

Free Speech TV - Media Giraffe Profile

Free Speech TV

Jon Stout - General Manager/co-Founder

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About

Jon Stout is program director, general manager and co-founder of Free Speech TV, a national independent satellite-delivered network reaching 25 million homes via DISH Network (channel 9415) and over 140 community cable stations. Working with activists and artists, Free Speech TV bills itself as using electronic media to cultivate an informed and active citizenry in order to advance progressive social change.

Stout grew up in Pennsylvania. After college, he worked for a congressman and then continued his education through graduate school. Stout then took work as a publicist for the Buffalo, N.Y.-based non-profit Hallways Contemporary Art Centre. He then served as executive director of the Los Angeles Filmforum, which is a non-profit showcase for experimental and activist media. In 1994, he moved Boulder, Colo., to join The Nineties Channel, which in 1995 became Free Speech TV.

Free Speech TV is a project of Public Communicators Inc, which is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. It's funded almost entirely by viewers and supporters of the service through help of on air pledge drives held throughout the year. Free Speech TV is also funded with the help of foundations such as The Glaser Progress Foundation and others which support "independent media and the use of media for progressive social change."

"We see our job as informing the American public about the issues that are out there so they can make informed choices on their own behalf and on the behalf of their communities, and to mobilize those people to join the campaign of these front-line organizations.

"We see television as probably the most potent culture force in America and we know that the corporate media can successfully use television for private game by selling audiences to the advertisers," Stout said in an email exchange with a Media Giraffe Project researcher. "We believe that same power of the media can be wielded to create not only active consumers but informed and engaged citizens. We believe that when citizens and viewers from the public have access to information to make informed choices and to get involved in the work for social change that they will indeed do so. This is a prime way for us to work for social, economic, environmental and cultural justice in the US and abroad."

Free Speech TV as an active volunteer program in which persons hoping to get involved in the project are given the basic training and tools they will need to help become a part of the fight for social change. Viewers are encouraged to get involved, too.

"The greatest risk, is that if we as an organization are unsuccessful at fulfilling our mission, that the country and the world will continue to be plagued by social and environmental injustices," Stout says. "Media consolidation is constantly limiting the access people have to information in order to make important decisions and Free Speech TV continues to work hard to provide these factors. The future of Free Speech TV appears to be both positive and negative as deregulation of media will make it more difficult for the project to continue, but at the same time positive factors such as public thirst for information and the drop in cost of media production will help Free Speech TV continue in its efforts."

Free Speech TV looks for stories which address the social, political, environmental and cultural issues from a progressive perspective. It acknowledges avoiding voices which appear to be working against social justice or voices that are found on a regular basis in mainstream media. Most programming is national in focus.

Jon received his B.A. from Gettysburg College and his M.A. from the State University of New York at Buffalo.

SEE ALSO: Article by Stout reporting on the Sept. 2005 conference in Philadelphia of the National Alliance for Media Arts and Culture (NAMAC).

(reported by Kristina Freire, University of Massachusetts student)

Links

- Audio

Media Giraffe Profile Archive | ID: 213

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