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Public radio station WDFH seeks \$\$ to continue

Financially struggling Westchester public radio station WDFH, Ossining—the license for which was recently put “on the market”—may have a temporary reprise.

Marc Sophos, founder and executive director of the station, says that listener Douglas Durst has pledged \$10,000 if the non-profit radio station—located at 90.3 on the FM dial—can raise matching funds of \$10,000 from other sources.

So far, the station has raised more than \$4,600 toward the match, including a gift of \$2,500 from Chuck and Gina Bell. The Bells, of Ossining, have been supporters of the station for several years and Mr. Bell is a member of WDFH's Fund-raising Committee, according to Mr. Sophos.

“WDFH has the potential to become a vital resource for our area, which is under served by local public media,” says Croton-on-Hudson resident Vinny Cohan, a longtime WDFH volunteer who hosts music and public affairs programs. “It's essential that we expand our base of supporters to include new people who may not have yet discovered WDFH.

He added that only recently has WDFH had the key elements in place to start developing a significant public following.

The Lower Hudson Valley's only local public radio station, it can be heard over the air in central and northern Westchester, eastern Rockland and southern Putnam counties and far western Connecticut. Listeners anywhere can also hear WDFH on smartphones, tablets, computers and other online devices.

The station, which is entirely non-profit and non-commercial, plays a free form mix of rock, folk, blues, and jazz from a library of more than 100,000 recordings. It also produces “OutCasting,” public radio's only program specifically giving voice to LGBTQ youth issues. Other programs include “For the Greater Good,” a new program spotlighting area non-profits and the important work they do; the local news discussion programs “In Focus” and “Eyes on Westchester,” and “Recovery Talk,” which focuses on recovery from illness, addiction, trauma, domestic violence and more.

The station's short-term goal, according to Mr. Sophos, is to raise the remaining \$5,600 to fully match the donation from Mr. Durst. But in the next few months, he added, “the station must secure donations of \$120,000 per year in order for it to sustainably meet its budget of \$10,000 per month.”

“Once we raise \$100,000, we may be eligible to apply for funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting,” Mr. Sophos continued. He added that the station's goal of \$120,000 is only a third of the average for community radio budgets nationwide, and that it is a tiny fraction of the budget of a typical mainstream, “NPR-

type” public radio station.

“We're also working to raise money through underwriting — announcements saying, ‘This program is made possible by a grant from such-and-such a business,’” Mr. Sophos said. He noted that every public radio and television station depends on local business support through underwriting, and he hopes that businesses in the lower Hudson Valley will recognize the value of what a public radio station can provide in our area.

In addition to listener donations and underwriting, Mr. Sophos said WDFH plans to hold benefit concerts in the coming months. Announcements will be made on the station's web site, <http://wdfh.org>.

The station also hopes to attract more major donors. “The lower Hudson Valley has many residents who could match the generosity of Mr. Durst and the Bells, and we hope that they'll join our circle of major donors,” he said.

“WDFH is ours to lose,” said Mr. Sophos, who literally founded the station using a low-power transmitter while a high school student in Dobbs Ferry (hence the call letters, WDFH).

“We've brought it to the point where it can really start to take off, and it would be awful to have to sell the license to another entity that would eliminate all local programming.”

He said there are several ways for WDFH to reach its \$120,000 goal: 1,000 people giving just \$10 a month, 100 people giving \$100 a month, just a few major donors, or any combination.

Over the long-term, he said, the station plans to develop a broad funding base that includes listener support, underwriting, foundation grants, corporate grants, major donations, benefit concerts and other events, and grants from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

“We have a plan. The question is whether we'll have the time to carry it out, and right now, time is money,” Mr. Sophos said.

People interested in making tax-deductible donations and businesses interested in becoming underwriters can get information at <http://wdfh.org>. Also on the site is extensive information about programming and opportunities for volunteers who run the station to participate. Anyone interested in supporting WDFH can also reach Mr. Sophos at 674-0900, ext. 58.

WDFH is affiliated with the Pacifica Radio Network and is owned and operated by Hudson Valley Community Radio, Inc., a non-profit corporation that is tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. All donations, whether from an individual or business, are fully tax-deductible.

--Ed. note: The Gazette is an editorial contributor to WDFH.