



It's Saturday Morning Live in RPV (Sept 1, 2005)

By Josh Cohen Peninsula News

RPV -- A festive mood blanketed the Rancho Palos Verdes City Hall property Saturday, as council members, student interns, city staff members and volunteers turned out for a live broadcast of the city's nascent RPV Channel 33.

The morning show saw finance directors become talent scouts, a public works director transform into a key grip and Recreation and Parks Department personnel filling time as casting coordinators.

There were stars out as well. The RPV City Council was honored with Channel 33's first live broadcast from the studio itself. But council members agreed to share the stage with the day's true divas, the young interns who make the whole show happen.

"These kids, they're amazing," said Councilman Peter Gardiner. For nearly four years, Gardiner has worked with PV on the Net Director Ted Vegvari and School Board member Gabriella Holt to bring RPV's first and only educational television channel to life.

"Where else can you meet the community needs and provide opportunities for kids all in one package?" Gardiner said. "It's the end of a long journey but the beginning of a new day."

For months, viewers of Cox Cable Channel 33 have seen a video reader's board that lists community events, but slowly that will change, says Holt. Viewers can expect educational programming -- from pre-produced videos covering topics such as health care and safety issues, to locally produced shows involving regional and city issues -- to appear shortly.

The video reader's board itself is a product of former Peninsula High graduate Samarth Pal, who currently works as a software engineer with Northrup-Grumman. Pal and Vegvari also teamed up to create an automatic, computerized scheduling system to ensure that Channel 33's programs run on time and in sequence.

Pal and his parents, Raj and Mahima, took part in Saturday's opening ceremony.

"It's great to see something like this, because it's your hard work right there and people are appreciating it," said Samarth. "And it's been great working with the kids and Ted. I just knew that after I graduated, I wanted to give back to my community."

For years, Vegvari has offered local students the opportunity to learn video production, animation, computer programming and video editing at PV on the Net. The opportunity to work at Channel 33, said Peninsula High School Principal Kelly Johnson, is a natural extension of the skills his students learn in the classroom.

"Truthfully, communication is education, and this is another avenue for our kids to get involved in all the aspects," said Johnson. "The reality is, kids are far more sophisticated than adults with respect to technology, and I like to see that knowledge applied. This is going to give that opportunity to a lot of kids, and it's another source of communication for the community."

Just one of Channel 33's whiz-kids is 13-year-old Tyler Fradkin, a self-proclaimed super hero and animation buff. Fradkin doesn't look a day over 11, but he sits confidently in the production booth while editing videos using the latest technology.

"You learn to work as a team, how to interact," he said. "Not only are you benefited, but you get to come back and help others."

Fradkin himself is a beneficiary of past PV on the Net experience, learning his trade from former volunteer turned professional animator Derrick Auyoung. But his love for video began at a young age.

"Tyler taught me how to turn on my computer when he was a baby," said his mother, Judi. "He's really passionate about animation and editing since he started learning here when he was 11. It's his purpose in life and his goal is to work in this profession. I'm just happy there's an opportunity here for him to do what he loves."

Councilman Steve Wolowicz said Channel 33 serves two purposes: as a tool to further educate the community, and as an avenue for students to apply their passion for technology and video arts to a trade.

"The more information that government can disseminate, the better off we are," said Wolowicz. "The second thing is that this is being done to expand education about the industry to young people ... and to get them to learn in a team environment."

"When you can end up with multiple benefits out of projects like this," he added, "it really can make you feel good. It reaffirmed our belief that the system works for young people."

Of course, it doesn't hurt that, as Holt puts it, "everyone wants to be on television," which made the day a fun event for all.

"I'm a little hurt that Steve is up for best actor and I'm up for best supporting actor," said Councilman Doug Stern, following the live meeting. "Are we still on camera?"

Turning to Stern, Wolowicz replied, "You know, the neat thing about having old folks around is that us youngsters learn so much from them."