

Phi Beta Kappa Guest Speaker Mary Anne Alhadeff--informal notes October 16,2003

Thank you for inviting me. I've been with Maine Public Broadcasting for 14 months.

To give you a little background about Maine Public Broadcasting:

- a. Maine Public Broadcasting Corporation is comprised of Maine PBS and Maine Public Radio. In addition, we have significant services in the area of education, many services people may not be aware of.
- b. We are the only statewide TV and Radio network. Statewide network was created by the merger 12 years ago between MPBN licensed to the University of Maine System and WCBB licensed to Colby, Bates and Bowdoin Colleges. We've recently completed the conversion to digital television at low cost and a year ahead of schedule. We now have the ability to broadcast four programs at the same time. We used to be like a museum that could only show one painting at a time. PBS stations have pledged to use one of their channels for digital broadcasting.
- C We have about 130 employees working in Bangor, Lewiston and Portland, one radio reporter in Augusta and a reporter coming soon to Rockland.

I'd like to tell you that I don't consider myself a broadcaster -- broadcasting is a means to an end. Rather, I think of Public Broadcasting as an educational, public service organization.

Our mission is to engage the minds and enrich the lives of the people of our community. It's not about ratings or earning profits, it's about educating people and making their lives better. Our core business is delivering educational content to lifelong learners -- from K-Gray. I was a teacher for many years. In a sense, I feel as though I'm still in the job of teaching.

Today I will talk about three areas of service: Children, Education and Local Production and share some additional thoughts on the Liberal Arts.

Service to children: Public television is one of the first steps on a path of lifelong learning. We work to instill in children a love of learning that will last a lifetime.

One-third of broadcast schedule is non-commercial, non-violent, and the only place on the dial that treats children as young minds and young citizens, not young consumers. We are not about raising the next generation of couch potatoes. We are not here to sell them anything, just to educate them. PBS programs were revamped a couple years ago. Two of these programs are CyberChase and Liberty's Kids.

Kids tells us they don't see themselves portrayed in a positive way in the media. We promote the accomplishments of young people:

- "From the Top" presents young classical music performers
- Basketball
- Reading Rainbow

- We participate in "Turn Off TV Week"
(None of us watch a lot of TV)

Education: The commitment to young people is not particularly surprising when you consider how many people in public broadcasting are former teachers. I was at a PBS conference recently and they asked all the former teachers to stand -- and sure enough, about half of us stood. Many public television stations used to have the word Education in their titles. In our case we were founded by educational institutions.

Here are some education initiatives we have that you may not know about: Maine PBS conducts workforce training. MPBS is the only collaboration in the United States between a PBS station and the Department of Education, the Department of Labor (and now Department of Corrections) to provide workforce training to adult learners in Maine:

- We provide formal instruction in a series called GED on TV.
- We provide formal instruction in WorkPlace Essential Skills

We address family literacy:

- We conduct fifty workshops each year called Ready to Learn that teach daycare providers, parents and teachers to use PBS children's shows for early childhood education.
- We have a public service initiative called First Books in which we partner with Head Start and local literacy organizations to distribute more than 200 books per month to low income families.
- We are committed to helping teachers in classrooms.
- We provide lesson plans for teachers to use in conjunction with our local productions such as Made Maine.
- We conducted the third annual National Teacher Training Institute in which master teachers train others to use technology effectively in the classroom.

Local Programs and Services :

I'm pleased when people ask me: "Why do we need PBS any more when we have A&E and Discovery and History Channel on TV? We produce 250 hours of local programming each year. Different stations have different missions (WGBH/MPR). We are one of the leaders in local productions -- this is why I wanted to come here.

The strength of public broadcasting, and what keeps us unique today when there are so many channels from which to choose, is our particular combination of national programming from PBS and NPR combined with our local offerings that can only be found on Maine PBS and Maine Public Radio. We have the ability to create a unique program schedule appealing to the interests of the people of Maine. On Maine PBS, we have a variety of programs appealing to local interests: Regular series like MaineWatch and Made in Maine. Made in Maine profiles thirty-nine companies each year and promotes their products and has a waiting list of companies to be on the program.

There is Quest, which offers stories about science in our region and a community resource guide offering nature and science-related events within the three states.

There is HOME, which illustrates the rich history of Maine.

Last fall, a series called School Zones, profiled a year in the life of three Maine teachers and a school principal from very different schools. I was particularly moved by the story of a young, single father who is a kindergarten teacher in North Anson. No other station would devote four hours to this kind of programming.

Maine Things Considered, airing every Monday through Friday at 5:30 p.m. wins the #1 award for best local program about every other year. And we compete with the biggest stations in New York, Boston and Los Angeles. I find that if I time on my drive home to listen to Maine Things Considered, I am well informed about what I need to know.

Inside our organization we say that Public Broadcasting is a liberal arts education: When I graduated from college people used to say, "A liberal arts education doesn't prepare you for anything. Well, this month, I'm celebrating my 24th anniversary in public broadcasting and I can honestly tell you I've used my liberal arts education every day of my career.

Recently, I was invited to speak at UMPI's 100th anniversary celebration. I was invited because I have a habit of saying that I will hire a liberal arts major any time I have the chance. In the past when people have asked me why, I've said, "Because they can think and they can write." But in addition, I would say that at its core, liberal arts are education for the sheer love of learning. This has become a fundamental need not just in my business, but in all business.

To illustrate, let me tell you about the kind of people we hire. Last week, I polled our news staff regarding their college majors and I found our News Director is a Philosophy Major. That particular day, I found we also have a PhD in English, a Theater Major, a Reporter who majored in Folk Arts and a Music Major. One of our reporters credits her Liberal Arts Education for her ability to host live call-ins about the Patriot Act and the casino issue, and in the same week produce a report about a theater in Portland and submit a new program idea about a book series.

My next thought about liberal arts is that it is an education of the complete person, spanning the arts, humanities, social sciences, natural and physical sciences. Accompanying this is the ability to receive new information and expand the capacity to think critically. A liberal arts education gives people information to live their own lives, prepares them to cast their votes, learn to cook. I can't emphasize enough the value of a liberal arts education.

Thank you again for inviting me to speak at Phi Beta Kappa.