

Virginia Tech's WUVT celebrates 75 years

Station alumni funded purchase of a new transmitter and remote control system

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College radio is alive and well at Virginia Tech, with WUVT-FM celebrating 75 years of broadcasting on April 1, 2023.

The anniversary was marked with a festive alumni reunion weekend and the installation a few months later of a new transmitter and remote control system.

WUVT, broadcasting on 90.7 MHz at 6.5 kW from nearby Price Mountain, operates today as a community-focused public radio station, with studios in the Squires Student Center on the campus of Virginia Tech in Blacksburg. The students are responsible for all aspects of running this popular station.

Many notable broadcast engineering and media professionals have benefited greatly from the practical experiences and enthusiasm unique to WUVT.

Its alumni are appreciative and supportive. During reunion weekend, a plan was conceived to raise funds to provide a new transmitter to replace its aging system. In less than three months the required funds had been donated, and after careful research, the university purchased a new Nautel GV5 transmitter and Burk ARC Plus Touch control system funded entirely by station alumni — a 75th anniversary gift to the students at WUVT.

The new equipment was installed professionally as a donation by Virginia-based Radio Cardinal Communication

Service. RCCS owner and WUVT alum Josh Arritt and field techs Jon Light and Jason Perdue accompanied student staff and other alumni on the installation day work.

Carrier-current roots

WUVT, in one form or another, has been on the campus since its founding as an experimental station in 1948. It is one of the longest-running noncommercial stations in the state.

It began operations at 640 kHz when a student built an unlicensed carrier-current AM transmitter system in a dormitory room. The station quickly became popular,

providing music programming and local news not available elsewhere.

WUVT eventually became a formal student organization on campus. WUVT-FM, 90.7 MHz, signed on as a licensed noncommercial station in 1969. Along with other student media organizations, it is a division of The Educational Media Company at Virginia Tech, an independent governing body for student mass media. Its board includes Virginia Tech faculty and staff, students and members of the Blacksburg community.


WUVT is known for its eclectic programming, covering a wide swath of past and present music styles. The volunteer DJs typically are students or alumni, and they select content based on their personal preferences within a daily "block" format. WUVT serves the wider community by offering music and local news rarely heard on commercial stations. Activities such as engineering, management, fundraising and programming are the responsibilities of the student staff.

Sadly, readers may remember that on April 16, 2007, a mass shooting on the campus took 33 lives. WUVT provided reporting to major news outlets and the local community in the immediate aftermath, showing professionalism and compassion to the world media.

Kevin Sterne, WUVT's student chief engineer, was critically wounded that day in a classroom. Thankfully he survived.

Those events called attention to the station's infrastructure needs. Subsequent donations from several broadcast equipment manufacturers allowed the station engineers to move the WUVT transmitter site off campus to its Price Mountain site location, where it enjoys improved antenna height and a power increase to 6.5 kW.

Today WUVT's young broadcasters represent the future of industry talent. It is up to all of us to stay actively connected to our favorite college radio stations, offering generous financial support and encouragement, making sure student stations continue to bring future generations of passionate people into the industry.

The station's new equipment was placed into service in November. WUVT thanks Nautel and Burk for their support and encouragement, and Radio Cardinal Communication Service for the installation. The station now sounds better than ever. Student staff enthusiasm is sky high. And the generosity of station alumni has now positioned this unique radio station for continued success. 

Below
Student Chief Engineer Corey Carpenter, left, and former student Chief Engineer Steve Floyd stand with the new Nautel transmitter.

