

Top fund-raiser WTVS ends best drive

By JUDITH BERNE

Why are economically depressed Detroiters and their suburban neighbors giving more money than ever to public television?

Channel 56 (WTVS) last month conducted the most successful fund-raising drive in its 25-year history.

And the woman behind it — energetic, ingratiating, committed Aggie Scott of West Bloomfield — happily looked for answers.

More people are watching and there's more awareness of public television, reports Mrs. Scott, the station's vice president of development.

Improved advertising and programming instituted under Jack Caldwell, new president and general manager of Channel 56, apparently is taking hold, she says.

And she readily admits that "the strike that delayed the start of the commercial season certainly didn't hurt us." The commercial shows which finally surfaced weren't terrific, she adds.

Increased audiences coupled with new state laws giving individuals and corporations a 50 percent tax credit on their contributions made the difference, she says.

MRS. SCOTT took full advantage, personally helping coax nearly 10,000 of them to pledge \$664,000 during the 16-day fund drive.

The number of pledges was up 56 percent over last year. The amount more than doubled December 1979's \$260,000.

If past practice holds, about 70 percent will honor their pledges. The con-

stant reminder that viewers could give twice what they had in the past but that it cost them the same apparently got through, she says.

"We don't let them off easily," she admits. "I don't call it a hard sell. I think of it — I'm not (kidding) you, this is a partnership. If you want this, you've got to give that." We make the point clearly.

"When I'm sitting home as a viewer, I understand people's irritations with the pledge breaks," she grins. But after comparing experiences with 200 public television stations all over the country, she knows, "It's the repeat and repeat of that message that finally produces the action."

BONUSES HAVE always been given to donors of smaller amounts.

But this year, "I had the guts to offer bonuses for \$1,000," Mrs. Scott says.

She did it on the theory that even people well-heeled enough to make large contributions are turned on by gifts. So a portable color television went to viewers pledging \$1,000 or more and a black and white model went to those pledging \$500.

The results:

Last year's one or two \$1,000 contributors zoomed to 40. And about 45 people pledged \$500 compared to "maybe five" last year. Since federal appropriations to public broadcast stations are directly tied to the local dollars raised, the increased contributions have added impact, she says.

BUT THE 80 people who work at Channel 56 aren't resting on the success of the winter fund-raising drive.

Plans for the annual auction, which provided about 16 percent of the station's current \$3.7 million budget, are underway. The auction is slated for April 3-11.

Beyond that, they are considering the effects that up and coming cable television will have on public and educational TV.

Cable television will change the television industry so that "not only will public television be different in 10 years, but all TV," Mrs. Scott says, predicting "a fascinating decade."

"Everything that was true (of the industry) in the '70s is going to be challenged in the '80s," she says.

Channel 56 is advocating two channels reserved for public television in every cable system.

She sees station manager Caldwell "leading us toward production of product. We might pull our tower down in 10 years," she says, "because other people can do it cheaper."

"There's no way to assess 'what cable will do to our fundraising,' she adds.

FOR HERSELF, Mrs. Scott "couldn't hop from job to job as a fundraiser. I've spent 20 percent of my life working for this station. I've done it without pay (she started as a volunteer) and for more than full-time.

"It's a very intense experience working here. It's a job, but it's a commitment."

"You can look at cable television as a threat or a challenge," she adds. "Everybody here is looking at it as a challenge. If we're good enough, I think we'll make it."



SCOTT: "We don't let them off easily. I don't call it a hard sell. I think of it — I'm not (kidding) you, this is a partnership. If you want this, you've got to give that." We make the point clearly." (Staff photo by John Stano)

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