

How This Public Access TV Station Is Staying Relevant in 2025

It's exactly 9 a.m. on Friday, August 22, and Jason Nower arrives at the small-town public-access TV station where he has worked full-time since the Covid pandemic. LTV Studios sits in an industrial part of the rural hamlet of Wainscott, not far from both a bustling farmstand and an airport notorious for incessant helicopter noise and private-jet traffic serving the uber-wealthy.

Nower is LTV's chief video and network engineer. This is his day job (for a little while longer, at least). He moonlights as an emerging indie cinematographer, lighting designer, producer, and film editor. There's lots to do — but first, coffee. Like, a fishtank-sized amount of coffee. The day waiting at the door would be one of Nower's most challenging on record there, but also one of its most successful and rewarding.

Today, a Famous Fashion Icon has rented LTV's studio space and technical services for a special video shoot, and the team's going to need to be on point. And tonight, the popular sports network ESPN will be onsite to tap into LTV's broadband connection for its own remote broadcasting operation.

In some ways, today will be business as usual for LTV — broadcasting a government meeting and filming a public-access TV talk show — but in all others, it'll be a test not just of a public-access TV station's true mettle, but also its ability to adapt to a changing world. As the Trump administration slashes money for NPR,

PBS, and other critical services, the sense of security for those in the public-access TV world is eroding fast and in real-time.

The Communications Policy Act of 1984 mandated the creation of the public-access platform and also provided its funding source: the “franchise fee” that cable television companies pay to municipalities for the privilege of operating in their cities, towns, and villages. Those local governments can choose to run those public-access services themselves, like the townships in Southampton and Brookhaven do, or they can contract them out to an entity like LTV Studios.

What does “LTV” stand for? The answer is literally “Local Television.” It’s been around since the early 1980s in East Hampton Town as an independent nonprofit organization with a chief mission to broadcast and archive local government board meetings and document the culture and history of the surrounding communities. LTV also provides space, equipment, and professional technicians for townsfolk to create their own shows, carrying out the medium’s long, winding, and weird legacy in support of freedom of speech and creative expression.

But more and more, LTV finds itself evolving. Within its warehouse-like facility, someone thought decades ago to carve out a 3,500-square-foot studio space that would have Hollywood-style sound-stage potential, if it was completely soundproof. Today, LTV Studio 3, as it’s called, hosts acclaimed plays, concerts and cabaret shows, two youth theater groups, panel talks, educational events, film screenings, political debates, Drag Bingo nights, and all manner of community

celebrations. These events, like the private rentals, bring rent-paying clients and ticketed guests through the doors. This provides a key avenue of income supporting an old-school media platform that feels to insiders like it's the "next target" in the crosshairs of politics.

The day unfolds with a relaxed but charged start. Jody Gambino, LTV's lead editor and a studio technician, arrives at 9:30. His own artwork is displayed in the long, echoing hallway that doubles as one of the East End's secret art galleries; he's also performed onstage here as a musician and DJ. Half an hour later, he dons a headset in the purposefully dim Control Room and clicks to start a YouTube livestream. In a building five miles east of LTV, Mayor Jerry Larsen calls a meeting of the East Hampton Village Board of Trustees to order as Gambino remotely controls the cameras and microphones previously installed in the board room. Town, village, and school meetings like these happen anywhere from two or three to sometimes 10 times a week, relying on a complex video and teleconferencing broadcast system that Nower built himself during the pandemic. (At the time, it was so innovative and effective that other public-access stations and municipalities started calling him for advice.)

Remote meetings are such an important function that LTV employs three other technicians to man them: Esly Escobar, an entrepreneur and artist who's slated to have a solo show at the Parrish Art Museum next year; Matthew Charron, a single dad and Marine Corps veteran who has, like, four jobs, and whose teenage son, Jackson, has also worked for LTV as an editor and animator; and Matt

“Chappy” Chapman, one of LTV’s kindest, most helpful, and longest-tenured employees, and the only one here who plays the viola. Everyone likes these guys.

Nower stares deep-in-thought at a wall, brewing a pot of pourover Java Nation coffee, as Gaylin Davey walks in. At 22, Davey, a musical theater kid who was the valedictorian of her Pierson High School class, is the newest member of LTV’s full-time staff. She moves effortlessly between tasks, working cameras, mics, and graphics while ensuring the lights stay on, the fire extinguishers get inspected, and all exits stay clear of obstacles. Davey’s assignment Friday, though, was different: assistant director and production assistant on the video shoot involving the Famous Fashion Icon.

Zach Minskoff announces his arrival by getting a running start into a Steph Curry-worthy jump-shot to reach up and tap the ceiling. (With apologies for the wrong sport-metaphor — he was actually a standout baseball player in high school.) As LTV’s head studio technician, Minskoff directs most of the public-access shows that film here, including one slated for later today.

It’s 10:23 a.m. Enter Tess Quinlan, who hit some *insane* traffic on the way in, guys. She’s the studio scheduler and social media curator who makes sure LTV stays engaged, and relevant, on all such platforms. Quinlan, who sports a 2025 take on 1999 grunge fashion, has worn a long-sleeved black shirt and is already a bit too warm.

Will Osborne, who earned his stripes as a bartender for LTV’s live events before coming on board as an associate producer this summer, is next to arrive. If

there's anyone on staff with a solid poker face, it's this guy. He and Quinlan will ultimately serve as associate producers on the Famous Fashion Icon shoot.

Antoinette Lanza breezes in through the door. If there's anyone on staff with an endless supply of optimism inside, it's this gal. Lanza is a producer here at LTV. Today she's wearing metallic purple eyeshadow that's fitting for her role as the hospitality producer who will cater to Famous Fashion Icon's needs. The night before, she scheduled an Instacart order with Goldfish crackers, Coke Zero, and a couple other things she knew her client would like. Smart.

The countdown is on — about 90 minutes to go before Famous Fashion Icon's arrival. But LTV's caffeine-fueled team got a head start yesterday, outfitting a full TV studio set, green room, and makeshift nail salon for the occasion. They're ready.

Chaos walks through the door at around 12:30. Bill McCuddy, a New York Post arts writer, auctioneer, and comedic TV personality, and Patrick McLaughlin, a prominent real-estate agent with a sense of humor and a popular blog, arrive to film their public-access TV show, "Weekend Live." They look everywhere (unsuccessfully) for a copy of this week's "Dan's Papers" as a trio of unpaid interns sets up the cable access shoot.

The interns, all recent college graduates, are Sydney Salamy, Max Mensch, and Rachel Osborne, and they understand the assignment: take direction from Minskoff as the others make magic with Famous Fashion Icon. Interns here neither fetch coffee nor make photocopies — the actual hands-on TV experience they're

getting will serve them well when they move on to full-time jobs. This is part of the beauty of LTV; the “L” may officially mean “local,” but it could also stand for “laboratory.” This attitude fuels LTV’s ability to continually adapt and evolve.

For a while, it’s calm as “Weekend Live” goes on air and the main event happens upstairs. Minskoff is called up to work the Teleprompter for Famous Fashion Icon. Juliana Lopez, newly promoted to the role of finance director, crunches numbers in a cozy wrap sweater in her office under the soft light of her favorite Ikea lamp. One of her own original paintings leans against a wall. Josh Gladstone, the creative director and veteran nonprofit arts administrator who’s currently serving as LTV’s interim executive director, checks in with the team’s progress, then turns his attention to his enormous to-do list. Trained in Shakespearean acting, he also recently portrayed Juror No. 10 in a production of “Twelve Angry Men.” Gladstone likes to give everyone the space to build new connections, play with fresh ideas, and find ways to generate revenue. Lately, there’s been a lot of that.

Hudson Woelk strolls in mid-afternoon; he’s without a doubt the most fashionable technical director out there, according to a consensus of his peers. He can operate a projector with aplomb and makes a mean Spotify playlist. And he’s on point for the ESPN broadcast later on.

Not pictured: Patrice Jacobsen, the programming director who assembles shows on LTV’s channels like a living digital jigsaw puzzle, has a hybrid work schedule. She’s one of LTV’s longest-tenured employees, starting as a college

intern before her graduation in 2000 from LIU Southampton, and was involved in the launch of LTV's second channel soon after. She also appreciates a good cup of herbal tea. There's Ellen Watson, who retired recently from her role as operations and office manager, but couldn't get away *that* easily — she's staying on part-time 'til the end of the year, at which point the staff will send her off with a proper retirement party, complete with a charcuterie board full of her favorite cheeses. Genie Henderson was in the first-ever producers class offered to local residents by the fledgling LTV in 1986, making her the ideal memory bank to oversee LTV's archive of some 25,000 shows. And Christine Sampson, a journalist who was hired in January as director of community engagement and producer of LTV's news show, is multitasking her heart out in the communal workspace called the Head End. Clumsy A.F., Sampson's role on Friday was to simply stay out of the way. Like everyone else, she totally nailed it.

It would be safe to say that today, LTV is a well-oiled machine. On top of its game. Firing on all cylinders. Three clichés in a row? Yes. A foregone conclusion among them? No. LTV's team is still human; mistakes happen sometimes. But not today.

Famous Fashion Icon's shoot wraps up promptly at 4:30 p.m. She departs with high praise for the crew. A little later, the ESPN folks arrive in a truck, and Woelk gets to work. And one of the three tenants renting private office or studio space upstairs arrives to deliver his nightly national news broadcast. Every room at LTV, from the podcast studio to the utility closet where the Christmas decorations

are kept, is put to good use. The rental income helps stabilize LTV's bottom line — the importance of which cannot be overstated, given the fragile future of public media.

Nower likes to advise his team to find something that makes them indispensable and irreplaceable, then become the undisputed best at doing that thing. LTV is just that to its community. Its evolution is essential. And days like today are proof that it's possible.

Later that night, following the day's landmark operation, the crew learned that its parent cable network, Optimum, had switched its channel numbers without proper notice. "Channel 1300" and "Channel 1310" sure didn't roll off the tongue as smoothly as "20" and "22" did. After backlash that united PEG stations across the region, the channels were restored a few weeks later. Still, LTV's massive ongoing push to fight for its future is mission-critical — a sign of the times, and a sign of things to come.