

# diversions



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## ALL ACCESS

### Chapel Hill's 'People's Channel' Provides Public Access to Local Cable TV

By JOANNA PEARSON  
Staff Writer

What do a gay church, an exercise instructor in her 90s and a group called Atheist Viewpoint have in common?

They all appear on The People's Channel, Chapel Hill's public access cable channel.

The People's Channel is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide the means and promote the opportunity for area citizens to exercise free speech. With a wide selection of noncommercial programming and citizens' "soapbox programming," Channel 8 beams out diverse, and sometimes controversial, selections.

"There is no censorship," Bob Gwyn, president of the People's Channel Board of Directors, said. "We do not preview the programs. We depend on producers to guarantee the content, and there's only one series we have to put on after midnight."

The People's Channel is available to anyone living in Orange or Chatham counties. At its studios on South Elliot Road, the People's Channel offers free instructional training classes and use of production equipment and studio operating equipment.

Chapel Hill has this community resource, Gwyn said, thanks to the foresight of certain town members.

"In 1998, a group of people here were dissatisfied with the public access channel and decided to form a nonprofit corporation," Gwyn said. "We did a lot of talking to the Town Board and the Cable Advisory Board."

The Cable Act stipulates that a cable company must provide at least one public access channel if a government franchise asks for it. In the 1998 franchise with

Time Warner, the town of Chapel Hill requested not only a public access channel, but a government channel (Channel 18) and a channel for University use (Channel 4).

"By the spring of 1998, (The People's Channel) organized a board, rented space, and built a studio, control room and editing suites," Gwyn said.

The Board of Directors of The People's Channel reflects the multiplicity of talents represented in Orange County. Gwyn himself is a retired UNC professor of communication studies, whose area of special interest has been community media.

#### People's Channel Orientation Sessions

Feb. 13 7 p.m. — 9 p.m.  
March 17 7 p.m. — 9 p.m.

Courses offered in:  
basic studio production  
character generation  
basic field production  
edit training

The next course, in basic field production, will be held Feb. 21 and 28 and March 7 from 7 p.m. — 9 p.m.

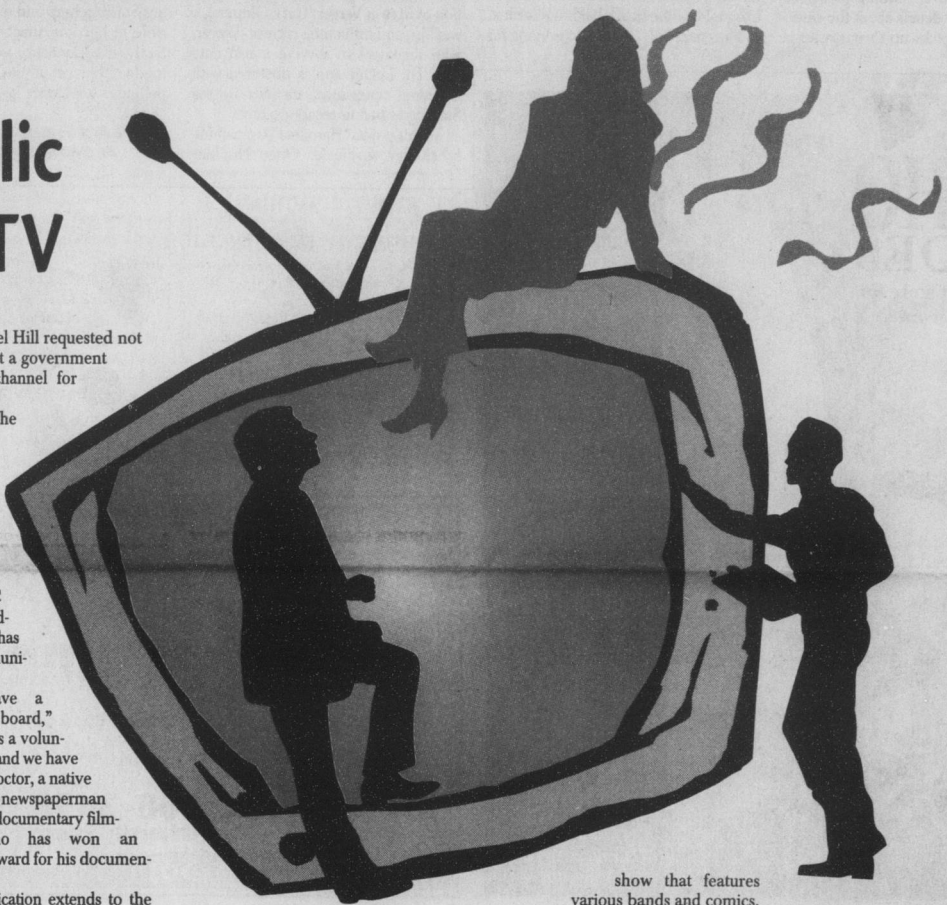
Call 960-0088 for more information.

"We have a dedicated board," he said. "It's a volunteer board, and we have a medical doctor, a native Chapel Hill newspaperman and even a documentary filmmaker who has won an Academy Award for his documentary."

This dedication extends to the producers of programming. The People's Channel Studios are open from 2 p.m. until 10 p.m. most nights so that people can put together their programming after work.

"Some folks have a message they want to get out," Gwyn said. "Others just like to get on TV. These are folks who feel a responsibility to discuss matters."

One program, called "People's Soapbox," allows anyone to get on TV and say anything they want for 10 minutes. Many programs have educational content, such as "Perils for Pedestrians," or a program called "In Praise



of Age" that is produced by the Senior Center. The People's Channel has also broadcasted movies for the blind.

"We're hoping to expand to less-served populations. We would love to get a news broadcast in Spanish," Gwyn said. "This is a community service. We're trying to use this means of communication to bring people together."

The People's Channel is not limited strictly to educational or informational programming, however. One series titled "Continuous Train Wreck" is a variety

show that features various bands and comics. For one stunt, the show's producer took a video camera and rode across North Carolina from the mountains to the sea.

And all of this is available for the mere 69 cents per month that Time Warner charges each subscriber. Although the channel isn't available on the University's cable system, Gwyn emphasized the availability of the resource to students interested in working on shows.

"We're very interested in getting University students involved."

The Arts & Entertainment Editor can be reached at [artsdesk@unc.edu](mailto:artsdesk@unc.edu).

### Produced by the People

Shows on The People's Channel, listed below, air at varying times each week.

- "Almanac"
- "Atheist Viewpoint"
- "Back to Basics"
- "Bell Yeager Freewill Baptist Church"
- "Catholic Perspective"
- "Community Land Trust"
- "Continuous Train Wreck"
- "Cotton Patch Gospel"
- "Enviro Closeup"
- "Family Fun in the Triangle"
- "Gospel on the Road"
- "Higher Ground"
- "In Praise of Age"
- "Inside North Carolina"
- "K-TV"
- "Let's Eat"
- "Live at the Cave"
- "Living by the Word"
- "Meet the Teacher"
- "Metropolitan Community Church"
- "NASA Clips"
- "Night Flight"
- "One on One"
- "Perils for Pedestrians"
- "Positive Progression"
- "The Prophetic Word"
- "Random Insanity"
- "Reading With Phonics"
- "Universe of Yahweh"
- "Windows"
- "Z-TV"

### UNC Grad Makes Bid for Fame With His Own Comedy Show

By BRIAN MILLIKIN  
Staff Writer

UNC graduates normally shoot for the big time by heading to New York or L.A. Troy Griffin, on the other hand, decided to stay home and bring the big time to Chapel Hill.

A May 2000 graduate of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication, Griffin has found success as producer and host of "Random Insanity," an irreverent variety show on Chapel Hill's cable access People's Channel. The show premiered in December, and has quickly established its bad self — in a good way, of course.

"I hate to label it," Griffin said of his show, "but it's like a cross between '(The) Tom Green (Show),' 'Jackass' and 'The Man Show.'"

Like those go-for-broke comedy shows, "Random Insanity" will go to any length to get a laugh. Segments for the show come from just about anywhere. A stuffy Thai restaurant has become a DJ funk party, a critical lens has been turned on a best buns contest at the beach, and — most memorably — a toenail has been pulled out of a toe by someone's teeth.

Nudity and profanity are not obstacles on the quest for "Insanity." "We're not setting out to be profane," Griffin said of the show. "It's a TV show

... I'm trying to put together a show people will watch."

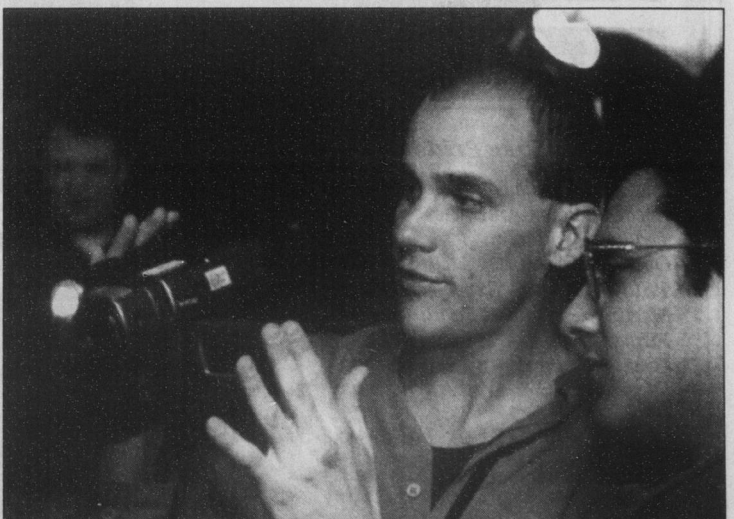
Inspiration for "Random Insanity" came before the success of "The Tom Green Show" and "Jackass." "I had this idea years ago, so at first I was pissed," Griffin says. "But they've opened the window, and my show's different enough that it won't be labeled a copycat."

The idea to do the variety show was in the front of Griffin's mind his senior year at UNC, when he worked and learned at the "Carolina Week" news program, which airs on Student Television.

"I took in as much information as I could there, because I knew I wanted to do the cable show," Griffin said.

It was the professional atmosphere of "Carolina Week," not the news aspect, that attracted Griffin. "I learned a standard of professionalism from that show as far as quality and putting it together," he said.

But while his work with "Carolina Week" was able to reach the entire audience of UNC students, his new show does not, since neither UNC nor Carrboro's cable services carry Chapel Hill's People's Channel. "I'm trying to get it on in Carrboro and added to STV," he said of the cable crossover problem. "It really doesn't make a whole



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ANDREW ROSS

"Random Insanity" producer and UNC graduate Troy Griffin, left, explains his craft to an interested onlooker. The crew shot the show live from Bub O'Malley's last Friday.

lot of sense." Griffin is sticking to his guns though, and producing an episode of "Random Insanity" every week to air Saturday nights at midnight. He's starting at the bottom and working up toward his life's aspiration: working with Oprah Winfrey. "She embodies everything I believe in," he said. "She's taken her thing and helped millions of peo-

ple." "Random Insanity" is just a step on the way to Griffin's true ambition. "I want to be able to help change people's lives, and hopefully, this'll get me noticed."

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