

A Good Year for 'Free-Speech TV'



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By Christopher Walsh
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LTV, East Hampton Town's public access television station, saw revenue exceed expenses by \$180,000 in 2022, a 27-percent increase over the previous year, its executive director told the East Hampton Town Board on Tuesday.

In his annual report to the board, Michael Clark said that 77 cents of every dollar received is spent directly on programming. "Those are the kind of numbers that you want to see," he said.

Like the larger world, the independent, not-for-profit organization was transformed by the Covid-19 pandemic. That public health emergency thrust LTV into a larger, urgent role in the community, which it met by adding new methods and technology so that government meetings of the town and East Hampton Village could abruptly migrate from municipal buildings to remote video conference while still allowing the public to access and interact with them. The Star named LTV one of the "superstars of 2020" for its swift adoption of new methodologies so that it could continue to inform the public during the once-in-a-century event.

"LTV provides a free-speech television and media platform to share all manner of public communication, education, and creative expression within our community and the world at large," Mr. Clark told the board. Since he took the helm in 2019, its studios on Industrial Road in Wainscott — in a building it owns, on land leased from the town — have hosted theatrical performances, concerts, art exhibitions, and, last weekend, the Indigenous Fashion and Film Review featuring a fashion show, films, and vendors.

With a staff of 11, only five of them full-time employees, LTV broadcasts 24 hours a day, seven days per week on two local channels. Channel 20 offers public access shows, channel 22 government and educational programming. Its channel 20 aired an average of 130 hours of locally originated programs, and another 45 hours of nonlocal programming, per week last year. "That's a lot of broadcasting of what people want to say and getting their message out to everybody," Mr. Clark said. There were 289 citizen-developed studio shows last year, 81 more than in 2021, and 62 LTV-developed and produced shows. "We also co-produce with a few people, if the situation is right," Mr. Clark said.

There were 22 free production classes and 33 producers trained in 2022. Those wishing to develop a show must take the class. "If you're in the Town of East Hampton, you're entitled to have your own show," Mr. Clark said. The topic "is really up to you, as long as there's no hate speech. There are certain guidelines for community television in general. But it's basically your show."

Channel 22 aired an average of more than 100 hours of government programming and 70 hours of educational programming per week in 2022. "We had 294 government and school board meetings," four more than in 2021, he said. Last year, LTV produced and broadcast live East Hampton High School's graduation ceremony, as it has since the pandemic, as well as the ceremonial groundbreaking for the South Fork Wind farm, which brought Gov. Kathy Hochul and Secretary Deb Haaland of the United States Department of the Interior to LTV's studios.

LTV increased its advertising revenue by \$40,000 last year, in large part due to a new awareness program. "We were able to determine that there were so many people in our community that simply didn't know what LTV was about, and what it was that we could provide for the local community," Mr. Clark told the board. "I think that proved very successful because you see the contribution numbers being up at such a higher level than they were the year before." Indeed, contributions — in the form of donations, sponsorships, and underwriting — nearly tripled over 2021, to \$111,000. Studio rental income was also up by around \$75,000, in part thanks to a two-week rental of its cavernous Studio 3 by a "relatively famous musician" who used it for pre-tour rehearsal.

Wages and compensation increased by around \$100,000, Mr. Clark said. "In my mind, that makes sense. We're doing a lot more. We started doing a lot more in 2022 with community activities and things like that. We need people to do it, so we did bring on a couple people more, more hours for the part-timers that were here, and did increase our wages for the year." Production expenses were also up by about \$20,000, he said. "That also makes sense because of the fact that we're doing a lot more."

Going forward, LTV will continue to "take government meetings to the next level" via technology upgrades, he said, as well as "the continuous employee training to change with the technology." The awareness campaign also continues. "LTV is YouTV, is our mantra," Mr. Clark said. "This is the community's television station." LTV, said Supervisor Peter Van Scoyoc, "is the best public access television station, bar none, from what I've seen traveling around and watching public access all over, when I'm on vacation or happen to be traveling somewhere. It's really extraordinary what LTV brings to the community."