

TV channel honoured

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ST. ANDREWS - The St. Andrews Community Channel, which was granted a licence as an independent television broadcaster last spring, was recognized in the group category with a Volunteer of the Year award at Monday's New Year's Day mayor's levee.

This is the fourth year the awards, which recognize volunteers in the community, have been presented because, said Mayor John Craig, St. Andrews is very dependant on its volunteers.

The nomination for the community channel came from Chris Gordon who was, unfortunately, unable to attend the afternoon ceremonies at the town hall due to ill health.

The idea of a community channel was put forth in 1993. The first broadcast was March 13 that year and by December the St. Andrews Community Channel was registered as a not-for-profit organization. The first organizational meeting was held Feb 14, 1994 with board members, volunteers and the general public in attendance.

In May 2004 the board of directors felt that the community television station was not reaching a sufficient number of community residents due to the fact that broadcasts were restricted to cable subscribers and, over the 10 years, these had diminished greatly.

On the positive side, the amount of interest being shown by the local community, as well as those living just outside the town limits, had grown by leaps and bounds.

So in May 2004 the decision was taken to become an independent television broadcaster. An application was made to the Canadian Radio and Television Corporation for a licence to broadcast and this was granted last spring.

This was an ambitious project but the board, along with volunteers of the station, the support of the town, local businesses and other volunteers carried out carpentry work, building, painting, and hauling equipment from as far away as Fredericton.

Now, the station can be reached by anyone in St. Andrews and the immediate surrounding area who has a television set and a simple aerial. The station broadcasts on UHF Channel 26, and the call letters are CHCT.

The community channel has overcome a number of challenges in order to reach this goal including fund raising to meeting the cost of the necessary equipment - about \$18,000. This was successfully met last September thanks to support from the Tecolote Foundation, the town and members of the sur-

rounding communities.

The broadcasting antenna has been constructed and the transmitter, which was purchased from a company in Alberta, have been installed. The building of the broadcast studio took many hours of labour and expertise - as well as bravery from the non-certified electricians who faced possible jolts of electricity.

The third and final part of the project was the organization of a fund raising dinner and silent auction which proved to be a tremendous success thanks to the generosity of the CHCT supporters.

The presentation Monday is by no means the first accolade that the community channel has received over the past 10 years. In 1994/95 they received a certificate of appreciation from the Governor General for their contribution to the "Canada Remembers" program.

In 1995 they were presented with a Fundy Cable award for community programming and in January 1997 a recognition award from the Fundy Community Foundation for contributions to their annual report.

A merit award from the province for local community television service on New Brunswick Day was received in 1998 then in 1999/2000 the channel received a War Amps recognition award. In 2004 the channel received the Robert Thomson Memorial Award in appreciation of dedicated service to youth activities in St. Andrews.

Now, as 2007 gets under way, CHCT is ready to once again serve the communi-

ty of St. Andrews and the outlying districts within 12 kilometres of the broadcast tower which is located on the roof of the W.C. O'Neill Arena.

The station broadcasts digitally and the community channel will be increasing its program offerings with a greater variety and they are now starting televised bingo.

Chris Flemming, who is chair of the board of the community channel, said they were very, very grateful to have been nominated for the Volunteer of the Year award and to have been thought worthy to receive it.

He said the community channel has come a long way to this point in its history remembering how they started out almost as a joke in the community.

"If anyone has been by the studio to see the wealth and range of equipment that we are working with it is staggering to see the way technology has allowed ordinary people to communicate with each other."

Flemming said that today there are wonderful satellite systems that can bring in 300 or more channels but there is very little local programming produced here in New Brunswick so the chances for people in St. Andrews to have anything shown is minimal at best.

The community channel allows people in the community to be seen and heard, he said, and that is what they are all about. Flemming added that they can use all kinds of help both in front and behind the cameras.

"We want to hear from you and we would love to have you join us."



Barb Rayner/Courier

The St. Andrews Community Channel, which last year became an independent television broadcaster, was recognized with a Volunteer of the Year award in the group category at Monday's New Year's Day mayor's levee. Pictured (from left to right) are board chair Chris Flemming, volunteer Mary Casement, Mayor John Craig and volunteer Ken Leslie.