HERE WITH YOU

FY 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

witr Live inspired®
A pandemic, a recession and protests for racial justice, intertwined with voting-law changes amid an intense presidential election year, presented a towering challenge for our journalists. We knew Pennsylvania would be a battleground in 2020, so we created a voting/elections beat in 2019 to cover Pennsylvania counties’ use of new voting machines, and expanded mail-in voting, for the June primary. Nobody anticipated COVID-19. But in March, the state started shutdowns and altered normal life in other ways to try to stop the virus’ spread. During the summer, following police killings of Black people across the country, racial justice demonstrations erupted – including in Harrisburg. WITF met the moment with engaged, listener-and-reader focused coverage on elections and voting, with pandemic coverage rooted in public health science and designed to inform, not unnerve, our community; and with outreach to communities of color to bring light, not heat, to issues of police brutality.

LEARNING AT HOME

When schools closed in March, families and teachers were left scrambling, trying to protect a continuity of education for all students. WITF Director of Education Debbie Riek remembers, “WITF quickly realized that children were not going to be learning in the same way and we answered the call, designing what is now a state-wide effort called Learning At Home.” To better serve the needs of families without internet access, WITF realigned its weekday schedule, adding fifteen hours of instructional programming to our over-the-air broadcast television schedule. In partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Education and seven local school districts, we created curriculum guides for teachers and families that match WITF programming to state standards and distributed 1,200 Learning At Home bags to families in the Harrisburg School District featuring a bilingual book, schedule and activity sheet.

BEING A CARING NEIGHBOR

In June, WITF’s Transforming Health initiative launched the inaugural Here With You campaign, intended to help our neighbors strengthen their physical and mental resiliency to cope with the pandemic. The collaboration with Capital BlueCross and WellSpan Health distributed 3,600 family resource packs to families in seven school districts. Each bag contained supplies and information for children to help spark creativity and encourage them to stay healthy at home this summer. Supplies ranged from colored pencils and rulers to activity sheets, wellness information and lip balm. To inspire healthy activities as a family, children also received a seed packet and planting instruction card. The Here With You campaign also provided free registration for myStrength, a behavioral health mobile app offering support for managing anxiety and more, launched To The Moon & Back Walking Challenge and championed A Summer Read focused on mental resiliency, Option B: Facing Adversity, Building Resilience, and Finding Joy by Sheryl Sandberg and Adam Grant.

IN MEMORIAM • MARK VAN BLARGAN

Mark Van Blargan was a lifelong believer in public media, a WITF supporter for almost 30 years, and a revered member of the WITF Board of Directors for more than a decade. We are forever indebted to our former Chair of the Board, whose breadth of knowledge, sense of humor, and legal expertise strengthened WITF and our service to the region. His foundational leadership and passion for public media were crucial during our pandemic response. The WITF family was devastated by Mark’s untimely death in August but his legacy will live on in our hearts and in our work.

MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO & CHAIR OF THE BOARD

When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news my mother would say to me, “Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.”

— Fred Rogers

Ron Herrick
WITF President & CEO

Susan Eichten
Chair, WITF Board of Directors

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Mark Van Blargan
Chair, WITF Board of Directors 2009-2020
September 8, 2019 | WITF Music Storyteller Sessions
In anticipation of Ken Burns’ new documentary series COUNTRY MUSIC, WITF produced its first live country music concert and film sneak peek, WITF Music: Storyteller Sessions at American Music Theatre in Lancaster. The evening featured bluegrass Colebrook Road, guitar-forward Ben Galaher, country meets classic rock Jess Zimmerman Band, and singer-songwriter Jeff Mammert. A mix of riveting live music, personal stories from the heart, and previews of the Ken Burns film, you didn’t have to be a country music fan to absolutely love it.

September 28, 2019 | Sesame Street 50 Years and Counting Walkaround Super Grover 2.0 was our superstar guest at WITF’s celebration of the 50th Anniversary of Sesame Street! Our largest event at the Public Media Center ever, over 1,000 people joined us for STEM activities, crafts, health screenings, photo ops and a free book for each child. WITF worked with Capital Area Transit to provide free bus rides from Harrisburg, and with the United Way of the Capital Region to provide transportation to the families they serve.

January 23, 2020 | WITF Family Play and Learn
For little ones, waiting for grown-ups to do important tasks in adult-centric spaces can be hard. That’s why WITF installed a WITF Play and Learn literacy and play space at the CASA community center in York. Featuring durable child-size furniture, bookshelves teeming with bilingual titles, building blocks and puppet theatre, the space turns unstructured waiting time into opportunities for lifelong learning.

April 22, 2020 | WITF’s First Virtual Event
In honor of the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day, WITF partnered with the Pennsylvania Parks & Forests Foundation and Earth Day 50 PA to host a virtual celebration. Almost 200 attendees joined us for the online screening of WITF original documentary Penn’s Woods: Cradle of Conservation and panel discussion featuring PA DCNR, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Allegheny County Parks Foundation.

June 18, 2020 | Toward Racial Justice
In the wake of the death of George Floyd, WITF offered a safe place to bring together underrepresented voices. With a committee of community co-organizers, WITF launched the Toward Racial Justice initiative, a bi-weekly series of virtual community conversations addressing systemic racism and injustice in Central Pennsylvania and beyond. “We are serving as a catalyst for change by bringing people together to discuss solutions and inspire collective action,” said Heather Woolridge, WITF’s Director of Community Engagement.

Story of Impact

June 15, 2020
One year after Transforming Health profiled a woman living with serious mental illness, Bucks County prison inmates found the story online—and had an urgent update. The woman in the story, Kimberly Stringer, was in jail. She was suicidal, and guards had pepper-sprayed her and locked her in a restraint chair. Transforming Health quickly produced a hard-hitting story on what happened. Five days later, Kimberly was moved to a psychiatric facility for care. Bucks County has announced policy changes to keep this from happening again.

This is heartbreaking. Oh my, we forget the people who need our help most. Thank you for this report.

Jeanette Fitzgerald via Facebook

When WITF shared our first story about Kim Stringer on Facebook, the world noticed.
1,416,911 people reached
23,264 total reactions
2,874 total shares

WITF TV: 202,100 weekly viewers
70% increase from 2019
In pageviews at WITF.org during the early months of COVID-19

WITF FM: 139,300 weekly listeners

WITF.org: 3.38 million pageviews

Tech Lambert
Multimedia News Director
NATIONAL EDWARD R. MURROW AWARDS
WITF was honored with two National Edward R. Murrow Awards by the Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA). WITF has now received 17 National Murrow Awards for excellence in broadcast and online journalism since 2007.

WITF SOCIAL MEDIA COVERAGE – THREE MILE ISLAND: AS IT HAPPENED
WITF was honored with excellence in social media for Three Mile Island: As It Happened, a six day initiative where WITF Digital Manager Lisa Wardle shared minute-by-minute updates via Twitter posts of the partial meltdown at the nuclear plant with historic footage, audio and documents.

PA POST – HOW A PENNSYLVIANIAN ENDED UP IN ICONIC D-DAY INVASION PHOTO
WITF’s PA Post was also awarded excellence in writing for How a Pennsylvanian Ended Up In Iconic D-Day Invasion Photo. WITF Multimedia News Director Tim Lambert unraveled the story behind a scene that happened on Omaha Beach in Normandy 75 years ago. It was immortalized in a picture of Private First Class Nicholas Russin of Lyndora, Pa. being dragged ashore, half-drowned, under artillery fire.

WITF MUSIC PRESENTS: COUNTRY MUSIC IN PENNSYLVANIA
WITF was honored with a 2020 Mid-Atlantic Regional Emmy Award in the category of documentary for WITF Music Presents: Country Music in Pennsylvania. The program explores country music and its roots in Pennsylvania and features untold stories of people in our region who played an important role in the creation of this uniquely American form of musical storytelling.

WITF SMART TALK: PENNSYLVANIA INFRASTRUCTURE NOT MAKING THE GRADE
The American Society of Civil Engineers honored Scott LaMar, Host and Executive Producer of Smart Talk, with the Excellence in Journalism Award for outstanding work to enhance public understanding of civil engineering. LaMar earned the award for an episode that sought to address a troubling state of affairs titled “Pennsylvania Infrastructure Not Making the Grade.”

PA POST MERGES WITH SPOTLIGHT PA
On August 17, 2020, Spotlight PA and PA Post combined into a single statewide news entity, based in Harrisburg. The merged and expanded team of 18 reporters and editors, plus fundraising and tech staff, is led by Chris Baxter and operates as Spotlight PA. WITF’s SVP of Content has joined Spotlight PA’s governing board and maintains a strong editorial partnership with the merged newsroom, ensuring that we reach a broad audience of Pennsylvanians on the radio, in addition to in print and online.

VOLUNTEERS KEEP US GOING
WITF volunteers are unrivaled in their passion and support for public media! We are grateful to everyone who answers phones, offers tours, registers event guests, assists with child activities and provides administrative support. During the first eight months of the fiscal year, WITF produced more large public events than we had before – and we could only do it because of the dedication of our volunteers. Thank you, Volunteers! We look forward to being together again next year.