

WISCONSIN COMMUNITY



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Supporting community expression through media since 1998.

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WCM GIVES 2014 AWARDS TO THE U. S. CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, AMERICAN COMMUNITY TELEVISION AND CONNIE DARLING, FORMER DIRECTOR OF FACT – TV FITCHBURG

Madison, Wisconsin – Wisconsin Community Media announced today that the Most Reverend John Charles Wester, Bishop of Salt Lake City and American Community Television Executive Director Bunnie Riedel have both received the 2014 Friend of Access Award. The Communications Committee of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and ACT are leading efforts to pass the Community Access Preservation Act, a bill that would among other things restore dedicated funding for public, education, and government access centers in Wisconsin.

Connie Darling, former director of Fitchburg – FACT will be inducted into the WCM Hall of Fame. Connie managed the City of Fitchburg community access television center for over twenty years prior to her retirement in 2010.

The Friend of Access award reads, “In recognition of your work to preserve the true democratic voice of the community – Public, Education, and Government Access Television.” Executive Director Mary Cardona praised Bishop Wester for “the invaluable support you have invested in the future of community television by working for the passage of the CAP Act.” The USCCB has been lobbying side by side with ACT to pass the bill, which would among other things restore dedicated funding for PEG centers as a local option, an option that remains in federal law, but was stripped from state law with the passage of Wisconsin’s state franchise legislation in 2007. Cardona said of Riedel, “Four years ago you founded ACT because you saw the need for the CAP Act and you knew community television needed a stronger voice in Washington. Since then, you have been the undisputed champion of the CAP Act on the Hill and have opened many doors for the rest of us.”

The Hall of Fame award recognizes one Wisconsin community television professional yearly who has “shown great leadership and devotion” to the mission of PEG access television, “empowering people to create media for human purposes.” In her letter to Darling, Cardona said, “You made it your business to know what was going on in the arena of telecommunications policy. Several times you took the lead in educating and organizing community television professionals on legislation affecting cable television and telecommunications...you were a friend to all and a confidant to many.”

Nearly 30 access centers lost important, if not essential, funding as a consequence of state franchise legislation, which promised to create competition and lower rates for cable subscribers. West Allis Community Media Center closed. Milwaukee’s MATA Community Media is expected to close in Spring 2016. Madison WYOU is holding on with the assistance of volunteers and a space provided by the Madison Public Library. Eau Claire’s station lost over half of its funding and Wausau recently reopened with just a tiny fraction of its former budget.

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