

WTTW COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD

MINUTES of the
PUBLIC MEETING of the
WTTW Community Advisory Board (CAB)
Tuesday, June 17, 2014
WTTW Studios
5400 N St. Louis Avenue
Chicago, Illinois

The Chair found a quorum present, and called the meeting to order at 6:15 p.m.

Introductions were made by the following present members of the Community Advisory Board:

Joseph Morris, Chairman
Mary Lou Mockus, Vice Chairperson
Ava Holly Berland, Secretary
Jeff Berkowitz
Helen Bracey
Yvette Brown
Susan Buckner
Leatrice Campbell
Janice Goldstein
Linda Jackson
Dr. Ron Kurzejka
Lennette Meredith
Maggie Steinz
Renee Summers
Norma Sutton
Arlene Swartzman
Rita Tandaric
Felicia Townsend
Christopher Vaughn

In addition, the following persons were present and introduced themselves:

V.J. McAleer, Senior Vice President of WWCI for Production and Community Partnerships and Management
Liaison
Mary Field, Executive Producer, "Chicago Tonight"

Finally, the following members of the public were present and introduced themselves:

Roberta Cook
Nneka Erondu
Susan Gasper Hickey
Derrick Kimbrough, CAB candidate
Ed Moran, CAB candidate
Charles Whitcam, CAB candidate
Chet Szerlag, CAB candidate

Ms. Cook stated that she retired from, and was a former colleague of Ms. Berland, at the Federal Communications Commission.

Ms. Hickey described her educational background, and applauded WTTW's balanced coverage of the 2012 Chicago Teacher's Strike.

Mr. Moran stated that he resides in Evanston, is an attorney with a sole practice, and represents many clients on a pro bono basis. Mr. Moran added that he is an avid WTTW viewer, considers WTTW nightly fare "mandatory" programming, and welcomes the opportunity to contribute to WTTW by serving on CAB.

Approval of Minutes

The Chair requested approval of the April 2014 Minutes. Mr. Berkowitz provided two edits to page 4. As revised, Mr. Vaughn moved the minutes be approved; Dr. Kurzejka seconded the motion; and, the minutes were adopted unanimously.

Revision and Adoption of the Agenda

The Chair requested adoption of the Agenda. Ms. Mockus so moved; Ms. Summers seconded the motion; and, the Agenda was adopted unanimously.

Discussion with Mary Field, Executive Producer, "Chicago Tonight"

The Chair initiated the discussion by characterizing "Chicago Tonight" as WTTW's hallmark and Chicagoland's "community living room," where the issues of the day are fleshed out. Travelling throughout the U.S., the Chair noted the program's uniqueness; no other public broadcasting station produces anything comparable.

Mary Field hailed from Philadelphia, attended Northwestern School of Journalism, started her reporting career in print, then radio and television, took a Benton Fellowship at the University of Chicago, and ultimately came to WTTW as the Executive Producer of "Chicago Tonight."

Ms. Field described her typical day, beginning with listening to radio stations WBBM and WBEZ and reading the Chicago Tribune and Sun Times, coming to WTTW and collaborating with the on air reporters and producers, deciding on segment topics, assigning shooting crews, and managing all the program's talent and various components. According to Ms. Field, "Chicago Tonight" always books two segments on a "day-of" basis – the news (near the program's beginning) and the debrief segments. Ms. Field added that the remaining (generally seven) segments are planned in advance. However, when a major news story breaks, they reinvent the entire program that day. Ms. Swartzman stated that she appreciates the thoroughly researched content, and that she has learned so much about the area's issues and events by watching "Chicago Tonight."

The Chair asked Ms. Field whether she remains at the studio during live taping. Like most viewers, Ms. Field watches the program in the comfort of her home. Indeed, when the Chair asked Ms. Field how she views the program's audience, she stated that she strives to bring stories that will engage, inform and entertain viewers who are typically tired from their daily grind and have limited time at that hour.

Responding to Ms. Summers' question as to how CAB members could provide assistance, Ms. Field encouraged members to provide her with interesting Chicagoland stories, and followed up by passing out her cards. In considering such stories, Ms. Field stated that "Chicago Tonight" does "enterprise," not "investigative," reporting. Enterprise reporting, Ms. Field explained, involves "digging" in to stories not covered by other media outlets. Taking Ms. Field up on stories that fit in the enterprise mode, Ms. Steinz suggested a segment on Notherly Island's planned green space, and a segment on honoring the Tuskegee Airmen and the Youth Flyers Program in connection with Meigs Field's rich aviation history.

The Chair asked Mary Field whether she was familiar with the group "Fix Channel 11" ("group") and its claims that "Chicago Tonight's" production costs are not justified (*i.e.*, the costs represent a significant portion of WTTW's budget) and that its format appears stagnant. Ms. Field responded that she is aware of the group's claims and addressed each separately.

As for the production costs, Ms. Field stated that she does not know the "Chicago Tonight" budget, and thus does not cannot address specific allocation of the program's operating expenses. Mr. Vaughn observed that if Ms. Field does not know, surely the group does not know, the specifics, and their claims very well appear baseless. Responding to the Chair's suggestion, Ms. Field agreed that such questions more appropriately should be directed to WTTW's CFO Reese Marcusson.

Responding to the Chair's question, Ms. Field stated that it is not WTTW's practice to pay the program's panelists and interviewees. Ms. Field, however, added that when experts have been asked to appear on a regular basis (*e.g.*, "Big Cat" Williams for Bears, and Neil Shubin for scientific, segments), they receive a nominal honorarium. According to Ms. Field, "Chicago Tonight's" salaried talent consists of six producers, two hosts, and a team of four reporters, each working various "beats," areas of interest. Ms. Steinz asked if such talent also is responsible for web content. Ms. Field added that the program's producers and reporters are responsible for developing web content. In addition, WTTW has a separate web editorial and content team that creates more content and maintains the station's website. Ms. Field also mentioned that "Chicago Tonight" recently partnered with Crain, establishing a fiber link to their offices, which not only is an excellent business reporting resource, but is a cost saving measure as well.

As for the program's format, Ms. Field expressed her mission to present interesting story segments that will attract a broad audience in the Chicagoland area. Dr. Kurzejka stated that he considers the format intimate and very friendly, from the studio's living room to his. Ms. Campbell added that in an evolving media environment, with fads and short blips (*i.e.*, "twittering"), she finds that format's stability an asset that really "reaches" viewers.

Ms. Steinz asked Ms. Field about "Chicago Tonight's" censorship issues/policies. Ms. Field stated that there is a policy precluding personal defamation and vulgar language, for example, but that the hosts' professional skills and the panelists' and guests' self-restraint generally suffice. (In the event particular a concern occurs, Ms. Field stated such concern should be brought to her attention.)

The Chair asked Ms. Field if she has ever punted on, or avoided, a controversial issue. Ms. Field stated, and avid viewers can attest, that “Chicago Tonight” has presented countless controversial issues. However, Ms. Field stated that the program does not usually air issues that are predictably divisive with pat arguments on each side (*e.g.*, abortion), which would neither illuminate, nor cover new ground.

The Chair followed up by asking if lack of resources ever caused her to pass on/avoid an issue. Ms. Field stated that the program’s limited resources means that her staff cannot travel and that reporters cannot cover their beat in the traditional sense. Instead, she stated, that stories are generally developed by telephone, internet research and other means within the studio, and that reporters are sent out in the field when there is something/someone specific to film. As for the technicians that work on the program, in the studio and in the field, the Chair asked whether they operate under her supervision and whether their salaries are charged to “Chicago Tonight’s” production costs. Ms. Field explained that she does not supervise them, that they are employed by other WTTW departments, but that the costs associated with “Chicago Tonight” are charged through the program internally within the station.

In a related matter, Mr. Berkowitz asked whether union-related work rules allowed her to have reporters in the field operating modern technology (video and audio equipment) without being accompanied by camera operators and other technical staff. Ms. Field responded in the affirmative. The Chair followed up, by asking whether she would welcome the flexibility to assign such tasks and to use such technology to reduce costs. Again, Ms. Field responded in the affirmative. Asking and being granted leave to respond, Mr. Whitcam contrasted WTTW’s current union-related work rules, which ensures technicians “good jobs,” to those on the West Coast where broadcasters are reducing the number of technical staff and diminishing the quality of recordings.

Mr. Berkowitz acknowledged that the program’s panelists generally represent opposing views and lend balance to the topics of the day, but believed the producers, hosts and reporters lean left and doubted any one of them “ever pulled the lever” for a Republican candidate or ballot issue. Ms. Field countered that, in fact, several producers are Republican. Ms. Field further added that each producer, host and reporter has different backgrounds, and above all, the journalistic integrity to delve into the subject and ultimately ask probing questions. Mr. Berkowitz disagreed, stating that the questions are not as probing as in John Callaway’s day. In contrast to Mr. Callaway’s one half hour program that addressed one topic, Ms. Field pointed out that today’s “Chicago Tonight” is a full hour and is comprised of six or seven segments. As a producer, Ms. Brown stated that she believed “Chicago Tonight” has continued John Callaway’s legacy. Ms. Brown added that it is not an issue of Democrat or Republican, but rather it is about ensuring that diverse views are presented on program topics. Ms. Brown concluded that we are fortunate to have such a program that addresses the needs and interests of the viewing audience in and throughout the unique area known as “Chicagoland.”

Trustee’s Liaison:

In Barbara Proctor’s and Michael W. Gonzalez’ absence, no report was presented.

Management Liaison

V.J. McAleer stated that on June 19, 2014, WTTW will air a documentary, “Jens Jensen, The Living Green,” which will be simulcast at Millennium Park. The documentary examines Mr. Jensen, the natural landscape artist who transformed Chicago by creating such treasures as Humboldt, Columbus and Douglas parks and the Garfield Conservatory.

Responding to the Chair’s question, Mr. McAleer confirmed that at the Board of Trustee’s next week’s meeting, Jim Mabie will be elected Chairman.

Ms. Campbell followed up on Dan Soles’ openness to invite CAB members, families and friends to preview and provide feedback on “Nature Cat” and was delighted that Mr. McAleer stated that he would look into getting tickets.

Finally, Mr. McAleer responded to the Chair's question regarding Dan Soles' pledge to provide copies of WTTW's 1988 journalistic guidelines, by stating that the guidelines were classified as confidential and thus not available. (Mr. McAleer noted that his wife, who works at NBC, told him that that station's guidelines were also so classified.) However, Mr. McAleer stated he would provide the Chair with the non-confidential document, "PBS Editorial Standards and Policies," which he did and which the Chair electronically distributed to CAB members following the June meeting. (A copy of the "PBS Editorial Standards and Policies" is attached.)

1) Membership and Nominating Committee

At the outset of the meeting, the Chair noted that Stephen Guenther was resigning due to work commitments. With Mr. Guenther's resignation, Ms. Meredith confirmed that CAB currently has four vacancies, that the Committee will review the applications, and that it will submit their recommendations at the August meeting.

The Chair expressed concern that there has been difficulty in downloading some of the online applications. In that regard, Mr. Berkowitz stated that Lee Cobb, who at age 15 graduated from high school and at age 17 is a sophomore at DePaul University) submitted one such application. Mr. Berkowitz added that members would benefit from hearing Mr. Cobb's perspective as a member of the millennial generation and by his election to CAB. The Chair added that Matthew Rarey, a CAB candidate who attended the April meeting, also reported that he submitted an online application.

The Chair asked the candidates who were present to speak.

Mr. Moran stated that he took the opportunity to introduce himself earlier in the evening, and would not take more of CAB's time.

Mr. Kimbrough, an educator and a doctoral candidate at the University of Illinois Chicago, stated he "grew up on and is excited" about public television, and very much looks forward to contributing as a CAB member.

Mr. Szerlag, a University of Chicago alum and health administrator, stated that WTTW is a gem in a realm of multiple media choices. However, he expressed disappointment with "Chicago Tonight," believing that the program tends to focus upon Chicago issues and neglects the suburbs.

Mr. Whitcam, an editor at WTTW 40 years ago and in California for the past 30 years, stated that WTTW is the "best place in television anywhere" and views Phil Ponce as "another Walter Cronkite." Mr. Whitcam is looking forward to returning to WTTW by serving on CAB.

Ms. Meredith thanked the candidates for attending, and told them she would be emailing each a list of the CAB committees.

2) Program Committee

In Ms. Cragan's absence, the Committee did not present a report. The Chair, noted that the Committee plans to meet on July 22d to discuss ideas for 2014-15.

3) Outreach Committee

In Ms. Meroni's absence, the Committee did not present a report. Ms. Tandoric, however, mentioned that Ms. Meroni attended the Board of Trustee's April Meeting, and provided Members with copies of her notes of that meeting. (A copy of Ms. Meroni's notes is attached.)

4) Technology Committee

The Committee did not present a report.

5) Cultural Research and Development Committee

The Committee did not present a report, as it has not scheduled a meeting since the April CAB meeting. Mr. Berkowitz, however, stated that the Committee will meet on July 16th, from 7 – 9 p.m.

Mr. Berkowitz stated that the Committee will be addressing education reform (*i.e.*, charter vs. public education). Ms. Buckner and Mr. Vaughn expressed their confusion regarding the Committee's focus, and felt that the topic more appropriately falls within the purview of the Education Committee. Ms. Steinz and the Chair responded by stating that the Education Committee is focused on the delivery of education, whereas the Cultural Research and Development Committee is focused on education reform.

6) Education Committee

The Committee did not present a report. Ms. Steinz stated that the Committee is taking a hiatus over the summer, and will forge ahead in the fall by, among other things, attending educational conferences and sharing with teachers WTTW's online resources. Ms. Steinz noted that there are nine members, several of whom participate as their schedules permit.

7) Secretary

The Secretary stated that she would incorporate Mr. Berkowitz' edits that were proffered earlier in the meeting, and circulate the revised April Minutes. The Secretary also applauded Ms. Brown's balanced and informative "Response to Violence" aired on WTTW.

8) Vice Chairman

The Vice Chair stated that she had compiled and distributed a current Committee Roster, complete with the Chairpersons as appointed by the Chair at the April meeting. (A copy of which is attached.) Ms. Buckner and Dr. Kurzejka then threw in their hats to join the Education Committee. A revised roster is on its way.

9) Chairman

The Chair reminded CAB members that everything it achieves ultimately culminates in developing a better, more useful Annual Report.

Old Business

None

New Business

The Chair distributed a Draft Resolution clarifying CAB's Bylaw's attendance requirement for member's consideration and discussion at the August meeting. (A copy of the Draft Resolution is attached.)

Good and Welfare

The Chair reported the absences of Barbara Cragan (because she is attending a wedding in Paris, France ... ooh la la), Heather Penn (because her evening class was rescheduled to accommodate the instructor's arrival of her newborn), and Sharon Meroni (because of the recent deaths of her step-father and her friend and boss).

The Chair also reported that Yvonne Davis is recovering nicely from knee surgery (hopefully, we'll see her at the August meeting).

Ms. Davis stated that she would forward the link to "Response to Violence," which she subsequently did and which the Chair electronically circulated.

Ms. Summers proudly announced her daughter's graduation from law school.

Ms. Berland excitedly announced that she and her mother, a former antique dealer, will be attending Antique Roadshow at the McCormick Place on July 26th.

Next Public CAB Meeting: August 18, 2014 at 6:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Ava Holly Berland

Attachments:

- PBS Editorial Standards and Policies
- Notes of the Board of Trustees' Meeting
- Committees Roster
- Resolution clarifying CAB's attendance requirement