

# Volunteers strengthen Amrac cable programs

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WINSTED — Not quite two years ago, the local public access station provided by Amrac Cablevision was a struggling enterprise, beset with technical problems and operated by a core staff of only seven volunteers.

Today Mad River TV 13 has 70 volunteers, and while technical glitches still aggravate the volunteers, they cablecast community and special events to Amrac subscribers.

"We tell (people) to watch Channel 13, because you never know what you're going to see," Tom Jardine of Winsted, one of the original volunteers, said. Jardine, an astronomy and diving buff, has put together two shows — one on the stars, another on shipwrecks. In both cases he was

the cinematographer, even filming the underwater sequences.

The station films everything from school concerts to Board of Selectmen's meetings.

But the best part may be that anyone can get involved — the station provides all the equipment free of charge, and volunteers have carte blanche to film and cablecast just about any topic they're interested in, according to Par Rasmusson, public access leader. Rasmusson is the only paid public access employee.

Under state law, cable franchises must provide equipment and a negotiated annual contribution to the public access station. Mad River TV receives \$2,900 annually from Amrac, Rasmusson said.

"Community access is not great television, but it is good televi-

sion," Rasmusson said recently from the tiny studio off Center Street. "People are willing to put up with lesser quality when they see familiar places and faces."

Winsted residents Linda Condon, Richard Nalette and Greg Clark attend nearly every Winsted selectmen's meeting with camera in tow.

Condon became involved about a year ago when she asked if a children's choir performance could be filmed. The choir was filmed, and Condon was assigned to edit the tape.

"It was a brand new process that was so intriguing — that we would edit the tape . . . and the end product — I was pleased with it. We aired it twice," Condon said. Condon, who enjoys writing songs, also has put together a couple of music videos with her

original songs.

"I think more people are taking advantage of (public access) now," Condon said. "You can do so many creative things."

Rasmusson likes to tell the story of a holiday concert by children that aired on Channel 13 and was later taped by the family of the performers. When relatives visited at Christmas the entire family watched the program, and it was the highlight of the day, Rasmusson said.

The channel is still small enough to be casual, Rasmusson said. Some local Boy Scouts recently toured the studio. Rasmusson made a tape of the boys and told them to tune into Channel 13 that evening where the Scouts got to see themselves on

See MORE, page 14

11/26/90