

CAN TV's Barbara Popovic wins national award

The Alliance for Community Media (ACM) honored Barbara Popovic, Chicago Access Network Television (CAN TV) Executive Director, with the Dirk Koenig-George Stoney Leadership Award at its annual conference on July 8, 2010 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This award is given to an organization or individual for making an outstanding contribution to championing the growth and experience of humanistic community communications.

The ACM (alliancecm.org) is a nonprofit, national membership organization founded in 1976 to advance democratic ideals by ensuring that people have access to electronic media and by promoting effective communication through community uses of media. The ACM represents over 3,000 Public, Educational and Governmental (PEG) access organizations and community media centers throughout the country.

Barbara Popovic Acceptance Speech

*Dirk Koenig-George Stoney Humanistic Communication Award
July 8, 2010, Pittsburgh, PA*

Alan Bushong, Mike Wassenar, Randy Van Dalsen, Charlotte Engle, Tim Lay and by extension, Jim Horwood – you have honored me deeply with this nomination and I thank you. I also want to thank the awards committee - Nancy Richard, Karla Saldana, and Jasmine White and the Alliance for Community Media.

George Stoney and Dirk Koenig devoted their lifework to humanistic communications. George, who is with us today, has led by example for much of his 94 years. He's never let go of his vision for what public access can be and holds all of us to that high standard.

My home base, CAN TV in Chicago, has a resilient, hard working, committed team in its staff and community based board. They never fail to stand firm in the face of challenges. I'm indebted to CAN TV's Technology Director, Greg Boozell, who has helped guide CAN TV's development, and whose vision, deeply held beliefs, and integrity have inspired and challenged me in this work, and Mary Stack, CAN TV's Associate Executive Director, who has been instrumental in building a standard of excellence at CAN TV.

My family members, like many of yours, are boosters. My children, Lona, Zora and Paul, grew up with CAN TV, and my husband Radoje, who immigrated to this country 30 years ago, has a deep appreciation for the importance of there being an independent, local media resource.

Times are tough. Many of us around the country can map the last decade by the challenges we've faced to sustain PEG Access in our hometowns. Damaging shifts in regulatory protections, sluggish or nonexistent enforcement, and particularly troubling are those, even among our allies, who are quick to characterize PEG Access as a dinosaur or anachronism.

But what's passe' about having an independent, noncommercial public media resource? What's passe' about companies paying to support it? What's anachronistic about people telling their stories, in their own voices without corporate interference or government censorship? How refreshing that there is still a space on television where the people who are living it are telling it. These principles are as invigorating and dynamic today as they were when I started in this business 25 years ago.

As I worked on the ACM et al Petition, and the Alliance for Communication Democracy's Future of Media filing at the FCC, I was able to speak with many of you, and to bring together in those documents stories that are coming out of PEG centers everyday.

Howard Brown Health Center in Chicago shared a story with us about their live call-in show on CAN TV. A woman called in saying that she needed to access healthcare because she had HIV. They learned that she had never actually been diagnosed, but had assumed she was positive because she had unprotected sex and then read about the high rates of infection among Black women. After the show, she went to Howard Brown. Her test came back negative. She had lived like that for 10 years. She cried and cried and cried and they were able to get her into counseling.

Since 1986, a group of labor activists in Chicago have produced 500 episodes of *Labor Beat*, cablecast on CAN TV and other PEG channels around the nation. *Labor Beat* is Chicago's "rank and file" forum, documenting the depth, creativity and energy of the working class in its fight for its independent interests. We've learned that the entire *Labor Beat* collection and future episodes will be archived at the nation's preeminent repository of labor history, the internationally renowned Walter P. Reuther Library of Labor and Urban Affairs at Wayne State University in Detroit. *Labor Beat* speaks to the epic scope of labor's struggles over the last quarter century.

Passe? No, I'd say groundbreaking.

Through history there have been people who have organized, documented, chronicled and shared the courageous acts of everyday people who stand up for their principles. In the PEG community we contribute to that body of work as we facilitate the voices of people we work with. We open up the channels. We teach. We put the tools in people's hands. We're committed to their success. A new generation is coming. In Chicago we've begun to certify the children who've

been coming to CAN TV for years along with their parents and grandparents. Taking part in the media isn't a foreign concept to them. It's home.

And yet, despite the value that we see everyday out in the field, we find ourselves at a critical moment for this movement. PEG funds are being diverted, channels are being shut down or displaced. The FCC has yet to act affirmatively to start turning the tide. And many state and city authorities have turned their backs on the public by failing to protect PEG channels.

We have our champions on the hill. Rep. Baldwin and Rep. Serrano are deeply committed, as is my Representative and many of yours who have signed onto the CAP act and urged the FCC to grant the ACM Petition. These leaders know what a public good looks like, they recognize how low the investment in public media is in this country, and they uphold government's responsibility for protecting public resources.

In the 21st Century, we have an opportunity to build on the strengths of this medium. We need to adhere to the principles that promise meaningful public service in the future - independence, a public mission, an educational mandate, a commitment to localism and diversity. We need to refute the excuses for eroding regulations that provide public benefits and support. To demand inclusion of the public regardless of the technology. To fight discriminatory treatment of public channels. Most importantly, to reinvest in engaging our constituents to stand up for their rights and protect their avenue for speech.

I was privileged some years back to drink a whiskey with Studs Terkel in his living room piled high with books and projects in the making. He was signing my copy of "Hope Dies Last" about people who show courage in the face of adversity. When Tom Engelhardt reviewed the book, he said "*Hope Dies Last* is a reminder that in good times, you can do nothing and still have hopes, but in bad times, you have to act, take that first small step, in order to hope. That's where we are today."

Thank you.