ONE ANSWER TO: "Toward Public Appreciation and Understanding of Science"

Each scientist has to answer to him/herself on the issues of public responsibilities. I long ago concluded that my efforts as a scientist were incomplete if I did not spend a reasonable fraction of my time working to apply my scientific knowledge for the public benefit and understanding of our universe.

DeKalb has a cable TV "Public Access Center", provided by the cable company (they must, under federal regulations, though the facilities can be pretty primitive) with a program director, volunteer technicians, both studio and portable cameras, monitors and taping equipment. Anyone who uses the cable TV service can pick up the public access center programs on channel 8. I have used this facility to make programs of my own, and at least one of my colleagues has done the same. However, with only occasional programs the viewing audience is thought to be small and the programs are generally rebroadcast three or four times for better coverage.

Science coverage in DeKalb newspapers, radio and television is miserable. There are notable exceptions, such as the nationally televised "Ascent of Man" and the "Nova" series, but they don't really fill the need for locally oriented science coverage. I decided that if I was unhappy about it the only solution was to do something about it. Thus was born "One Citizen Looks at This Week's Science". The program appears every week, Wednesday evening at 7 PM. If I'm going to be out of town I tape a program in advance, otherwise it's live. Viewers are able to count on it, and hopefully, look forward to it. I have completed four months of programs and the audience apparently builds slowly. Now I receive several comments weekly on the show, usually appreciative. We announce and show the phone number and invite people to call in with questions, comments, and rebuttals to my editorial comments. Thus far calls are rare.

I prepare by doing my regular scientific reading which ranges from the science, environment and medicine sections of Time, through Science, American Scientist, Scientific American, Science News, Industrial Research, and the local papers. As I read I mark passages and dog-ear pages and lay the journals on a special shelf. Each Wednesday evening I pull the stack down and leaf quickly through to see what I will use that evening. I try to relate each item to local interest, often in terms of pollution; land use; medical problems; weather forecasting; quality of life, both physical and intellectual; and continually stress the necessity for basic research to make any of these things possible. I do not hesitate to make value judgements, but generally try to ask questions, to get people to think about the scientific world and its impact on them.

The majority of colleges and universities are in communities that have cable TV systems. If your community has cable TV and doesn't have public access get busy and insist upon it, then get busy and have your own "One Citizen Looks at This Week's Science". You'll find it personally rewarding and you'll have a clean conscience knowing you're helping to meet the responsibility we all have "Toward Public Appreciation and Understanding of Science".

s/Jack Bennett

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