

Air Waves
Radio Free Nevada KXNV 89.1 FM

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A technician works on a broadcast tower.

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Despite the Internet's impact on the music industry and increasingly popular podcasts, broadcast radio still holds strong as a medium for communication and entertainment even in the midst of waning listeners. For many, radio needs to be revamped, reclaimed and used once more as a valuable platform for communities, citizen journalism and local arts and culture.

That's the goal of KXNV 89.1 FM—also referred to as Radio Free Nevada—a station that can be heard at 89.1 FM. The station, which has been operating since late October, has been more than two years in the making, and is getting closer to an official launch. As one of the final steps toward “official,” they received their FCC approval last week.

Boardmember Steve Funk says the process of taking over a license is arduous, and that it required patience.

“It's an interesting chain for where the license came from,” he says. “We had to get the station on air by a certain date [late November]” to receive and maintain ownership.

Working with the Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada (PLAN), the idea for taking over the channel came up about two and a half years ago.

“We realized that in local radio, there's just a slice of broadcast left in, and a little bit of politics, a lot of religious broadcasters,” says Funk. “We thought, we should nail that down so the community could have a proper radio station. So it took two and a half years of working at it bits and pieces, clawing and scratching and asking for help, but we made it just under the wire of the FCC, just one month shy of getting the station.”

KXNV is a nonprofit organization, as is PLAN, and the station is funded through grants and donations. Although it's considered public broadcasting, it's not associated with the local public radio station, KUNR.

“Open Sky Radio [media network] and PLAN worked together to get the station going,” says Funk. “Once we got on the air, we had to fill out a bunch of paperwork and send it to Washington. We're running on a contingency broadcast situation.” Although it's a formality, he says, it's common when establishing a new station.

Current programming consists primarily of music. A small group of disc jockeys including Bruce Van Dyke (an RN&R contributor) and Funk have curated more than 80,000 songs.

“We’re still adjusting to this programming approach being heavily dependent on an Apple computer,” says Van Dyke. “We’re using what we’re calling the bucket approach to radio shows. My bucket plays, and I build the bucket by building the master library. Right now it’s a 24-hour jukebox.”

Van Dyke says he chooses “great old songs that are familiar, and great new songs that aren’t familiar,” based on his preference and expertise.

But plans for the station go far beyond music.

“We have big aspirations for the radio station,” says Funk. “[We see it] really connecting to the community, connecting to voices in the community, working with a number of entities, working with nonprofit organizations and charitable organizations, connect[ing] to youth, women, arts and culture. It’s really about arts and culture, and we also have an aspiration to have a close-to-the-street volunteer news organization. We’re excited to achieve what this could be for the community.”

Funk and Van Dyke say the organization will reach out to those who want to help with programming once the station is officially launched.

“We hope to have public affairs, news programming and a lot of organizations sharing on the station,” says Funk. “We look forward to carving ourselves a lovely little niche in the airwaves of Northern Nevada.”