

# Midpeninsula Community Media Center

Strategic Plan 2002 – 2004



Media Center  
Serving the Midpeninsula Community

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Palo Alto, CA 94306  
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Our service territory covers Atherton, East Palo Alto, Menlo Park, Palo Alto, Stanford, and includes unincorporated portions of San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties.

### Potential Viewers

	Population (2000 Census)	Households (2000 Census)	Households Subscribing to AT&T Broadband 9/2001	Penetration Rate
Atherton	7,194	2,413	1,641	68%
East Palo Alto	29,506	6,976	3,139	45%
Menlo Park	30,785	12,387	6,937	56%
Palo Alto	58,598	25,216	12,608	50%
Stanford	<u>13,315</u>	<u>3,207</u>	<u>Unknown</u>	Unknown
<b>Total</b>	<b>139,398</b>	<b>50,199</b>	<b>24,325</b>	

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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Midpeninsula Community Media Center helps build a healthy community by building cross-jurisdiction and cross-cultural connections. We do this by working with local governments, community members and organizations to create and distribute television and Internet-based programs that promote and celebrate individual expression, local achievements, learning, cultural exchange, arts appreciation, and civic engagement.

The Media Center was formed in September 2001 by the merger of the Mid-Peninsula Access Corporation and Silicon Valley Community Communications. The merger gives us the opportunity to re-examine the changing needs of the community and our role in it. A survey of community leaders revealed that there are many people and organizations who do not know about our services, that we need to learn more about who is watching our channels, and that there is interest in programs that are youth-oriented. In addition, we need to address changes in the field of community access television and in the organization's funding and cost structures.

This strategic plan covers 2002 through 2004. The major elements of the strategy are,

1. Increase our revenues by growing our production services business, launching a fund-raising campaign, and restructuring our working capital.
2. Purchase a new facility and move in as quickly as possible. We are looking at buildable lots and at refurbishing existing buildings.
3. Develop a marketing strategy to raise our visibility in the community. The strategy will be based on a survey of residents and local community service organizations to learn more about how we can meet their needs.
4. Prepare to play a key role in the institutional network being built by Palo Alto and AT&T Broadband for the cities and schools in the Joint Powers Agreement. The institutional network will allow us to set up satellite facilities and put live shows from the field on the cable TV system.
5. Review and update our programming mix. There is demand for more youth-oriented programs. This year we are taking over the operation of the government channel, and when AT&T completes the fiber upgrade, we will get another channel for community use, plus a second government channel.

The support of the community is critical to our success. We rely on the community for members of the board, for producers, volunteers, staff members, and viewers. The Media Center is committed to seeking out new partnerships that will provide us with the ideas, energy, and resources we need to continue to serve the community.

## 2. VISION, MISSION, VALUES

### **Vision:**

Our vision is of a community that explores and uses video and other electronic communications technologies to tell its stories, learn about the diversity of the community, and engage in a dialogue that crosses political and cultural boundaries. We see these technologies as tools for public engagement, as affordable communications tools for local governments and non-profits, as a means of creative expression, and a path to an attractive career. In our community, all residents and community organizations will have the opportunity to learn how to use and apply these tools, and to share their opinions and creations with the rest of the community. Our youth will understand how to create and analyze video as a means of communication and expression. Local governments will have easy access to communications channels to keep the community informed about services, events, and policies of local interest. Community organizations will have affordable access to those channels to tell their stories and attract support.

### **Mission:**

Using communications technologies,\* such as television and the Internet, the Midpeninsula Community Media Center works with local governments, community members and community organizations to create and distribute programs that promote and celebrate individual expression, local achievements, learning, cultural exchange, arts appreciation, and civic engagement. The Center provides a venue for connecting producers and viewers that is unavailable through commercial media.

### **Organizational Values:**

- We believe communications technologies can strengthen communities by providing information about the community, by creating opportunities for cross-jurisdiction dialogue, cultural validation, cross-cultural exchange, and voter awareness, and by allowing more voices to be heard.
- We believe in supporting creativity because of its role in building a vital, vibrant community and economy.
- We believe everyone should have the opportunity to learn how to use the latest communications technologies.
- We believe media literacy helps people interpret and respond effectively to the messages they receive in their everyday lives.
- We believe in upholding and protecting the First Amendment rights of citizens.
- We believe public benefit organizations should have affordable access to video-based communications tools to help them tell their stories.
- We believe local governments should have affordable access to television and Internet-based channels to help them reach their constituents.

\* The Media Center's primary medium is cable television, distributed by AT&T Broadband. We also use the Internet and the World Wide Web, and will explore other communications technologies, such as video streaming and community radio, as time and resources allow.

### **3. BACKGROUND**

#### **History**

The Midpeninsula Community Media Center is a 501 (c) (3) public benefit corporation. It serves the communities of Atherton, East Palo Alto, Menlo Park, Palo Alto, Stanford University and unincorporated portions of Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties. The Media Center partners with other community television access organizations in the Bay Area to produce shows and exchange material.

The Media Center was created in September of 2001 through the merger of the Mid-Peninsula Access Corporation (MPAC) and Silicon Valley Community Communications (SVCC). MPAC began operations in 1990, providing video production training and equipment for community productions, and staff produced programs designed as a platform for community groups. MPAC provided coverage of local government meetings and fee-based production services. SVCC was created in 2000 by the members of Cable Co-op with a donation of \$10 million from the proceeds of the sale of its cable television system to AT&T Broadband. SVCC's mission was to continue the Cable Co-op tradition of producing community interest shows on a regular schedule.

The working capital fund created as a result of the \$10 million donation is intended primarily to support the Media Center's facility expenses. Under the prior cable franchise, Cable Co-op was required to provide the cable access organization with studio and office space. When the cable franchise was transferred to AT&T Broadband, no requirement for the provision of space was included. Consequently, the Media Center has experienced a substantial increase in its operation costs to cover facility expenses.

The Media Center is officially designated as the Cable Access Organization to bring community media services to the communities served by the Cable Joint Powers Authority. This designation gives the Media Center the right to use the cable access channels and \$0.88 per subscriber per month, as negotiated in the Joint Powers cable franchise with AT&T Broadband. AT&T Broadband currently has about 24,000 subscribers in the communities we serve.

#### **Assets**

The Media Center manages the following resources for the benefit of the community:

- A leased facility with
  - A large, three camera, production studio and related production equipment for shows, and master control
  - Five video edit suites for community use
  - Office space for Media Center staff

- Three channels carried by AT&T Broadband for public and government access programming.
- Two vans with production equipment for remote productions.
- Twelve cameras and other equipment for lending to members of the community.
- Potential viewers in 24,000 households subscribing to cable television from AT&T Broadband.
- A working capital fund worth about \$7 million.

Our most important asset is our community. We are fortunate to serve a community with a diverse set of interests, a wealth of resources, and people who want to stand up and be heard.

### **Current Programming**

The Media Center has access to channels 26, 27 and 28 carried by AT&T Broadband. Channel 26 is the Government Channel, which carries city council agendas and live meetings from city halls as well as replays of meetings and other programs of civic interest. Channels 27 and 28 are the Community Channels. During the week, we use these channels to run the California Channel (the state legislature live from Sacramento), to publicize community resources and events, and to announce our programming schedule. In the evenings and on weekends, we use these channels to carry programs produced by community members as well as staff productions about local newsmakers, artists, community groups, and sports events.

#### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

Under contract, we send production crews to meetings of city councils, and other committee or board meetings. The Menlo Park, Palo Alto, and San Mateo County Board of Supervisors chambers have television cameras installed. We operate the video equipment and send the signal onto the cable system. In other cities, we provide a crew and portable production equipment to record event for live or delayed cablecasting, as contracted by the cities.

We also produce *City Beat* for the City of Palo Alto, a monthly magazine show that provides news and information to local citizens.

#### **COMMUNITY PROGRAMMING**

We recruit individuals and organizations to come to the studio and produce shows. Many local public benefit corporations have taken advantage of this resource to tell the community about their services and raise awareness about the issues they address. Some shows have become regular productions, like *Other Voices*, community forums, and guest speakers sponsored by the Peninsula Peace and Justice Center, *On Call* – a medical advice call-in show, and *3<sup>rd</sup> Eye* – a show on local and national issues as seen by African Americans.

We have produced fund raising telethons for the Ecumenical Hunger Program of East Palo Alto. The events showcase local bands and raised over \$25,000 in 2001.

### **STAFF PRODUCTIONS**

We produce a number of shows with the goal of generating more community connections, awareness, and involvement. On *NEWSwatch* the hosts create a venue for debates and discussions on many different local issues as well as local reactions to national issues. *Close Up Café* features lively interviews with luminaries and unforgettable characters of the Midpeninsula. The *Community Journal* series delivers a mid-peninsula news wrap up sandwiched between feature stories produced by community groups, neighborhood associations, and local agencies. The Regional *Game of the Week*, captures high school and college sports events.

At election time, we produce special shows on all of the campaigns and ballot measures, in partnership with the Palo Alto Daily News and the League of Women Voters.

### **Training and Equipment**

We provide low-cost classes in video production and editing. The classes help members of the community learn how to use video equipment, and, we hope, turn some of graduates into volunteer producers of our shows. We provide internships for students at local high schools and colleges who need practical experience. As part of their training, the interns create promotional videos for local public benefit organizations.

Video cameras, tripods, and a laptop computer with video editing software are available for check-out to graduates of our training programs.

### **Staff**

We have eight full time staff members and 47 people who work part time (many of whom work on the sports crews).

The Center is supported by over 200 volunteers who assist with everything from entering information for the community bulletin board and program preview guide to operating the control room and studio equipment during community productions.

### **Governance**

A volunteer board of directors governs the Media Center. The board has fifteen seats. Current members include members of the staffs of the cities of Palo Alto, East Palo Alto, Menlo Park, and Atherton. Other directors provide the organization with expertise in financial and legal matters, or help us connect to key stakeholders like schools, community service organizations, and arts organizations.



## Funding

In 2003, the Media Center's funding will come primarily from the following sources:

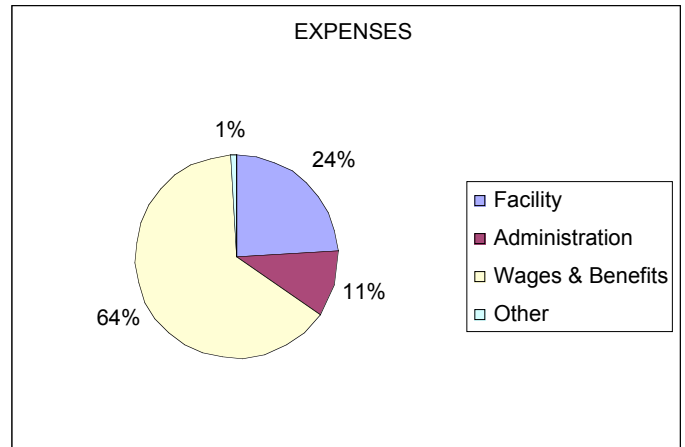
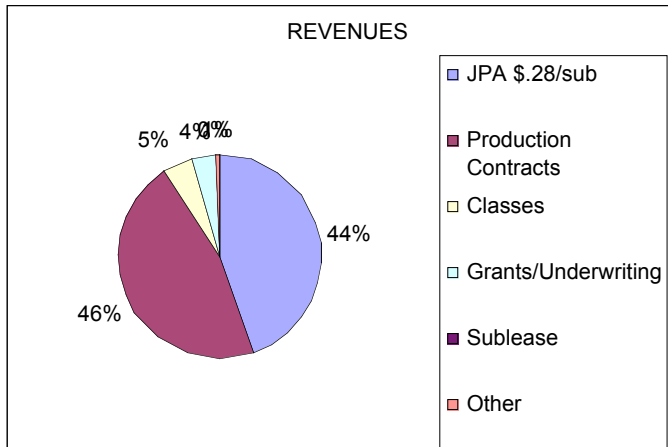
- \$0.88 per month per subscriber to AT&T cable television (\$258K).
- Contracts for services to local governments (\$270K).
- Fees from classes, equipment loans (\$28K).
- Grants and underwriting (\$22K)

Operating expenses will include the following major items:

- Facility (\$249K)
- Wages and benefits (\$665K)
- General and administration (\$109K)

This budget assumes that we will be able to find and move into a new facility in the first half of the year. It does not include expenses relating to purchasing or outfitting a new facility or for buying out the lease. The budget still leaves us with a deficit of \$450,000 that will be withdrawn from the capital account.

## 2003 Budget



## 4. THE CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

Changes in the national and local environments are profoundly changing the role of the Media Center in our community.

### CHANGES IN THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

**An evolving mission.** Access organizations are evolving from a model based on providing an outlet for free speech with access for everyone, to a model that balances the needs and interests of both the producers and viewers of local cable television and other communications technologies. In this new model, the access organization works proactively to facilitate connections across different community groups, inform people about the richness of community life and resources, and provide opportunities for learning, exploration and civic engagement. This results in a mix of services, which includes open access for individual expression, community programming, and staff-originated productions.

**Falling costs of technology and improving ease of use.** In the last few years, video production has evolved from a complex, expensive process to something anyone can do with an inexpensive camera and a home computer. The television industry is shifting from analog to digital media, necessitating investment in new equipment, but reducing production time and costs.

**Institutional Networks facilitate satellite facilities.** Cities are building fiber optic networks to provide very high-speed connections between public facilities and community resources. A camera at a baseball diamond will be able to plug in and transmit live shows to homes throughout the service area. For less than \$20,000, a senior center or library will be able to set up a small room as a studio, and produce and transmit shows.

**Broadband is turning the Internet into a medium for video.** The Internet is already contributing to the strength of a community. With the addition of video streaming, the Internet becomes a new form of television that can serve small communities of interest.

**The end of the cable monopoly.** Satellite television companies are taking subscribers away from cable companies. In some communities, new entrants are building fiber optic lines to offer cable television in direct competition to the incumbent provider. Congress and the Federal Communications Commission have not been active in protecting the role of community television access providers.

**Changing funding models.** Cities are cutting back on their support for general access programming. At the same time, they are increasingly contracting with the access organizations to produce and cablecast public meetings and other programming of value to the community.

**Growing interest in regional collaborations.** Access organizations are breaking loose of the strict one cable franchise, one access organization per community and forming regional alliances. Networks are being interconnected, and there is interest in providing specialized services to each other.

**Some things have not changed.** Access consultants report that across the country, the top three local viewing needs have not changed:

- City council meetings
- High school sports
- Local events and issues

### **CHANGES IN THE LOCAL ENVIRONMENT**

A number of forces are changing the character of the midpeninsula region. The Media Center's strategy needs to recognize and work with the following changes and trends.

**New Vitality in East Palo Alto.** The economy of East Palo Alto is growing. The boom of the 1990's brought new people to the community, new investment in housing, the construction of a large office complex and the development of a shopping center with several large retail chains that bring tax revenues to the city. Plans are proceeding for a new downtown next to City Hall. Residents of East Palo Alto have long been among the most active users of our resources.

**Creativity is a Factor in Silicon Valley's Success.** New research from Carnegie Mellon University links economic success to concentrations of creative people. Resources like the Media Center attract and encourage creative people. Organizations like Creative Initiatives and Zero One are encouraging the growth of the arts as a component in the Valley's economic development strategy.

**Declines in the Commercial Real Estate Market.** The economic recession is still unfolding in Silicon Valley. Rents and prices for commercial properties have fallen sharply in the last year and may continue to fall. The Media Center is in the fortunate position to be able to consider buying a property.

**A New Institutional Network.** Over the next two years the public schools and city buildings in our community will be connected by a municipally owned, high-speed, fiber optic network. The network will allow people to originate programming at any of the nodes on the network, and send it to the Media Center for distribution on the cable television system.

**Fiber to the Home is Coming.** The City of Palo Alto has been testing fiber to the home in one of its neighborhoods. If the project is a success and the residents are willing to pay for the service, a few years from now we will have an audience that will be able to watch our shows on the Internet. The availability of next generation broadband in the home could dramatically change how we distribute our programming.

## 5. ANALYSIS

In 2001, we asked members of the Stanford Graduate School of Business Alumni Consulting Team (ACT) program to help us better understand what the community wants from us. They interviewed leaders from schools, city governments, community-based organizations, and elected officials. The analysis of their surveys led to three recommendations:

1. **Raise the visibility of the organization in the community.** Many people do not know we exist, and even those who have participated in our shows do not know the full range of our services. City officials would also like to see data on how many people are watching our shows.
2. **Improve the quality of our programming and services.** The quality of our signal varies considerably. Sometimes city council meetings are inaudible or the image is very poor. The ACT analysis also identified an opportunity to increase the professionalism of our production services.
3. **Develop more programs for youth.** There is demand in the community for more services for youth and funding to support the demand.

An earlier ACT study strongly urged developing **more fee-for-service business**. Our first steps in that direction have been successful. We need to do more.

We also conducted an internal review of our strengths and weaknesses.

### MAJOR STRENGTHS

- Staff is skilled in studio and remote productions.
- Special strengths in producing sports shows.
- 4,000-5,000 graduates of our classes.
- Up-to-date cameras, tripods.
- An activist community that cares about local issues.
- Partnerships with the PA Weekly and Daily, and the League of Women Voters.
- Working capital reserves.
- We will gain two additional channels when AT&T completes its fiber upgrade in 2003.

### MAJOR WEAKNESSES

- Out-dated, labor-intensive, cablecasting equipment.
- Uneven signal quality.
- No engineer on staff.
- Low awareness in the community of the full range of our services.
- No data on who is watching or what people want to see.
- High rent and high cost of utilities.
- AT&T's cable television subscribership is declining.
- No structured fund raising program.

## **6. STRATEGIC ISSUES, OPPORTUNITIES AND CORE STRATEGIES**

The following strategic priorities should take us through 2004.

### **Issue: Financial Model**

Our current financial structure forces us to draw down on our working capital. Our contracts with local governments and the \$0.88 per subscriber do not provide sufficient revenues to support current levels of community programming and staff-produced programming. If we were to continue to operate at this rate, we would exhaust the working capital fund in less than eight years. If a new facility allows us to cut our facilities costs in half, we would still be spending \$200,000 a year more than we are taking in.

**STRATEGY: ESTABLISH POLICIES FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF OUR WORKING CAPITAL AND RESTRUCTURE THE INVESTMENTS TO BE CONSISTENT WITH OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES (2002)**

It will be essential to protect funds needed for the new facility. We have a new member of the board with investment management expertise. She has proposed a model for setting our priorities and re-allocating our investments.

**STRATEGY: GROW OUR PRODUCTION SERVICES BUSINESS (2003-2004)**

The Media Center is already a service center. Under contract, we shoot and distribute public meetings for the cities, and we produce high school and college sports events for Peninsula Television. Our studio is available for rent. We are already having some success attracting sponsorships for our regional game of the week sports shows. We are exploring the feasibility of contracting with the cities to provide video streaming services. We need to promote our services more widely to community-based organizations and price them appropriately.

**STRATEGY: DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT A FUND RAISING STRATEGY (2003-2004)**

Like most 501 (c)(3) public benefit corporations, we need the financial support of the community. Past efforts at fund raising have met with some success, but they were not sustained. We may need to hire a consultant to help us review our fund raising assets, set goals, identify target supporters, and acquire the appropriate donor tracking systems. We may also want to hire staff to manage our development programs. It may be time to launch a membership program to help us capture and maintain contact information.

**STRATEGY: DEFINE THE ROLE OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS IN FUND RAISING (2003)**

We do not have anyone on the board who has significant fund raising experience. We need to recruit someone to the board who can help us develop a strategy. If the board decides to participate in the fund raising program, we need to provide training. We also need someone on the board who is skilled at

doing fund raising. This may or may not be the same person who can help us create fund raising strategy.

### **Issue: Facilities**

Our current facility has several disadvantages:

- The cost of the lease is higher than we can afford. We signed our lease at a time of relatively high rents, but even at a 50% reduction, it would be hard for us to cover the cost. Renting also subjects us to volatility as leases expire and rates change. By being subject to such market forces, the Media Center is not able to ensure the preservation an important community asset.
- The costs of operating the facility are high. The building is old and poorly insulated. The roof leaks at times. The lighting system is outdated and expensive to operate.
- The interior is worn and threadbare. It does not project an image that is welcoming to volunteers and clients.
- The current location is relatively central to our service territory, but it does not enhance our visibility in the community.
- The site will convert to residential housing in 2019 so we have to move before then.

The cost of commercial property has fallen in the last year and there is no sign of it picking up for a while. This presents us with a rare opportunity to buy land in Silicon Valley.

**STRATEGY: WORK WITH REAL ESTATE PROFESSIONALS TO FIND A PROPERTY, BUILD A NEW FACILITY, OR REFURBISH AN EXISTING BUILDING (2002-2003)**

Property ownership will allow us to develop a new asset that will provide us with flexibility down the road.

- If our needs change it will be easier to modify the building.
- If we buy a property and find that the location is not working for us, it will be easier to relocate because we will have an asset to sell.
- If we run into financial problems, we will have the option of selling the building to raise money.

### **Issue: Visibility in the Community**

Despite its years of experience, thousands of hours of productions, and thousands of people who have visited the facility for one reason or another, the great majority of people in the community do not know what services we provide. Greater visibility would help us recruit producers and volunteers, and attract more community-based organizations to take advantage of our resources.

We do not have any reliable data on how many people watch our channels or what shows they prefer. The lack of such data makes it difficult to justify our role in the community.

The ACT consulting team found that some people are concerned about the quality of our services. We have had a difficult time getting the cable operator to maintain the quality of the signal from Palo Alto's City Hall.

**STRATEGY: CONDUCT A SURVEY OF RESIDENTS AND LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS TO LEARN MORE ABOUT WHAT PROGRAMMING AND SERVICES THEY WOULD LIKE US TO PROVIDE. (2003)**

Our primary supporters, the cities, want to know how many people are watching the shows we produce. We want to know what people want to see, and we want to know more about what services local community organizations need, such as consulting on marketing communications strategies.

We are in contact with a group at San Jose State University that specializes in doing community surveys for non-profits. We will also conduct focus groups and explore other forms of community outreach.

**STRATEGY: DEVELOP A MARKETING STRATEGY TO INCREASE AWARENESS OF THE MEDIA CENTER IN THE COMMUNITY, BUILD VIEWERSHIP, AND ATTRACT PRODUCERS AND VOLUNTEERS. (2003)**

Over the next 6 – 12 months we will develop a marketing strategy based on the results of the surveys and community outreach. We will identify whom we want to reach and investigate the potential of various marketing tools to increase our visibility with those people.

**STRATEGY: UNDERSTAND WHAT QUALITY MEANS FOR A MEDIA ACCESS CENTER, SET GOALS AND ACHIEVE THEM. (2003-2004)**

Once the intensive work on the new facility is past, we will survey our customers to better understand what quality means to them and how we measure up. We will then set goals, develop ideas for improving our quality, and institute a quality tracking program.

### **Opportunity: Local Government Institutional Network**

As a condition of the cable television franchise, the Joint Powers Agency (JPA) cities have required AT&T Broadband to build a fiber optic network that will connect all local government facilities and community buildings. As the official Community Access Organization for the JPA, the Media Center will be a node on the network. We will encourage schools and community centers on the network to set up satellite facilities for the creation of video material. The high-speed network will allow us to feed high-quality signals from public meetings, schools,

and community centers onto the cable television system. The JPA has also asked us to play a role in administering the network.

**STRATEGY: PARTICIPATE IN THE PLANNING OF THE I-NET AND HIRE APPROPRIATE EXPERTISE (2002-2004)**

We will continue to attend I-Net planning meetings. As our role and the schedule become clearer we will identify the appropriate expertise we need to acquire and develop a budget.

**Issue: Programming Mix**

In late 2002, we are taking over operation of the government channel. In 2003 or 2004 we will get a second government channel to operate for the JPA and a new community channel. We need to develop plans for these channels, including the programming they will carry, the budget, target audience and marketing strategy.

We do not have a strong partnership with the schools that would help us reach more students and provide students with a new channel for artistic expression and for expressing their opinions. We may be able to dedicate this new channel to education programming.

**STRATEGY: CREATE A PROGRAMMING TASK FORCE (2003)**

The task force will work with staff to develop a plan for the kinds of content we want to attract and produce, and strategy for scheduling the shows on our channels. The task force could include members of the board, producers, and other advisors.

**STRATEGY: ADD SOMEONE WITH YOUTH SERVICES EXPERTISE TO THE BOARD**

Meda Okelo, Community Services Manager for the City of East Palo Alto, joined the board in September 2002.

**STRATEGY: MEET WITH THE LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND YOUTH GROUPS TO DISCUSS PROGRAMS TARGETING YOUTH (2003-2004)**

We have begun meetings with school administrators. We need to create a team of people, including students, to develop a plan that meets the needs of the schools and can be funded.

A key element in the discussions is the possibility of setting up satellite facilities at the schools. The satellite facilities could be small studios or portable equipment for creating student-conceived and produced shows. We met with staff members of the Palo Alto Unified School District and proposed the formation of a multi-district task force to develop a detailed plan.



We tried to get funding to provide classes in media literacy for high school students several years ago. There may still be an opportunity to create a regular, structured program.

**STRATEGY: INCREASE THE NUMBER OF SHOWS FEATURING NOTABLE PEOPLE SPEAKING AT LOCAL EVENTS.**

Kepler's Bookstore, Stanford University, Castilleja School, the Commonwealth Club and other local organizations bring high-powered presenters to our region. We have captured some of their talks, and some of those shows have proven to be extremely popular with our viewers. We can do more to establish relationships with the hosting organizations and build a business around taping and cablecasting their presenters.