New GM Mark Leonard Believes in Public Broadcasting as Tool for Connections

As the new General Manager for NET (and only the third in the organization’s history) Mark Leonard is mindful of the legacy of previous GMs Jack McBride and Rod Bates.

“Their legacy is not missed on me; they were absolute pioneers,” Leonard said. “I am honored that they left such a strong foundation.”

Leonard, who started Aug. 1, came to NET from Illinois Public Media. Leonard has worked at six public broadcast stations during his 32-year public broadcast career, including a stint in South Dakota. There, he said, he started to really understand the importance of public broadcasting to rural Americans. And he also kept hearing about the national reputation and esteem held by NET, then called Nebraska Educational Television.

“While NET is a conduit for national content,” he said, “we also excel at telling stories with deep Nebraska roots.”

Leonard has spent his first months in Nebraska listening to Nebraskans; he has visited communities across the state, from Omaha to Scottsbluff.

He sees NET as offering a sense of connection in Nebraska, especially for rural communities.

“We are owned by the American people and operate on their behalf. We earn that trust every day and we don’t take it for granted.”

Mark Leonard
NET General Manager

“We public media really owns a particular niche that it is best at providing — the really important content like news, educational and instructional television, equalizing access between rural and urban areas. We fill that space.”

“While there is an evolving model, broadcasting really is part of our DNA. We can do so much more than linear content now,” he said. “We can allow the community to come to us, at the same time we are pushing out to the community. We want to be at the table, convening conversations that help identify solutions and aspirations. Because we are a state, university and public entity, we are a unique bridge that connects the arts, health care, agriculture, politics, all sorts of industries.”

He firmly believes that public media protects the level of trust that Americans extend to it.

“We are owned by the American people and operate on their behalf. We earn that trust every day and we don’t take it for granted.”
In the first year following the successful 2012 close of the NET Foundations’ five-year Inspire Nebraska Campaign, we continued to see friends and donors make gifts that pushed the campaign past its $25 million goal. Thank you for your generosity. You have put NET in a strong fiscal position and ensured NET’s future.

Your gifts had an immediate and direct impact on programming. Membership and endowment support helped underwrite our most successful original television programs in 2013: *Nebraska’s Capitol Masterpiece; Emery Blagdon and His Healing Machine;* and *Remembered Voices.* These documentaries told the unique and inspiring stories of Nebraskans. We also learned in 2013 that PBS was interested in distributing *Great Plains: America’s Lingering Wild* nationally. Again, your gifts were instrumental in helping NET Television produce high-quality programs with wide appeal.

The Foundation also supported several news documentaries and talk shows; the video magazine *Nebraska Stories;* live broadcasts of college and high school sports; and of course, the purchase of national programming from PBS and NPR.

We also enjoyed success with NET Radio, including the ability to showcase Nebraska in October through the live broadcast of *A Prairie Home Companion* with Garrison Keillor, which originated from the Lied Center for Performing Arts in Lincoln.

Each year, the NET Foundations for Radio and Television strive to connect Nebraskans through valuable and vivid radio and television programming, and through live events such as concerts, social activities, special trips and other ways to keep our members engaged and active. Trips took us from Scottsbluff to Norfolk, Kearney to Columbus, the Platte River to Spring Creek Prairie.

This year we bid farewell to NET’s former general manager, Rod Bates. We welcomed new NET Foundations’ board members Nicholas Baxter, Lucy Buntain Comine, Dana Falter and Laura Jana. New board officers are Margaret Hornady-David, chair, and Carol Russell, vice chair.

We have worked to increase efficiencies and reduce costs and are working to add value to benefits such as our MemberCard. We also have been pleased to offer free toolkits to help with estate planning and planned giving.

We anticipate a promising future in 2014.
Original Documentaries That Premiered in 2013:

Emery Blagdon and His Healing Machine, examined the artwork of the late Emery Blagdon, who lived near Stapleton, Nebraska, and produced an arresting body of art now considered to be of the highest quality and import.

Nebraska’s Capital Masterpiece showcased the architecture and art comprising Nebraska’s magnificent state capitol. The documentary used dazzling artwork, interviews, archival film and photos, letters from the design team, and contemporary photography to place the building in context.

Nebraska Stories. NET’s Emmy Award winning video journal reflects the people, places, history and culture of Nebraska. Nebraska Stories offers intimate glimpses and emotional connections to its subjects.

Remembered Voices documents how contemporary students learn about the Holocaust through art and music created in the 1940s by people sent to Terezin, a Nazi concentration camp. Weaving history and survivor interviews with modern lessons, Remembered Voices is a compelling look at how voices from the past inform us today.

QUEST. NET provides content for QUEST, a multimedia effort in partnership with six other leading public media organizations. QUEST focuses on sustainability science concerning our food, energy, water climate and biodiversity. Visit netnebraska.org/science

Ashfall Unearthed. This half-hour music special features the television premiere of “Ashfall,” an original composition by Rusty Banks and performed by the Nebraska Chamber Players.

NET Sports

Each year, more than 200 hours of local sports programming broadcasts on NET1. The network’s flagship show, Big Red Wrap-Up, provides analysis of University of Nebraska Husker football. NET is the only statewide network that broadcasts high school and college sports. In addition to airing live high school championships in girls’ volleyball, football, wrestling, boys’ and girls’ swimming and diving, and boys’ and girls’ basketball, NET also broadcasts on tape delay state debate and speech and state bowling. Collegiate sports coverage includes University of Nebraska baseball, women’s basketball and women’s volleyball; University of Nebraska at Omaha hockey and basketball; Creighton sports and more. NET also broadcasts the annual Nebraska Shrine Football Classic and the All-star boys’ and girls’ basketball games and volleyball matches. NET is No. 1 for live sports in Nebraska.

Children’s Programming

Weekdays, NET Television offers 12 hours of educational programming for children. A new addition to the line-up is Peg+Cat, a program for preschool kids that focuses on math concepts.
NET RADIO

NET Special Projects

By Backyard Farmer. Produced in association with UNL’s Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Backyard Farmer completed its 61st season in 2013 and is the longest-running locally produced broadcast television show in the nation.

Skyworks. Skyworks, a British-based film team, spent July 3–10 taking high-definition video for use by NET, UNL, Nebraska Game and Parks and Nebraska Tourism Commission. The film crew flew over many state landmarks, monuments, parks and other attractions in a low-altitude helicopter, taking high-definition video. For highlights, go to netNebraska.org/skyneb.

Shakespeare Uncovered. NET Television and NET Radio participated in Shakespeare Uncovered, a partnership with Nebraska Shakespeare and Flatwater Shakespeare to piggyback on the national PBS broadcasts of Shakespeare Uncovered. Radio “Shakespeariences” and several video projects and events were produced. NET Night at Omaha’s Shakespeare on the Green attracted the largest audience in the festival’s 27-year history.

Platte Basin Time Lapse Project. In 2011, conservation photographer Michael Forsberg and NET Television producer Michael Farrell began placing 40 time-lapse cameras along the 600 miles of the Platte River watershed in three states, from the headwaters in the Rocky Mountains to the confluence with the Missouri River near Omaha. With 500,000 images capturing flood and drought conditions, the project is an environmental monitor. The pair aim to continue the project, which has numerous partners including NET, and develop it as a teaching tool.

Quilted Conscience. This film by a former Nebraskan showed how teen-aged immigrant girls from the Sudan remember their war-torn culture, develop hope for the future and learn to live in their new home town, Grand Island, Neb., through the art and craft of quilting.

A Prairie Home Companion

One highlight of the NET Radio year was the Oct. 19 production of A Prairie Home Companion with Garrison Keillor, live from the Lied Center for Performing Arts in Lincoln. A sold-out house enjoyed Keillor’s take on Nebraska, on football and on the prairie skies. His guests included singer/fiddler Sara Watkins; Curt Friesen, a farmer from Henderson, Neb., who chatted about the farming industry; and Jackie Allen, a jazz singer from Lincoln who schooled Keillor and Watkins in the art of torch singing. About 200 NET Radio members attended the afternoon rehearsal and enjoyed a Q&A session with Keillor prior to the performance.

On the Road with NET Radio

NET Radio went on the road this year, originating a Friday Live in Kearney from the Merriman Arts Center in August, and that evening hosting a performance of the Nebraska Chamber Players with guest artist Nathan Pacheco. Friday Live’s usual home is the Mill Coffeehouse in Lincoln’s Haymarket. In 2013 the show also originated from the Lied Center for Performing Arts and the Sheldon Museum of Art. New technologies allowed a video stream of selected Friday Live programs in addition to the audio stream.

NET Radio in Omaha

NET Radio continued its cooperative program agreement, forged in 2012, with KVNO/Omaha. NET Radio provides Afternoon Concerts and Classics by Request to listeners of both stations from noon–4 p.m. weekday afternoons, originating from NET Radio with host Lora Black. KVNO provides overnight classical music programming from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. Monday–Thursday; 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. Friday and Saturday; and 11 p.m. to 5 a.m. Sundays (all Central Time), originating from KVNO. Now, each station’s music programming is offered statewide.
AWARDS

NET News received 19 awards, including seven first-place awards, in the Great Plains Associated Press Radio competition. Honorees included Fred Knapp, Bill Kelly, Emily Kreutz, David Hughes, Grant Gerlock, Hilary Stohs-Krause, Mike Tobias and the late Jerry Johnston.

NET professionals received eight awards, including four golds, in the Nebraska Broadcasters Association Awards of Excellence. Individuals earning honors included Bill Kelly, Hilary Stohs-Krause, Jim Carmichael, Gavin Felix and Christine Lesiak.

NET professionals received three Heartland Emmy Awards. Recipients were Mike Tobias and Ray Meints for Campaign Connections 2012: Voter Voices; Kay Hall, the late Jerry Johnston, Christine Lesiak and Michele Wolford for Nebraska Stories: Free Land!; and Kelly Rush, Brian Seifferlein and Meints for Making Paint Move: A Nebraska Story.

In December 2012, Chadron State College awarded Ron Hull, NET special advisor, an honorary degree, Doctor of Humane Letters. He also delivered the commencement address. In October, Hull received the Addison E. Sheldon Award, conferred by the Nebraska Historical Society in recognition of his long-term contributions to Nebraska history.

NET General Manager Mark Leonard was honored in 2013 for work achieved at his previous position as general manager of Illinois Public Media. In February, the Association of Public Television Stations awarded him the 2013 National Advocacy Award for his exceptional efforts in furthering public television’s legislative goals. In mid-summer, he received the 2013 C. Scott Elliott Development Professional of the Year Award, presented by PBS for his work in Illinois.

The National Center for Media Engagement recognized NET’s involvement in the American Graduate Initiative.

Geothermal: Energy from the Ground Up, co-produced by NET Connects, the Nebraska Well Drillers Association and the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services Division of Public Health, earned a second place award from the American Clean Skies Foundation.

NET Communications professionals took top national honors for the promotion campaign “Great Plains: America’s Lingering Wild” in the NETA (National Educational Telecommunications Association) awards competition. NETA awards showcase public television’s best work in community engagement, content production, instructional services and promotion. Communications team members are M.J. Winquest, manager; Diana Fujan, graphic designer; Larry Kubert, communications specialist; and Kristi Koser, multimedia graphic designer.

CELEBRATE nebraska

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Virtual Learning Library

Launched in 2012, the NET Virtual Learning Library is a free, online tool for teachers, students and parents to find appropriate, credible and independent information. The library has more than 35,000 learning objects, with new materials added constantly. The online materials cover a variety of subjects, blending interactive content with rich visuals and audio. They can be sorted by grade level, topic and media type.

Ready To Learn

NET Learning Services launched Ready To Learn activities in Auburn and Fremont in 2013. Ready To Learn is a coordinated educational experience that connects concepts learned in preschool, school, after-school, summer programs and at home to strengthen children’s math and literacy skills. NET Learning Services and the State Department of Education/Office of Early Childhood/Head Start-State Collaboration Office are partners in Nebraska. At kickoff events in Auburn and Fremont, preschool children and their parents visited interactive learning stations where they used apps based on PBS characters. At both events, PBS characters Super Why! and Princess Presto attracted large and happy crowds. For more, see netNebraska.org/readytolearn.

Stories of Nebraska Quilters

A new online website created by NET uses Nebraska quilters and quilts as a way to teach history. “Stories of Nebraska Quilters” was developed by Chet Kincaid, NET senior producer for interactive educational media, in collaboration with the International Quilt Study Center and Museum and the Nebraska State Historical Society. To see the site, go to nequilters.org.

State of Education in Nebraska

The “State of Education in Nebraska” is a two-year initiative led by NET and 18 partners, including the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation and Nebraska Loves Public Schools, among others. A statewide transmedia effort, “State of Education in Nebraska” examines issues and connects Nebraskans to the important role that innovative school-community partnerships can have in improving student achievement. Monthly programs airing on NET2World have examined the role of poverty and the achievement gap, supporting high-risk youth, parent engagement, STEM education, arts education, out-of-school activities and other issues. For more information, visit netNebraska.org/stateofed to view previous programs.

N-Lighten Your Journey

NET’s Interactive Media team, part of NET Learning Services, has developed a curriculum for students attending Paul Mitchell Schools of cosmetology. “N-Lighten Your Journey” has five modules to help students develop positive social-emotional skills. It is the first social-emotional skills curriculum designed for staff and students in a higher education setting. Melanie Eirich, executive producer for NET Learning Services, headed the team project.

Coffee and Conversation in the Community

Free monthly screenings of contemporary films from PBS’s Independent Lens series are followed by a moderated panel discussion with audience participation. The films are shown in partnership with ITVS Community Cinema, Lincoln community radio station KZUM (89.3 FM), the Mary Riepma Ross Media Arts Center, the Midwest Theater in Scottsbluff, the Other Lifelong Learning Institute and the Malone Community Center. Community Cinema brings together leading organizations, community members and public television stations to learn, discuss and get involved in today’s critical social issues. For more information see netNebraska.org/engage.

Career Readiness

An interactive website focusing on career readiness, developed by a team from NET, won a Silver Award in the annual International Cinema in Industry CINDY competition. Career Readiness is an interactive website with 11 modules designed to help users improve basic job readiness. NET Senior Producer for Interactive Educational Media Chet Kincaid headed a multi-divisional effort. To see the site, go to netNebraska.org.
The NET News team produced a number of special documentaries in addition to daily Signature Stories on NET Radio and contributing to coverage of a variety of events. These multimedia/multiplatform documentaries produced multiple ways for viewers and listeners to interact.

... until He Is Dead: A History of Nebraska's Death Penalty

Since 1878, Nebraska has used the death penalty sparingly. This documentary examined the state's history with the death penalty, using decades-old public documents, press coverage and court cases combined with interviews of experts in law, history and public policy to provide context to stories of horrific crimes and calls for justice. Bill Kelly produced and reported this program.

Devil Clouds: Tornadoes Strike Nebraska

Easter Sunday 1913 saw seven tornadoes rip through Nebraska; the worst cut a seven-mile swath through Omaha, killing almost 100 people. The tornado outbreak would be responsible for 168 deaths statewide and nearly $10 million in damage (more than $200 million in today's dollars). Mike Tobias was producer and reporter.

Changing Lands, Changing Hands

Soon, thousands of farms will be changing hands and how that occurs could reshape the industry that drives the economy in Middle America. This co-production of NET News and Harvest Public Media examined the effects this ownership change will have on rural America. Grant Gerlock was producer and reporter; Ryan Robertson and Mike Tobias also reported.

Marijuana Crossroads

As more states legalize medical marijuana, routine traffic stops often turn into marijuana busts along Interstate 80 in Nebraska. NET News explored the growing legal marijuana industry and the consequences for Nebraska, where in one county alone, felony and misdemeanor marijuana cases have increased five-fold in the past five years. But few public officials have this on their radar screens and the policy discussions are just beginning. Bill Kelly produced and reported the program.

Nebraska Taxes: Moving Forward, a half-hour talk show produced and hosted by reporter Fred Knapp looked at tax policy in Nebraska.

How Can We Save Rural America? was a half-hour talk show that aired with Changing Lands, Changing Hands. Hosted by Grant Gerlock, the panel discussed the struggles of small towns in rural America.

NET News welcomed two new reporters. Ryan Robertson, a multimedia reporter, joined NET from Wichita Falls, Texas, and Ariana Brocious, joined as a reporter and Morning Edition host from a radio station in Paonia, Colo.

NET News provides comprehensive coverage of the Nebraska Legislature. Reporter Fred Knapp and other members of the award-winning NET News team produce daily stories that air on NET Radio during Morning Edition and All Things Considered. Additionally, NET broadcasts gavel-to-gavel coverage on NET2 World. And viewers or listeners can access legislative coverage via NET's website and mobile apps. Knapp also produces and hosts weekly Capitol Conversations podcasts in which he interviews state policymakers about topics of importance to Nebraskans. Capitol Conversations can be found at netNebraska.org/news or via the mobile app.
ENGAGING AUDIENCES

Audience data show that at least 110,000 people tune into NET Radio at least once a week. Additionally, NET Radio live streaming is a highly used online source for listeners. The news/classical stream had nearly 525,000 sessions for the live stream, collecting 22,275,360 live-streamed minutes. The news/jazz stream had 227,000 sessions for the live stream, collecting 8,994,900 live-streamed minutes.

NET’s social media strategy is to engage and deliver content to the citizens of Nebraska across all possible channels. Facebook users have increased 190 percent and Twitter interaction has increased 80 percent over last year. Older social media outlets such as podcasts and even email continue to grow. Podcast subscribers grew 61 percent and 19,944 people subscribe to one of NET’s several e-newsletters.

During the average television viewing week, 51 percent of Nebraska TV households tune into NET Television. That’s more than 972,000 people in 350,000 households who enjoy the variety of local and national programming available on NET. NET Television Video on Demand continues to engage significant numbers of viewers. Videos on the NET YouTube channel were watched more than 200,354 times by 180,990 users, totaling almost a half million minutes. The COVE player, developed by PBS, provided 28,424 additional views to 11,842 users. NET’s video streams were viewed 55,183 times by 36,177 viewers.

NET also provides an important service to the state by live streaming selected NET programming and extensive coverage of the State Legislature and Courts. Some 77,473 streams of NET programming were served live, totaling 1,551,929 minutes. The combined Capitol streaming was 178,407 streams totaling 5,389,046 minutes.

In 2013 programs was produced in 2013. "Now What?" is a co-production with the Consortium for Dementia Alternatives based in the Omaha metro area. In 2013 programs included medical care in rural areas of Nebraska, what the different types of dementia are and how treatments differ for the different types.

Pathways to Recovery was produced with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services informing viewers about mental illness and what to do when someone has been diagnosed with a mental illness. The program was designed to help the audience understand that a mental illness is not a death sentence and provides information on how people can get assistance and lead full, productive lives after being diagnosed.

NET Connects

NET Connects works in partnership with non-profit, educational, governmental, community service and mission-oriented organizations to deliver new informational and educational programs to the citizens of Nebraska. Content developed by NET Connects is broadcast on NET2 World, providing a broad audience.

NET Connects, formerly NET Public Media, has produced several community-based projects over the last year, including:

Now What? A continuing series about dementia and other issues faced by an aging population and their families. Three programs were produced in 2013. "Now What?" is a co-production with the Consortium for Dementia Alternatives based in the Omaha metro area. In 2013 programs included medical care in rural areas of Nebraska, what the different types of dementia are and how treatments differ for the different types.

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NET Focuses on Mobile Access

NET increased its mobile focus this year. At the beginning of the year NET succeeded in making all its live streams available on mobile devices. The “NET Nebraska” app allows users quick access to NET’s live and on-demand content, including Big Red Wrap-Up, Nebraska Stories, high school sports, NET News and more. NET also launched a “Nebraska Capitol Live” app for instant access to legislative and state government activities. Apps offer our audience a new way to consume our content and encourage the discovery of the different types of content we create, from sports to news to arts and humanities-focused programming. The free apps are available for iOS and Android devices and can be found in the appropriate app stores or at netNebraska.org/apps.

Nebraskans for NET

Citizens from across the state continue to advocate on behalf of NET as “Nebraskans for NET” volunteers. Federal and state financial support, combined with the generous contributions of members and donors, remains vital to the continued success of NET. Citizen volunteers speak up on NET’s behalf in order to earn legislative support to build and maintain our technology and educational services. Fans of NET Television, NET Radio and the many news, sports, arts, science and kids programs found on the network should “like” the Nebraskans for NET Facebook page and ask to receive occasional legislative updates.
The Jack G. McBride Society recognizes donors who contributed annual gifts of $1,000 or more in Fiscal Year 2013 (7/1/2012 – 6/30/2013) to the NET Foundations for Television and Radio.

These generous gifts allow NET to produce local television and radio programs that impact more than one million viewers and listeners statewide.

The Gift that Keeps on Giving

A gift to the Jack G. McBride or Friends of the Future societies ensures that the NET programs you love will thrive today, tomorrow and beyond. To learn more about the many ways you can support Nebraska public broadcasting please visit the NET Foundations’ brand-new planned giving website: netnebraska.org/giftplanning. You’ll find plenty of tools and resources to help you make informed giving decisions.
Friends of the Future Society

The Friends of the Future Society recognizes donors who establish bequests and planned gifts to the NET Foundations for Television and Radio. These endowed funds enable NET to pursue programming innovation and excellence that will benefit generations to come.  

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NET and Nebraskans statewide are grateful for the extraordinary generosity of thousands of Nebraskans and others who support our programming and services through membership, annual and corporate gifts and gifts to our endowment. We wish we could acknowledge every donor individually in this publication, but space constraints prohibit us from listing every name. Please know, though, that we deeply appreciate your commitment to Nebraska public broadcasting.

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