had collected 50, maybe 100, of these tracks, then I started to go on garage sales, and that’s where I found most of my 8-tracks. That is actually where I got the name of my show, ‘Bob’s 8-track Garage Sale.’”

Bob Anders’ show is coming up on the one-year anniversary of officially being on air. When you talk with him about radio and the community around KHOI, he lights up. “My favorite part about it is just the whole idea that it’s a community-based radio station. It’s owned and operated right here in this community. We don’t have a higher, corporate structure telling us what to do, how to do it, what to play. We can decide to do what we want, and that way you see great diversity in the programming at KHOI. As far as diversity goes, I’m about as far off-center as you get!” says Anders.

“Some people feel that radio is kind of an archaic technology. The thing about KHOI is the technology is current, so you can listen to it on your phone, on your iPad and on your computer. I think that makes it relevant, so KHOI radio is not an archaic technology.”

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