

Channel 998 History

By Charleene and Werner Sharp

Background

In March 2020, Andrew DuJon, President and CEO of the Waterman Village Community, shut down the campus. COVID was emerging as a major problem and all group activities were shut down. Meals were delivered to our homes daily. We were safe but bored. We were concerned about our next door neighbor who was alone and lost her bridge, chorus, exercise classes, etc. as did many others who were in similar situations.

We, the Sharps (Werner, electrical engineer, and Charleene, former commercial TV writer) started looking for ideas to improve communication in the Community. One promising idea was resurrecting the defunct Comcast Channel 998 which had been inactive for five years since before the Sharps had moved into the community. Any communication, no matter how primitive, would be an improvement at this time.



The Beginning

In April we scheduled a meeting with Andrew to discuss our idea. He was enthusiastic and told us to go forward. He wanted the emphasis to be on recording and broadcasting interviews, community meetings, and exercise classes. Werner scheduled a meeting with Comcast at the Broadcast Control Room (Brady Sturgill's office now) adjacent to the Osborne Center and got the channel up and running. We were lacking the support equipment (cameras, video storage, etc.) but the cable itself was functional. In May 2020 reported our results back to Andrew and he told us to "Push On".

We initiated the project by establishing some guidelines. First, cost was very important. We were not competing with Channel 2 in Orlando. Second, all players would use the same equipment (cameras, software, etc.) to save time in training and maintenance.

Equipment

We did an internet search and selected inexpensive digital cameras that were fine for our application. We also did a serious study for playlist management software and discovered a company named Yodeck which provided video signage software and hardware for \$100 a year per cable. This system is employed at the Disney Haunted House. Werner had a current copy of Photoshop Premiere so we were covered in the editing area.

Staffing

The next task was recruiting, training, and scheduling the volunteer interviewers and camera operators. We formed the Channel 998 Team (three other couples) namely the Simlers (Linda and Don), the Jerlas (Susan and Ron) and the Roths (Gloria and Joel).

When the Team was complete, started the training process for interviewing techniques and camera operation. Tom Kaffenberger helped with the camera training. A weekly status meeting was held assigning responsibilities and critiquing previous efforts. Our first broadcast was the Memorial Day celebration in June.



Standing L to R: Ron Jerla, Joel Roth, Werner Sharp, and Don Simler.
Seated L to R: Susan Jerla, Gloria Roth, Charlene Sharp, and Linda Simler.

First Interviews

We learned very early that we could not do interviews in the resident homes, that there were lighting issues, audio noise, etc. Andrew responded by building a recording studio in one week. Broadcasts included management to resident monthly meetings and town halls, events, and interviews of new neighbors and hobbyists, exercise classes, rehab, and virtual church. After 12 months we had done 300+ resident interviews, many celebrations, 12 Manager Monthlies and broadcast approximately 2500 hours of video.

Brady Sturgill Arrives

In May 2021 Brady Sturgill arrived and focused initially on live broadcasts from the chapel.

In September 2021 the channel is running smoothly. Brady has assumed the Broadcast Engineer role and is supporting five separate video sources.

In March 2022 the channel was moved to standby. Brady became unavailable due to Lakeside needs.

WVCCTV is Created

In July 2023 the project was restarted. And many new volunteers appeared. The channel name was changed to WVCCTV (Waterman Village Community Cable TV) to include Lakeside (Channel 5) and the Oaks (Channel 998).

2024 Postscript

As of December 2024, WVCCTV operates with a dozen resident volunteers who are supported by the Activities Department and Brady Sturgill. The volunteers act as producers, editors, videographers, and schedulers. Nearly all our video is shot using ordinary cell phones.

We broadcast 24/7 on channel 998 in the Oaks and channel 5 in Lakeside. Weekly TV Guides are emailed to all residents with printed copies available at the concierge desks in the Lodge and the Grand.

Programming is selected in response to periodic resident surveys, and currently includes a mix of resident produced and commercial shows, such as:

Management Meetings, Wellness Exercises, Outpatient Exercises, Resident Variety Shows, Good Morning Waterman Village, Movies, Music Hour, Road Trips to nearby Florida destinations, Documentaries, International Travel, DocTalks, TechTalks, VIP Meetings, Resident Field Trips, Restaurant Reviews, presentations by department heads and local legal, banking, government and other service providers, The Old Curmudgeon, Music Trivia, Cooking For Morons, Where In The World Have You Been?, and POETRY Why Not?

We are constantly on the lookout for residents who would like to produce their own TV shows. We stand ready to provide whatever assistance you need to turn your TV ideas into TV shows. Just send an email to wvcctv23@gmail.com or talk with any member of our team.

To make it easier for residents to access locally produced content, we now have a web-based Video Library. This library features programs that were first shown on channels 5 and 998, showcasing the talents and creativity of our community members. Residents can share their experiences, hobbies, and stories through these easily accessible videos, allowing family and friends to stay connected with their lives.