

A TV PIONEER

Suffolk Closeup

Publication: East Hampton Press
Published on: Jan 30, 2024
Columnist: [Karl Grossman](#)

“A Celebration of a Bold Life” was the title of a memorial for an extraordinary person, a pioneer of public access television in Suffolk County — indeed, the lead creator of a model for public access TV in the nation. Frazer Dougherty died in September at 101.

The memorial at the studios of LTV in Wainscott (LTV for “local television”) on January 14 included a video and photos of Frazer’s remarkable life and testimonials from relatives and folks he worked with at LTV.

It began with daughter Ariel Dougherty telling the 150 people assembled: “Frazer’s death is not only a loss for his family and friends but also for the many, many people he encountered throughout his numerous adventures.”

He was born in Pennsylvania, and the family later moved to Virginia. The video related how, with war breaking out in Europe, Frazer considered enlisting in the Canadian Armed Forces. But he had met the woman who would be his first wife, Page Caroline Huidekoper.

So, in 1940, he joined the National Guard. With the attack on Pearl Harbor and the U.S. entering what would be World War II, he transferred to the Army Air Corps and was a B-25 bomber pilot, flying 63 missions in New Guinea. A photo displayed his plane pierced with bullet holes.

The war won, back home he became an industrial designer and test pilot of the Airphibian, a flying car. The video showed Frazer flying and driving it. The Airphibian is on exhibit at the Smithsonian, and there were photos of Frazer sitting proudly in it at the museum.

He was very much involved in the civil rights struggle and supporting Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He was at the March on Washington and the marches from Selma to Montgomery.

He married Frances Ann Cannon Hersey in 1963. (She had been the girlfriend of a young John F. Kennedy and then wife of writer John Hersey before marrying Frazer.)

Frances Ann and Frazer spent most of the 1970s sailing around Greece and its islands, and then moved to East Hampton.

Frazer was fascinated by TV and its potential for community use. East Hampton was being targeted for large-scale development in the early 1980s. Developers were pushing the Town Board to abolish the town’s Planning Department to prevent it and its director, Tom Thorsen, from doing what the developers wanted. The board’s GOP majority complied.

However, then-East Hampton Town Supervisor Mary Fallon, at a public hearing, faced hundreds of East Hampton residents outraged by the department’s elimination. As they blasted it, she broke down. Frazer, with a video camera, recorded the scene. He took the tape to Sammons Communications, which had the town’s cable TV contract, and it was aired.

TV foremost conveys feelings and emotion; thus, showing the episode on TV had a great effect, significantly expanding opposition to what was happening. Fallon would resign as supervisor. There would be other government changes. The Planning Department would be reinstated. And Frazer would tell me later how it demonstrated the effectiveness of local TV.

Meanwhile, led by Frazer, working with Jill Keefe, Marty Katz and Bill King, LTV was being established. Frazer asked me to be on its board, and, impressed by the communication abilities of local TV and how LTV could be a national model, I joined it.

“Frazer was LTV’s champion,” Genie Henderson, an LTV producer, board member, its longtime archivist and former executive director, said at the memorial. Frazer was LTV’s “nonstop promoter to anyone who would listen,” she said. “Who can forget the man who was everywhere with a camera — parades, fairs, benefits, lectures, nature walks, heated debates ...”

And “thanks to his perseverance, here we are,” she continued. “For me and for I know dozens if not hundreds of others who got involved with this ‘we the people’ notion, it was about the community ... LTV virtually opened up the community.”

“Originally inspired by Frazer’s mantra — ‘Never throw anything away’ — we didn’t,” said Genie. And the LTV archive is now “30,000 shows strong,” which, “thanks to a partnership with the East Hampton Library, are now being digitized and made available for viewing online. It’s an exceptional, eclectic and highly unique collection — and all thanks to one man who had the will and the vision to create a platform for the people and by the people.”

Frazer hosted a daily two-hour morning show on LTV, “Hello Hello,” making 1,400 programs.

LTV is funded with cable TV franchise fees through East Hampton town and village and contributions from individuals, underwriters, grants and studio rentals. It is under the steady hand now of Michael Clark as executive director.

When cable TV was starting, the Federal Communications Commission in 1969 adopted a requirement that cable TV systems with 3,500 or more subscribers operate an “outlet” for “origination cablecasting” for “local production and presentation.” That requirement, unfortunately, no longer exists.

In addition to writing, I’ve long done television, too. For 33 years, I’ve hosted a TV program, “Enviro Close-Up,” broadcast nationally by Free Speech TV.

But TV should also be local. (I host, without any compensation, a local program on LTV, “Environment Long Island.”)

LTV and Frazer Dougherty have pioneered a model for local TV.