

Large volunteer effort and diverse programming:

## Campus radio station

# CHRY

by Daniel Zaretsky  
CHRY Station manager and President

There are those who see their university experience as a means to future employment. Others see university as an environment where the assumptions of society are to be challenged. Still others see it as a place to further the servicing of community needs.

These disparate perspectives are in constant tension. This article, however, is not about what synthesis of these and other distinct perspectives is desirable. Rather, speaking from an avowedly adherent perspective, it is about CHRY Community Radio, the York-based 50-watt FM radio station which has tried to meld these different perspectives in a coherent framework.

CHRY 105.5FM serves as an intriguing experiment on the art of the possible. Based on the efforts of hundreds of volunteers over three short years, the station's appeal to both its participants and listeners cuts across various age and cultural variables. We have a florist, a farmer, a school-teacher and a baker — we're only waiting on a candlestick maker.

The multitudinous programming opportunities are the most obvious areas in which people can get involved. Yet, the station's 150 or so active volunteers assist in administration, computer programming, publication production, financial management, public relations, engineering, advertising, community outreach, technical production and a host of other needs like carpentry, electrical work, logo design, etc. as they arise.

CHRY's programming format exemplifies an integrated approach to radio, standing in stark contrast to the monoliths found in commercial radio. Transmitting from the top of Vanier Residence, CHRY has gradually carved out tremendous popularity throughout much of North York and elsewhere in the metropolitan area as evidenced by its annually successful on-air fund raising drives.

A *New Age* (on over-55 issues), the *Rhythm Method* (a dance music show unrelated to body cycles), *Voice of Afghanistan* (in three languages), *All About Alzheimer's*, *Rendezvous*, *Reggae in the City*, *Bread and Butter*, (daily current affairs), the *Jam Factor* (not for the epicurean) and York University sports share the same dial frequency. These programmes fill obvious listening needs among local residents.

CHRY was born as an FM broadcaster on October 13, 1987. From the beginning there was a passionate commitment to bring together the interests of surrounding communities with university energies. From the start, we believed the goal of meeting the idealistic and practical needs of students and community members alike was attainable. The definition of "community" we have worked with has emphasized groups and issues that are underre-

presented in the media and the public at large.

Examples of the former include disadvantaged socio-economic groups and minority religious, cultural or racial groups. As well, our mainstay musical and other artistic genres are staple forms for many of our listeners, like reggae or independent rock music.

Underrepresented issues germane to general listening audiences, for example, in social service areas such as education, health and housing, typify the sorts of topics that are often overlooked by mainstream media. Pollution or health-related issues are profound examples of areas where media inattention can leave us with doubts regarding media premises and participatory democracy.

This concrete, yet challenging, mandate, still remains unfulfilled. But, a quick peek backwards compared to a present-day snapshot is a fabulous measure of progress. This measure should give a sense for where CHRY is heading, and an indication as to how some of you can express your own ideas and provide input.

CHRY, at various earlier times CJ/1/KRY, was, for approximately 15 years a typical university closed-circuit station. Heard by fewer listeners than participants, it served, with a few periods of flourishing exceptions, as a plaything for both committed radiophiles and those craving ego-satisfaction. Its end product was often lacking in both the coherency of purpose and professionalism required to appeal to wider audiences.

Generally, the station lacked resolve to reach out into the community or even the University itself. Instead the volunteers enjoyed the sheltered environment to engage post-pubescent rebellion at worst, and at best a "play DeeJay" version of our childhood "play doctor" game.

This is not to minimize the past, but it does reflect on the potential left unrealized, indeed, unrecognized.

The York University radio experience was largely typical of that found elsewhere in Canadian universities. This all changed when CHRY embarked on a grand challenge in two significant ways. First, its application proposed a shift from its closed-circuit state, where it could be heard, if at all, only in select locations on York's main campus, to an FM signal, receivable through large parts of Metropolitan Toronto. Secondly, a format was proposed to the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), whose distinctiveness was sufficient to override the Commission's reluctance to license a third campus-based radio station in the city.

The precedent-setting CRTC decision to give CHRY a spot on the FM dial expressly recognized aspects of our application which ring ironic in light of its more recent, and hotly-disputed decision to license a country music station over a black or dance music station. The Commission stated in its decision that it was taking into account that CHRY "would be the only station in its service area

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