

## Meet Jonathan Olken of LTV East Hampton



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**D** By Todd Shapiro

Jonathan Olken is a fan of local television, which is understandable. He's chairman of the board of LTV, which is headquartered in East Hampton.

"Our basic mission is to cover all of East Hampton town and village board meetings," Olken says. "We also have five studios that people can use to make programming at no charge."

It is those studios that Olken is most proud to share with others. Olken, who has a long background in television, hosts a monthly "Meet the Mayor" show.

"It is all about the community," Olken explains. "We also have several cooking shows. They're always popular, and really terrific."

More important, Olken wants people to know that he and the staff are on hand to help people get their show on and build their audience.

"There absolutely needs to be a community-based visual media company," Olken says. "Our mission is to provide information and entertainment to the community. For example, we recently premiered a documentary called Bonackers, which are those who are 10th-, 11th- or 12th-generation citizens of the area, most of whom are farmers and fishermen. We showed it here and the place was packed. That's a service we provide to the community, a place to go and see quality documentaries. We've also hosted other programming and special events."

Olken, who had a long career in commercial television and marketing, previously worked for ABC and produced such campaigns as "Let's Go Mets" and the "Think Big" educational piece. He also was involved with the "USA Minute," which asked famous people what they felt about America. He also is a former executive vice president of WNET 13.

"Most of my career was in television," Olken says. "With commercial companies you have a different kind of job that is entertainment based and news oriented. I am not negative about commercial media. It is just different. They have a job to do, and we have a job to do. We're here to provide information and they're there to make money."

While LTV is available on channel 22 and 20 in East Hampton, programming also is available on YouTube, their website, cable and Facebook.

"As the media landscape changes, we change with it," Olken said of the various outlets. "Anybody in the world can watch us. They find us. It is just more outlets to send our message out. The farthest we've reached that we know about, so far, is Japan."

Olken is also proud of the diversity of programming and that young viewers are also producing programming.

“A student in high school tapes a monthly show, and has also produced a 30-minute film,” Olken said. “We provide the technical knowledge, assistance and camera people. They get their own guests. I like to think that we are user friendly. Not having a background or knowledge in television shouldn’t discourage someone from coming to us.”

Olken explains that before hosting “Meet the Mayor,” he had never been in front of the camera.

“My executive director said I had to do it,” Olken remembers. “We had a half hour to fill, so I just did my homework and went with it. That is what I’d tell anyone about coming on. Just be yourself. It is just talking to another human being. If I can do it ...”

Olken says they have one host who comes on every morning and just talks about whatever is on his mind. He occasionally has a guest. While he is not encouraging everyone to do that, he does explain that the show should be about what interests you.

“Some shows are more interesting than others,” Olken says with a laugh, “but it is not our job to choose. We just provide the forum. If they want advice, we help them.”

Olken, who is married with children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, spent most of his commercial career in New York City. He and his wife bought the place in East Hampton and they would come out on the weekends. As he neared retirement, they began spending more time out East. Now 80, they are full-time Hampton residents.

He says the next big thing for LTV is to produce a weekly, all-local news program.

“We’re in the early stages of development,” Olken says. “Our staff is only so big, but people are getting to know us and to respect us.”

Olken says the in-studio programming also is popular.

“Last summer we hosted 70 live events such as musicals, plays for adults and children, people who are workshopping their plays and films,” Olken says. “We also have a summer internship program. Our interns come in not knowing anything and leave with skills they can use. We have a young, diverse staff and that’s the way we like it. They learn about running the lights, cabling, sound, cameras.”

Although the staff is largely young, Olken says they are looking for people of all ages, talents and abilities.

“We want people to exercise another form of creativity,” Olken says. “It is all about expression. We realize that people have to learn, and we are OK with bringing them along. That’s also what we’re doing with the venue. It was an under-used resource, but now people are getting to know us and the venue. We don’t have a lot of money, but we make it stretch as much as possible. When we make a dime, we put that dime back into LTV, so that we remain state of the art.”

For more information, visit [ltveh.org](http://ltveh.org) or call 631-537-2777.

Todd Shapiro is an award-winning publicist and associate publisher of Dan’s Papers