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Radio By, For the Community

By Anne Marie Cummings

It's been a long time coming, but Ithaca Community Radio (ICR) finally gets to fulfill its mission of creating local radio. According to Rene Borgella, chairperson of ICR's board of directors, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has awarded ICR, out of a pool of 3,600 applicants, two additional broadcast frequencies.

ICR, a volunteer organization, plans to have their two new frequencies, serving outlying areas, on the air by the end of the year, and will broadcast programming in Ithaca via their current translator frequency, 88.1 FM. Now local listeners will continue to get ICR's programming at the frequency they're used to.

A production and broadcast studio is being built at the Clinton House, in downtown Ithaca, for the transmission of locally-produced and syndicated programming on ICR's three frequencies: W201CD 88.1 FM (Ithaca), WRFI 91.9 FM (Watkins Glen) and WINO 89.9 FM (Odessa). In addition to airing public radio programs like "Democracy Now!," "Free Speech Radio"



Rene Borgella, left, and Ken Campbell outside of the Clinton House in Ithaca.

and "CounterSpin," ICR will provide new offerings that will include some locally-produced programs.

"There's a great abundance of talented and skilled people in the Finger Lakes region who can produce incisive, provocative shows," Borgella says. "Local news shows, youth programming, women's issues, veterans' talk, eclectic music — there's no shortage of possibilities."

A month ago, ICR learned that it could no longer re-

broadcast the signal it's been receiving since 2002, WEOS FM from Geneva, owned and operated by Hobart William Smith Colleges (HWS), so the timing of the licenses from the FCC couldn't have worked out better.

"WEOS had applied for a new radio station in Ithaca 10 years ago, WITH 90.1 FM," says Susan Rogers, general manager at WXXI Public Radio of Rochester, an organization which is now collaborating with

WEOS. "ICR knew that once that signal went on the air, they would have a difficult time receiving WEOS over the air in order to translate it."

But Borgella says that ICR never knew that they would have problem receiving WEOS. According to him, ICR's plan, as well as that of WEOS, was to rebroadcast WEOS' 89.7 signal until ICR got on the air with its own primary frequencies of WINO or WRFI. "I was surprised about a month ago when Ken Campbell, manager of Binghamton-based WSKG, and Jeanne Fischer, vice president for radio at WXXI, told me that HWS' new station, WITH 90.1 FM, would make it very unlikely for ICR to be able to continue to receive 89.7 for rebroadcast."

Campbell has offered WSKG's assistance to ICR since ICR's inception, so Borgella contacted him to see if there was anything WSKG could do to help ICR in the current situation. That was when WSKG stepped forward by offering one of its signals — WSQX — until ICR is ready to broadcast its primary station.

Photo by Anne Marie Cummings