

Democracy Now: An Alternative Voice on WEMC

By Chris Fretz
Contributing Writer

Peace and justice are on the airwaves of WEMC, 91.7 FM.

Democracy Now, an hour long radio news program emphasizing peace and social justice concerns, is broadcast daily at 5:00 p.m. on the EMU radio station. *Democracy Now* is the flagship program of the Pacifica Radio Network and is "...committed to bringing the voices of the marginalized to the airwaves."

Launched six years ago as the only daily election show in public broadcasting, *Democracy Now* was successful enough to become a national news show. It covers current events as well as specialized news stories.

Recent stories have included the account of 26 prisoners, including Harrisonburg residents, who were arrested for trespassing at the School of the Americas; a roundtable discussion about

President Bush's proposal to Iraq with Hans von Sponeck, former UN humanitarian coordinator for Iraq; and a feature on the earth summit coming to a close in Johannesburg.

In 1998, *Democracy Now* won the George Polk award for a documentary about U.S. oil companies in Nigeria and their activities in the Niger Delta.

Phil Easley, the general manager of WEMC, cited the program's focus on peace, environmentalism and human rights issues as one reason for airing *Democracy Now*. He emphasized the Pacifica radio network's approach as a fresh alternative to the mainstream media. "They will listen to some of the more progressive voices that are ignored by the mainstream, like Sponeck, Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn," he said.

He also appreciates the program's reporting style. "I'm fas-

cinated with Amy Goodman's approach to interviews. She asks very straightforward questions," he said. "They're very open-ended, but direct and simple. Some reporters reveal things about themselves with their style of question and biases, but I always feel like I'm learning about the person she's interviewing, not her."

Lastly, Easley is impressed with how *Democracy Now* has publicly addressed other news sources about their lack of anti-war coverage.

"Mainstream news media thinks they're doing fine," Easley explained, "and other sources would like to marginalize Pacifica."

The Pacifica Radio Network has its origins as an alternative to mainstream media. It was started in San Francisco in 1949 by Lewis Hill, a conscientious objector, as a foundation to create radio stations not influenced by commercial advertisers. Pacifica

has now grown to include five major stations in New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Houston, and Washington D.C., with other affiliates across the country. Pacifica does

not accept any corporate underwriters; its funding comes from listeners, grants and the corporation for public broadcasting.

Although *Democracy Now* is produced by Pacifica, it is semi-autonomous. Several stations, including WEMC, carry *Democracy Now* but no other Pacifica programs.

Easley is hopeful about the program's impact on the campus and the surrounding community.

"It's a good way for EMU to extend its peace-building mission to the surrounding community," he said. "It could build a bridge between the campus and the community. People outside of EMU can listen to *Democracy Now* and connect the values there with those of EMU."

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Students Speak Out On War

SGA Senator Derrick Charles makes a sign advertising the SGA sponsored phone-in. The phone-in started on Wednesday and will continue through Friday. The phones next to the Game Room in the Commons are available for free calls to members of Congress in order to voice opposition to war on Iraq.



Kevin Docherty

WV Editor Lands Job in Nepal

By Andrea Kniss
Staff writer

Nine years in Nepal just wasn't enough.

Micah Keller was seven years old when he left Harrisonburg in 1985 with his family to work with United Mission in Nepal under the sponsorship of Mennonite Board of Missions. The Kellers returned to the Shenandoah Valley in 1994, but their eldest son didn't stay long.

After acquiring a BA in journalism from EMU in 2000 and getting married this past April, Micah Keller Shristi returned to Nepal's capital city, Kathmandu, a month ago for some adventures of his own.

Surrounded by civil war in one of the least developed countries of the world, Shristi now works as a copy editor for Nepal's foremost daily English-language newspaper, the *Kathmandu Post*.

As a child, Shristi was fascinated with the journalistic adventures of Tintin, a Belgian comic strip reporter/hero. Later in life he declared an English major at EMU "on a whim," he said. Shristi was co-editor of *The Weather Vane* during spring semester of his senior year.

Richard Benner, assistant professor of English and faculty advisor for *The Weather Vane*, described Shristi as "a very exciting, inspiring student" with a restless spirit and a severe case of

senioritis. According to Benner, Shristi sometimes wrote with a brash and forthright style. His quest for a meaty story caused offense at times. "I had to kind of tone him down a little bit," said Benner.

Shristi landed his job at the Kathmandu Post through Ameet Dhakal, a Post staff member currently studying in EMU's Conflict Transformation Program on a Fulbright Scholarship. Heidi

"Reporters and editors are regularly arrested and jailed without trial for publishing controversial stories"

Lantz-Trissel, a classmate of Shristi's, informed Dhakal of Shristi's time spent in Nepal and interest in journalism.

Only four months after his marriage to Charlotte Gingerich of Iowa City, Iowa Shristi moved in alone with a Nepali family to begin copy-editing at the Post. "Friends are a big reason I've chosen to live and work here," he said. He also wants to learn more about the roots of the current conflict between the army and the Maoist guerrillas, which is debilitating progress in education, development and relief work.

At 6 p.m., six days a week, Shristi bikes to work. Come mid-

night, after hours of editing and re-writing stories, a truck drives him home through several military checkpoints.

Language is another daily obstacle he must confront. "I only wish my Nepali was as good as the English skills of my [Nepali] co-workers here," said Shristi.

According to Shristi, U.S. news dominates the international and business pages of the *Kathmandu Post*, "especially since the Bush Jr. administration is so aggressive on the global stage right now."

The Nepali press has little freedom when it comes to local and national news. "Reporters and editors are regularly arrested and jailed without trial for publishing controversial stories," Shristi said. Over 100 journalists are currently in prison under these circumstances.

Shristi is intrigued by the frequency with which reporters subject themselves to pressure from advertisers and publishers. He admires journalists such as Briton Robert Fisk, who "covers the real news" and "isn't scared to let the world know about the terror to civilian populations that results from U.S. attacks and U.S. funded violence."

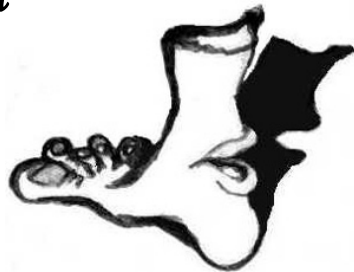
It is Shristi's aspiration "to be one of those journalists who usually don't make any money but publish the otherwise suppressed stories of the oppressed and under-

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Foot in Mouth

"If I'm talking today and don't make any sense—I mean any more than normal..."

Clair Mellinger
Botany



Have a contribution? Send it to wvane@emu.edu along with the professor's name and class.