**Volunteers add knowledge, diversity to KUAC FM**

By Nancy Tarnai

At KUAC FM, skilled volunteers are thrilled to be in the studio when the “on air” light flashes.

Take, for instance, Pamm Zierfuss-Hubbard, who volunteers as a radio host whenever needed, usually Tuesday, Thursday or Friday from 6 to 9 p.m.

“I've always been fascinated by radio talent and wanted to be on air but have never had the chance until I moved to Fairbanks,” Zierfuss-Hubbard said. The first time she did an on-air solo shift, she was hooked.

“I volunteer because I love it and it's a ton of fun. In 2016 I decided to do more things that I've always wanted to do, and being on the radio was a big one. I love doing it, and my goal is to host my own show one day,” she said.

In fact, she has already picked a theme for her future program, which she wouldn’t name for fear someone would take her idea. “Trust me, it's gonna be awesome,” she said.

Zierfuss-Hubbard and 30 other on-air volunteers provide the University of Alaska Fairbanks' public broadcasting station a diversity of voices, along with cost-saving benefits. KUAC has been located on the Fairbanks campus since its first broadcast in 1962.

“It’s about community involvement,” said Lori Neufeld, KUAC FM volunteer coordinator and music director. “They bring a wide breadth of musical knowledge and they fill in the gaps.”

Volunteers attend a group orientation, followed by one-on-one training with Neufeld. Then it’s practice, practice, practice. “They reach the sweaty palm, maiden voyage eventually to go live on-air alone,” Neufeld said.

While KUAC staff can teach almost anyone to sound comfortable on air, successful volunteers are those who have a passion for public broadcasting.

Gretchen Gordon, KUAC’s assistant general manager and director of development, outreach and FM, said station volunteers save KUAC more than $100,000 per year.

“But it's not just saving KUAC money,” she said. “It's about adding a rich variety of community voices that are knowledgeable and passionate about music, news and information and our mission to educate every generation.”

“Round Midnight" host Maryanne Babij studied comparative literature, film, women’s studies and religion at Indiana University at Bloomington. She began volunteering for KUAC in 1996, and appreciates that friends in Africa and Germany can listen to her show online.

“I live for connection and community, and KUAC extends my community all over the world,” she said. “It boggles my mind and uplifts my heart. I get to participate and not just listen. I love it.”

Listeners call and email about the shows Maryanne hosts. "I'm so glad to hear Maryanne on the airwaves,” a fan said. “She's my favorite. Even when I've never heard of an artist she features music from, I love it." A listener posted on Facebook, "Oh Maryanne, you have me stuck in my car in my driveway because you keep playing more music I want to hear."

Volunteering for KUAC is Bob Fischer's passion and a huge part of his life. A longtime volunteer, Fischer chose to allocate even more time to KUAC after retiring from a 50-year career with the National Weather Service. He now hosts "Afternoon Concert" on Mondays. Several years ago, he purchased and donated CDs to widen KUAC’s baroque classical music library.

Another volunteer, Nora Foster, has a degree in biological oceanography and is semi-retired and self-employed in the field of identifying marine organisms. She has given her time to KUAC since 2000, when her late husband was volunteering on "Any Old Time." He invited her to join him in the studio to see how fun it was.

Foster’s regular assignment is hosting "Afternoon Concert" on Tuesdays, but she occasionally hosts country or rock programs. “I like to explore the music,” she said. “I have old favorites, but I like to find others.”

A radio host strives to push the right buttons, pronounce names correctly and time everything precisely.

“It’s a good brain game to make it all fit,” Foster said.

Nancy Tarnai is the marketing and communications manager at KUAC. She can be reached at 907-474-1890 or at nancy.kuac@alaska.edu.

Cutline:

*Photo by Nancy Tarnai*
Lori Neufeld, left, brainstorms with on-air volunteer Nora Foster in the KUAC FM studio.