

# Goddard Radio Doubles Its Outreach

by Nat Frothingham

Goddard College Community Radio will be throwing a big community "signal launch party" at the Hardwick Town House at 3 p.m. on Saturday, April 9.

Entertainment at the launch event includes storytellers Tim Jennings and Leanne Ponder, singer-songwriter Robert Sarazin Blake, the Vermont Vaudeville variety show and the headline act, the Eames Brothers band.

The signal launch party celebrates a notable expansion of Goddard College Radio from a single antenna close to the college library in Plainfield (WGDR, 91.1 FM) to a second station with greater power, a much higher antenna location in Hardwick (WGDH, 91.7 FM) and a much-expanded potential listening audience.

At its founding in 1973, Goddard College Radio (WGDR at 920 watts) was essentially a student radio station located at the college library with a listening area that included Plainfield, Marshfield and parts of Montpelier and East Montpelier.

"It was designed to be here, right here on campus," said David Ferland, a 15-year WGDR veteran and the station's operations manager.

During the '70s and '80s, WGDR was just that, a student radio station. When the students went home on vacation, the station went quiet. But over time, something remarkable happened: Members of the community were invited into the station and they kept the station going when students were gone. As Ferland explains it, a symbiotic relationship developed between Goddard and its nearby community, and something almost unique was created.

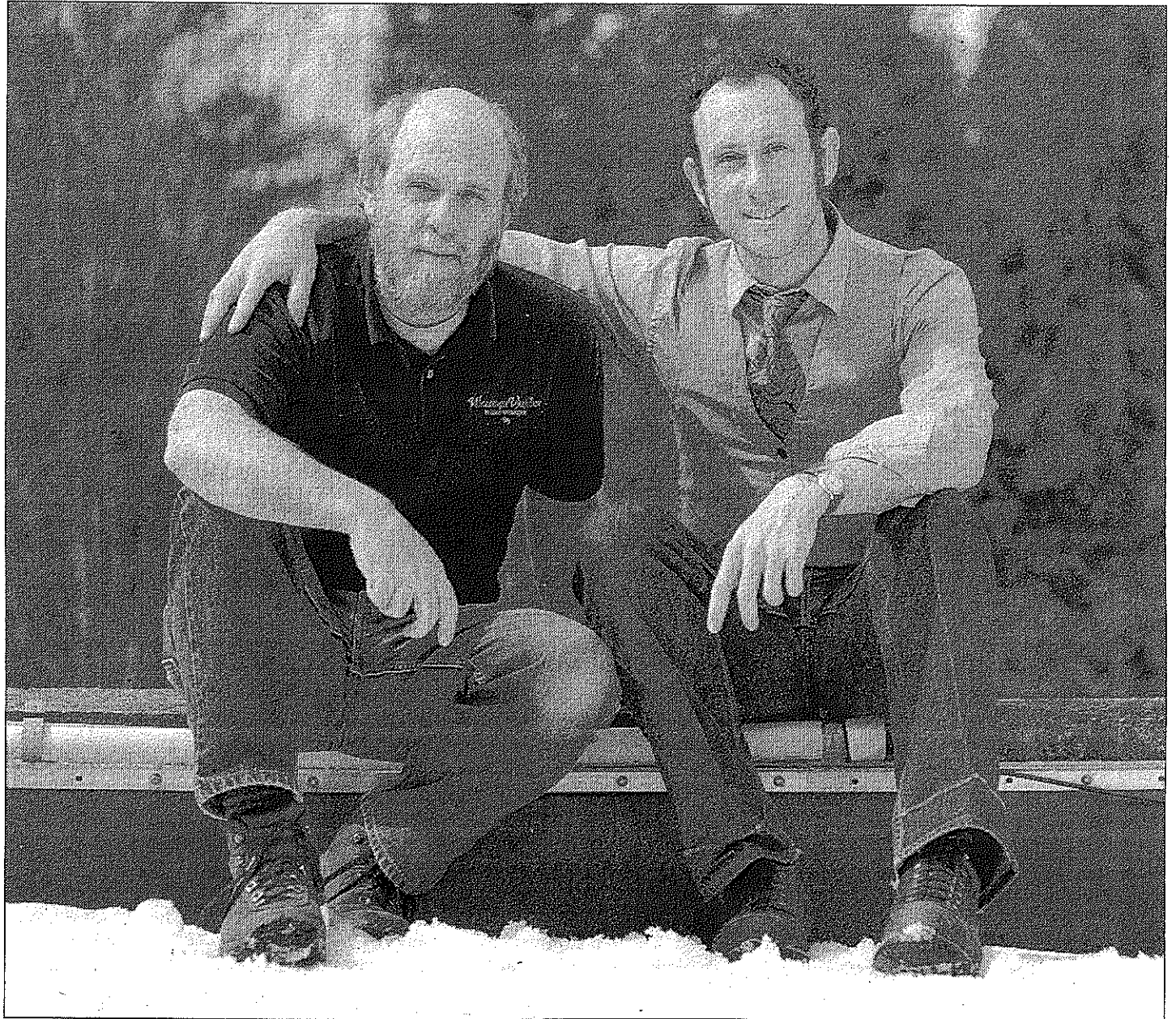
What was created was a "gem" of a radio station, and "gem" was the word that Ferland came back to again and again in describing what, over time, the college and the community achieved through the radio station.

According to Ferland, the station's special quality is its open format: music, talk, agreement, disagreement, public affairs, opinion, drama, reading, poetry, the arts. Reverence or irreverence: at WGDR there were no restrictions.

"You could say and play whatever you wanted, subject of course to the rules of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) or the bounds of good taste: No hate speech, no gratuitous personal attacks, no indecent language.

While there's a lot of often self-serving loose talk in radio circles about "community radio," at WGDR, anyone can walk into the studio, introduce him- or herself and learn how to use the phone system, a microphone, the radio control board and how to integrate radio with the Internet. Then that person can go on the air. Or, as Ferland said, "Without restrictions on programming content, you gave normal people an opportunity to be as brilliant as they are" even though your brilliance and mine are almost certain to be different.

Now, with the new signal launch, Goddard College Community Radio will be



David Ferland (left), WGDR operations manager, and Kris Gruen, interim station director. Photo courtesy of Kris Gruen.

broadcasting live from Hardwick as well as Plainfield, and the station will more than double its overall power and geographic range.

The little college radio station that started in 1973 will now have a second antenna on top of Town Hill Road in Wolcott. With this new, higher antenna, and at 1100 watts, WGDH will be broadcasting to new audiences in Hardwick, Woodbury, Morrisville, Cabot and Stowe, among other more northern locations.

Last fall, Goddard College hired Montpelier resident Kris Gruen to a brand-new position as WGDR's interim station director.

"Kris was hired to integrate students, faculty, community and the administration," WGDR's operations manager Dave Ferland said of Gruen's new role at the college.

Gruen is a Goddard alum who has developed a career as a singer, songwriter and teacher.

As a singer-songwriter, Gruen has just released *Part of It All*, his second album and his touring and performing have taken him in Vermont to Higher Ground and nationally to the Living Room and Mercury Lounge in New York City and houses like the Hotel Café in Los Angeles.

As a songwriter and performing artist and now as interim director at Goddard College Radio, Gruen is in a position to reach out to

other artists and performers to help them promote their work, find performance opportunities, and, in due course, use the station's space and equipment to record their work. Gruen talks with excitement about Artists for Media Diversity, an organization based in Austin, Texas. This organization wants to work with WGDR to record and promote performing arts across the country.

Over the past several years Gruen has worked as a teacher of writing with residencies in elementary schools in Worcester, Rumney, Warren and Cabot.

He has also worked as a teacher of writing and as a performance director at Montpelier High School and U-32. One of his most adventurous projects was a collaboration between him and Montpelier High School English teacher Karen McCadden called the Hungry Rat Revue. This was an opportunity for high school students to write their own poetry. And as Gruen said, "Poetry triggers music, and they play off each other." All this has led to live student performances at the Langdon Street Café, the Vermont College of Fine Arts and WGDR.

"I oversee the music," Gruen said. "Karen oversees the poetry. Recently we've been rehearsing on the third floor above the Langdon Street Café. I've wanted students to feel that their work doesn't go into a folder."

As a Goddard alum, Gruen understands what Goddard did for him, and he's deeply committed to representing Goddard faculty and Goddard educational ideas on the new, much more powerful Goddard radio stations.

"Goddard let you study what you wanted to," Gruen said of his experience at Goddard. At the same time, the college demanded that students write critically about what they were doing.

"How does your student work relate to the artistic community you were a part of and to the world at large?" That was a question Goddard wanted Gruen to answer. And then this further question about his student work: "How does it better the world?"

In the past, Goddard was a residential college. The students lived on campus. Now, the model has changed, and students are part of an intensive, low-residency model. They continue to be Goddard College students, "but location has a different connotation."

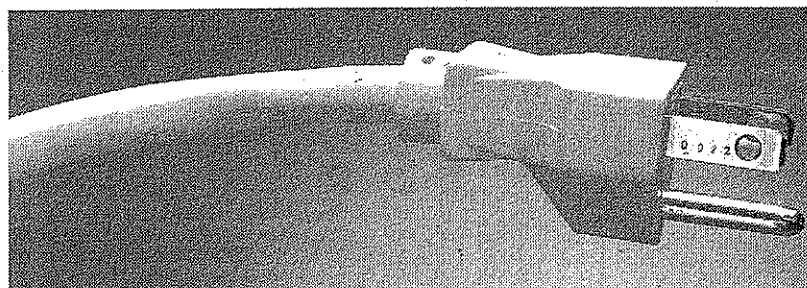
As Ferland said, "If you're in Hardwick or Philadelphia, you can stream and hear us."

Getting back to the fundamentals of what has made Goddard and Goddard College Radio different, Ferland acknowledged his bias.

"I'm an employee," he said. Then he went on to enumerate the educational values that have made the radio station the community asset that it is today.

"Bully for Goddard," Ferland said about the ideas that inform the radio station. "You learn by doing. Everyone participates. You learn your whole life. We work together on common projects. This is different than having the faculty tell you what's going on, or what to think. That's what self-directed learning is all about."

## Media



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