WOSU Public Media
The Path To Pearl – One Hundred Years in the Making

SLIDE ONE (KIT KAT LOGO)

(Tom Katzenmeyer Introduction)

Thank you for those comments, Tom.
You are always so generous with your time and you've been a great mentor to me and so many others. Thanks for all you have done for WOSU and for this community. And for serving on the search team for my successor!

And thank you Kats for this special opportunity. Thanks to our President Bob Loversidge who suggested this field trip and then unfortunately could not be here.

I hope many of you enjoyed the tour and will come back in the future.

This is the very first event in our new headquarters outside of a staff and board meeting. We are just about two weeks away from being fully operation and broadcasting from 14th and Pearl.

SLIDE (100 Years)

This Kit Kat essay is not about the history of WOSU per se, but there is some of that. The focus is mostly on the technology and facilities rather than programming and people, though plenty of folks have made this place possible. It has been an interesting path to Pearl Alley and it's been 100-years in the making.

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SLIDE (Sparks Transmitter)

On April 19, 1917, two weeks after the United States declared war on Germany, the president of the Ohio State University received a letter from the US Radio Inspector ordering the dismantlement of all wireless radio equipment.

At the time, Ohio State was one of the leading universities in the development of wireless code and spark transmitters. The university appealed the order saying its powerful transmitter should stay in operation in case it was needed by the government. The appeal was denied.

From 1900 to World War I, Ohio State had been building and testing different transmitters and receivers to extend wireless communication of the dots and dashes of Morse Code. OSU had started this work shortly after Marconi showcased his invention in England.

(SLIDE – Great Flood)

The great flood of Columbus in 1913 brought wireless to the forefront as OSU relayed information about the flooding to police and the press. It sparked the university to seek an experimental license and build a wireless station called 8YO. But while the feds ordered the dismantling of that transmitter in 1917, they supported a new facility that would setup OSU nicely for the future of radio.

(SLIDE – WWI Air Hangar)

With the campus awash with cadets, the university was one of six in the country to develop a flying school. The School of Military Aeronautics was quickly established to provide training in piloting, airplane maintenance, gunnery and wireless.

Within a year an aviation building was completed on 19th avenue to house these activities. It was designed with an unusual sawtooth skylight with north-facing windows placed vertically, allowing for maximum indirect natural light as the cadets worked on airplanes in the hangar.

(SLIDE – FLYING CAMPUS SHOT)

Instructors and cadets were often seen rolling planes from the building down a nearby hill to a grassy plain along the Olentangy River, where the university had a small airstrip for flight tests. That strip of land found a more lucrative use a few years later when it became the site of the massive Ohio Stadium.

Once the war was over, OSU converted the aeronautics school into a communications lab for the department of electrical engineering. And here's where, perhaps predictably, football enters the picture.

(SLIDE – Ohio Stadium)

In 1921, KDKA in Pittsburgh, the first radio station officially on the air in the country, had broadcast the first live play by play game by voice rather than morse code at the University of Pittsburgh's Forbes Field.

Ohio Stadium was under construction at the time and KDKA's success led the university to lobby the State of Ohio to invest over $40,000 in a new radio station – today that would be about $600,000 in purchasing power. The goal, among other things, was to develop a station capable of broadcasting Ohio State football.

(SLIDE – Thompson at Mic)
With that infusion of funding, on April 24, 1922, OSU president William Oxley Thompson sat at the microphone and declared the Ohio State station ready for regular programming as the first radio station in Columbus and one of the first designated educational stations in the country.

(SLIDE – Stadium Radio Headline)

During the summer of ‘22, the stadium was completed and the little university radio station with just three full-time staff focused on football. As the Dispatch reported the week before the first game– “attaches from the radio station have set the stage to give the running story of the conflict and snatches of cheering and band music.”

(SLIDE – Headline and Announcer)

The Buckeyes beat Ohio Wesleyan by a resounding 5 to zero in the new stadium with the station broadcasting at 833 on the AM dial. The stadium was dedicated at the Ohio State game with Michigan later in the season and the radio station, then known by the call letters WEAO, had installed a new 500-watt transmitter and could be heard by OSU alumni from Chicago to New York City.

(SLIDE – Twin Towers)

One of the dominant landmarks on the OSU campus in the 1920s became the twin radio towers built at Woodruff and Neil Avenues. The station also installed lines running overhead and through a network of underground tunnels to the university chapel, Campbell Hall, which overlooked Mirror Lake where university concerts were held, and to Orton Hall, where the iconic Chimes became a regular feature on the station.

(SLIDE – Studio)

WEAO broadcasts focused on the university and Columbus community with all live programming since there was no easy way to record anything at the time. Lectures, concerts, talk shows and educational programs filled the time.

(SLIDE – Farmers Remote Truck)

Aside from the sports audience, the station targeted farmers across the Midwest and built this remote truck. One of the most popular programs was the noon farm market and weather reports which included live discussions with farmers in their fields.

(SLIDE – WOSU Mic)

WEAO became WOSU in 1933 when the university filed for new call letters to reflect its ownership of the station. As the Depression of the 1930s set in, the university fortified the station with important funding while hundreds of other educational radio stations went dark.

Those included many institutions in Ohio that had believed in the promise of radio to extend their mission through broadcasting. The studios that were built at Denison, Wittenberg, the University of Cincinnati and Toledo all went off the air in the late 20s and 30s.

(SLIDE – Radio Popular)
And though a quarter of the population of the United States was unemployed during the '30s, radio popularity grew immensely. Having a radio receiver was one of a family's most prized possessions. The commercial stations had created networks, allowing for national entertainment for the first time. – providing variety shows, radio soap operas and comedians who moved to radio from vaudeville -- stars like Jack Benny, George Burns and Gracie Allen and Eddie Cantor.

(SLIDE FM Armstrong)
In 1938, a rather incredible gathering took place in Boston at the largest attended Institute of Radio Engineers meeting in its history. American inventor Edwin Armstrong was demonstrating Frequency Modulation or FM radio, which promised high fidelity sound far superior to AM radio.

At the gathering, a newspaper reporter described the scene like this: "600 scientists and engineers virtually spellbound were sitting for over an hour listening to all kinds of audio programming. Static, hiss, hum and other distracting sounds that always accompany conventional radio were gone. The system could reproduce silence itself."

FM radio had to wait until the end of World War II before becoming a reality.

(SLIDE WOSU Program 1949)

There has always been a competition for the airwaves between the large commercial broadcast networks and a very small number of local educational broadcasters like WOSU in Columbus focused on public service.

(SLIDE NBC Network)

The commercial radio networks saw the struggling educational stations as wasting important broadcast spectrum.

But when it came to FM radio, the commercial stations didn't bother to object to educators who wanted to secure noncommercial FM channels. There were few FM radios being made and many commercial broadcasters didn't think FM had much of a future.

(SLIDE FM Dial)
So in 1945 after testimony from OSU leaders and other educators, the FCC ruled to set aside 20 broadcast channels for educational use nestled at the bottom of the FM dial from 88.1 to 91.9.

Funding issues shelved plans for a potential statewide Ohio educational FM network, but the university applied for an FM license and put WOSU FM on the air in December 1949 at the 89.7 frequency.

The new FM tower was positioned next to the AM tower that had been moved to the OSU golf course.

(SLIDE – AM and FM Radios)
With both an AM and FM station, the intrepid WOSU engineers decided to experiment in the 1950s by offering the first "stereo" broadcasts in the city. This was two decades before WOSU was able to actually broadcast in stereo.

What they did was to ask listeners with multiple radios to tune one radio to 820 AM and the other to 89.7 FM and then announced which frequency would be the right channel and which the left channel so the listener could position the radios properly. The gimmick gained popularity and for a few years this version of stereo radio was showcased by WOSU every Sunday afternoon as part of its classical broadcasts.

(SLIDE – Tyler)

Television was next up and here's where there was a real battle between noncommercial and commercial forces. An Ohio State researcher and administrator, Keith Tyler, organized an impressive lobbying effort in Washington on behalf of all educators. At the FCC hearings, Tyler coordinated hundreds of hours of testimony from educators and politicians like John Bricker of Ohio pointing out the lack of any airtime on large urban television stations for the arts, history or children's programming.

(SLIDE – Tyler and Hennock)

In April 1952, the FCC announced its decision to set aside allocations for noncommercial educational television in communities across the country. It was a triumph for Tyler, his team of lobbyists, and FCC commissioner Frieda Hennock, who believed strongly that television should be a place where programming could educate and inspire.

(SLIDE – WOSU TV Exterior)

Four years later, in 1956, WOSU TV went on the air from a yellow cement single floor structure on North Star Road at Lane Avenue.

(SLIDE – John Schmidt and wife)

The TV set pieces may have been scavenged from OSU surplus property, but WOSU was excited to start transmitting on UHF channel 34 and several of the radio staff quickly became television announcers and hosts.

(SLIDE – WOSU AM FM)

Attention and funding shifted from radio to television on campus and the old radio studios dating to World War I had deteriorated badly. 1960s WOSU announcer and program director Ken Keller put it this way --

“Never has such a glorious sound emanated from humbler facilities. The deprivations suffered by the staff as a consequence of such ill-housing were many. The radiators rattled endlessly during the winter months. There was no air conditioning, so in the summer the windows were thrown open and fans moved hot air about. Airplanes over campus created such a din that announcers on-air would simply stop talking until they could hear themselves again.”

(SLIDE – Riots)

In the spring of 1970 as riots took over the campus, tear gas floated through the open windows causing staff to cough and wheeze so much that no one could be on the air. WOSU covered the riots closely, but when OSU decided to shut down its campus, both the radio and television stations were taken off the air for eight days.

(SLIDE – Fawcett Center)

A beacon of hope came with the creation of the Fawcett Center for Tomorrow on Olentangy River Road. It had been planned, as seen in this 1966 rendering, to be an impressive modern conference and telecommunications facility for large conventions, conferences and seminars and a space for WOSU radio and television to broadcast the many issues and stories coming out of those conferences.

(SLIDE – Fawcett Center)

The Center was downsized considerably by 1970. Little money was raised and it became an average brick 1970s conference building. WOSU's space was reduced and extra studios were shelved.
Still, it meant for the first-time radio and television were brought together – the radio staff escaped its humble 1918 facility and WOSU TV jumped closer to campus from its remote North Star Road studios.

(SLIDE WOSU at COSI)
To be relevant, WOSU needed to be part of the community that supported it, be present beyond broadcast and engage with the public…and the basement of the Fawcett Center didn't make that possible.

The WOSU at COSI studios helped resolve some of that issue and opened in 2006 at a time when COSI was struggling to fill its massive building and looked toward partnerships like this one to help.

(SLIDE – WOSU@COSI Magazine)
In the ten years of this unique partnership, which was recognized for its across public media for its creativity, WOSU hosted concerts, political debates and hundreds of events for kids and adults.

(SLIDE – WOSU@COSI Crowd)
In 2015, we learned that dinosaurs were coming to COSI through an agreement with the American Museum of Natural History.

(SLIDE – WOSU@COSI Entrance)
Certain prominent parties insisted on locating the new exhibit exactly where the WOSU studios lived on the first floor of COSI. So the dinosaurs replaced Big Bird and WOSU and we had to dismantle and be out of within a year, losing our public engagement space, studios and moving our TV staff back to the Fawcett Center.

Though in 2015 that news was a kick in stomach. Six years later, look where we landed. And here is some of that story.

(SLIDE – 15th AND HIGH FOOTPRINT)

First, I commend my boss Jay Kasey and other senior leaders at Ohio State and Campus Partners for listening to our dilemma and coming up with something brilliant – a footprint in the new 15th and High Development then in concept stage as a place holder for a new WOSU.

(SLIDE – 15th and High- empty corner)

WOSU committed to raising $12 million to support the construction of the building on this empty corner and we quietly started the largest capital campaign in our history.

On March 23, 2017 – An unseasonably warm day in Columbus…my development chief, Laura Baker and I met with Andy and Sandy Ross for a key request.

(SLIDE – Rosses)

The Rosses had a deep relationship with WOSU through the years. Yet, we were not fully confident when we sat in their plush living room and requested a $5 million lead gift for the campaign. It was one of the great pleasures of my career that they agreed to fully support our ask.
In that moment, this building became much closer to reality.

(SLIDE Headline Out of the Basement)

Last March, we exceeded the $12 million campaign goal with the help of hundreds of donors and you see some of their names on rooms as you walk through the building. We added in $7 million from WOSU reserves and took a long term loan out for the remainder for the total $31 million price tag.

(SLIDE –Planning Room Image)

Chris Meyers and Associates, a local architectural firm, was chosen as our chief architect and we selected Messer Construction to build the facility. All along the way, we could not have gone anywhere without the guidance of the team at Campus Partners, the university development arm focused on improving the immediate off campus areas especially East of High Street.

Their first major project opened in 2005 with the South Campus Gateway mixed commercial and residential development about five blocks south of here that includes the Gateway Film Center.

The next major project was 15th & High.

(SLIDE – MAMAs)

Amanda Hoffsis and Keith Myers pieced together the purchase or trade for 34 parcels over the past decade to secure the blocks from 14th to 17th Avenue along High Street and Pearl Alley.

(SLIDE – Aerial)
This recent aerial image gives a better perspective of the project. 15th and High is designed to open the university's front door and connect from the University District across High Street to the Oval and Thompson Library in the heart of campus.

The OSU Advancement building and the under-construction Administration building border the newly opened University Square public plaza. There is planned a boutique hotel and a 500-car garage.

The idea is to reimagine Pearl Alley, which will be transformed into a safe, vibrant pedestrian area with restaurants, bars and retail along the alley and the plaza.

(SLIDE Staff Brainstorm)

In 2015 and '16 our staff brainstormed a lot about what might be most important in a public media facility for the future. We visited several facilities that had recently completed renovations. Staff wanted open, flexible space and technology that tied together radio and television and digital.

They wanted space for public engagement, internal collaboration and specific spaces for student staff. Most of all they wanted light, windows, with the transparency of the building that as one staffer put it reflects the public in public media.

In 2017, the architects went through many iterations before settling on an exterior design that everyone on the team felt fit our vision.

Let's see a few.

(SLIDE DESIGN)
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We all believed the architect hit it out of the park with this last design.

The building height here is maximized at 70 feet due because of University District building guidelines. That meant we had to build a lower level 30 feet below ground to accomplish the 52,000 square feet we needed to house the new WOSU.

The problem is the underground water table for this land is at about ten feet below the existing surface. Messer installed a temporary dewatering system of 8 wells that went down 40 feet below grade. These wells had pumps installed which drew down the water table inside the wells below the excavation and created a temporary dry bowl in the middle of the site.

(SLIDE Foundation Cement)
As part of the foundation construction, an epoxy waterproofing system was installed in the all the walls and the foundation that was over 3 feet thick in places. This is an image from a night in October 2019 when 150 runs of cement trucks runs were made from midnight to 7 am to pour the foundation.

(SLIDE – Concrete Walls)
Once the entire concrete frame was completed, Messer was able to turn the pumps off because the weight of the structure, about 20 million pounds, counteracted the buoyancy of the water pressure that naturally came back.

The analogy we have heard is that it was like putting a bowl in a bathtub and then putting enough weight in the bowl to keep it submerged. Another is that we are like a giant rock in the middle of a stream that goes around us and on to the Olentangy River.

(SLIDE – TECH HUB)
The discussion about water tables, pumps and bathtubs made us nervous. Working with our architect, we did move the technical core up to this floor right behind me backstage, so that any issue of water on the lower level wouldn't take us off the air. We don't believe that will ever have occur, but we certainly wanted to be extra safe.

Here are a few of other highlights of the building.

(ROSS TIME LAPSE)
We are in the Ross Community Studio, which was built as a broadcast and streaming studio and meeting space to be used for public engagement activities, debates, lectures, performances and meetings like this one. We hope to energize this space almost every day for young and old.

(MEDIA LAB)
On the third floor, another public facing space is the Media Lab, which includes a separate podcast studio for eventual public use for students and the community to produce their own videos podcasts and other media mentored by WOSU staff.

(SLIDE- Open Wiring)
There is a lot of exposed wiring and mechanicals in the common and office areas. Most everything is open, which was part of our interior plan. It also freed monies to focus on building higher quality broadcast studios.

(STUDIO A)
Our TV and Radio studios and production rooms are all tied together with fiber optics to allow for video and audio production everywhere in the building.

(SLIDE - Newsroom)
For instance, we expect to grow a much larger WOSU Newsroom with more student interns and full-time staff in the future. The newsroom allows for live video or audio reports for television, radio or digital distribution.

One element that was key to our hiring Meyers and Associates was that they brought into the process an expert in broadcast acoustics.

(SLIDE Radio Studio)
The radio production and on-air studios are designed with a room within a room construction in which each space's floor, walls and ceiling are isolated from the surrounding construction. Sound isolation ceilings and special acoustical doors and wall treatments are part of the acoustical focus.

(SLIDE Perf Studio)
The second -floor performance studio is designed for video and high-end audio capture and production of musical performances with the white oak wood floor married to an absorbing material on the walls. The sound is optimized for recording music.

(SLIDE Acoustical Wood)
And then there are two custom millwork pieces that look like art pieces. These are in important audio mixing areas. The wood pieces have multiple wells and the depth of each well is based on a mathematical sequence that maximized randomness of the direction and time delay of reflected sound.

(SLIDE Green Plaque)
This is also a green building with great use of recycled materials in construction, LED lighting everywhere that is motion sensitive, efficient HVAC and a high level of filtration and outside air and a great deal of what they call “daylight harvesting,” the use of natural light throughout almost all the upper floors.

(SLIDE Staff Training)
Over the past six months, WOSU has been moving into this facility and the staff have been getting trained on the new equipment and software. We will be broadcasting WOSU TV from here by the end of the week and radio will transition after that.

(FINAL SLIDE – Building)
It’s been quite a journey for WOSU’s public radio and television stations. The community and the university have made a statement about the future of public media by supporting this new headquarters.

And I know the leaders of this organization will continue the tradition of bringing distinctive and diverse insights to our citizens through trusted journalism and public affairs coverage, through highly valued educational media initiatives and through our in-depth focus on the arts, science and the history of our community and our country.

I thank you for this opportunity to showcase the new WOSU Public Media at 14th and Pearl.