

**MESSAGE TO THE MEDIA
(Incorporated)**

July 1989

THE PROMPTER

Vol. 2 No. 3

Next General Meeting
Wednesday, July 26, 1989, 7:00 p.m.
Concord Pike Library
Community Room
3406 Concord Pike (Route 202)
Wilmington, DE
* Bring interested friends *

William F. McLaughlin, Chairman of the Department of English at Concord High School, will talk to us about his class in media studies and television viewer awareness.

MTM Annual Board Meeting

--- Took place June 14, 1989 at The Hercules Country Club. Dinner and socializing combined with election of officers, review of year's activities, discussion of current directions.

We are pleased to announce that Barbara Troth has been elected vice president, for a two year term to 6/30/91; and that Jane Hollowell has been elected recording secretary, to fill the unexpired term of Luise Harris.

The following charter members of the Board of Directors are re-appointed for a two year term to 6/30/91: John H. Bader, James F. Daley, Jr., Joseph A. Halloran, Luise D. Harris, Kathleen B. Lynch, Alta C. Weeks. Board members appointed 7/1/88 for two year terms to 6/30/90 are: Betty Collins and Frances B. Gornley.

Newly appointed Board members, effective 7/1/89 for terms expiring 6/30/91 are: Edith W. Beck, Denise Breton, Mary Jane Gregory, Jane W. Hollowell, J. Lee Hollowell, Eleanor Kozinski, Christopher L. Largent, R. Douglas Layton, Judith F. Melman, Moira Sheridan and Barbara Troth.

Copies of our Constitution and Bylaws are available on request.

Doug Layton has consented to chair a committee for Bylaws review and amendments.

UNDERSTANDING OUR MISSION: SOMETHING TO KEEP WORKING ON

At the Board meeting, some divergent viewpoints about our mission were aired. That can be a good stimulus to think harder and put our ideas to the test. However, we have to work to achieve a common understanding of our stated mission and to explain it accurately to those who are interested. Otherwise we defeat our efforts to grow and expand and empower our message. Educating ourselves is a pre-requisite to educating others. Raising questions helps us to hammer out our position more clearly on this complex issue.

Some points to ponder ---

--- Our objectives are positive, not negative. We aren't simply seeking to rid the airwaves of violence and other obvious trash. Those are Symptoms -- gross symptoms, to be sure -- of a whole system in disorder, because the industry's chief executives have established production policies that are not sensitive to the nation's needs. Our goal is to help and urge TV's top decision-makers to get in touch with these needs; to become fully aware of the responsibility of public stewardship of a medium whose unprecedented power can either carry civilization forward or reduce us to barbarism.

MESSAGE TO THE MEDIA, P. O. Box 236, MONTCHANIN, DELAWARE 19710

George: when we can afford it I'd like us to have a more professional format for the, with more ambitious content, etc.

--- Our goal doesn't envision quick-fix solutions because there aren't any. Attempts of that kind are only a flash in the pan. We accept the complexity of the problem and the need for a partnership of industry leaders, national leaders, and informed citizenry to examine it honestly and study it in its full societal scope.

--- Recognizing that moralistic pressures only generate First Amendment challenges and endless debate, we invite people of all faiths to stand firmly with us on principles and values held in common in our pluralistic society -- values that motivate respect for human dignity and dedication to human development, education, mental health and social progress. We see the industry's present practices as doing violence to those values and to the nation's cultural and artistic integrity.

--- Our mission, we believe, represents the level of citizen action needed to involve people in the scientific and professional disciplines. Dr. George Gerbner has pointed out that successful action for television reform will require a coalition of the professions, parents and informed general citizenry.

ESSAY CONTEST

One hundred fifty eighth grade local area students submitted eligible entries for our contest on the subject "How television affects the adolescent's life". The contest closed June 2nd. Judging is now under way by three highly qualified judges. Winners will be notified around Labor Day, and will be invited with their parents to our October 25th dinner meeting.

FALL DINNER MEETING

Plans are moving along for MTTM's dinner meeting to be held Wednesday, October 25, 1989 at the Du Pont Country Club. Dr. George Gerbner will be principal speaker.

Mary Jane Gregory (998-5718) or Joe Halloran (658-3770) co-chairpersons, would like to hear from you if you have names you would like added to the invitation list. We hope to draw to this event many professional people, in education, health and human services, as well as young parents.

Put this event on your calendar. You won't want to miss it! Cost and other details will be forthcoming.

HELP! HELP!

If you haven't already done so, please check your records and send in your membership renewal (plus a little extra, if you can) if you have entered another membership year.

FINANCIAL REPORT 4/3/87 TO 6/30/89

MTTM opened its bank account 4/3/87 with a donation of one hundred dollars. During our first fiscal year of operation, through 6/30/88, we gained 55 individual members and 2 organization members. Income from membership donations totalled \$1,468.00 during this period.

In our second year, through 6/30/89, we gained another 55 individual members, bringing total membership to 110. Income from membership donations 7/1/88 through 6/30/89, totalled \$1,173.00. Total income, 4/3/87 through 6/30/89: \$2,641.00. Since membership dues is only a modest five dollars, these income figures testify to the generosity of many members.

INCOME - 4/30/87 - 6/30/89	\$2,641.00
Expenses - 4/3/87 - 6/30/89	
Photocopying	\$847.62
Postage and P.O. Box	303.10
Press conference 8/19/88	129.60
Consultations	
Tax consultant	75.00
P.R. consultant	150.00
Stationery, misc.	
supplies and services	376.43
Total Expenditures	<u>\$1,881.75</u>
Cash Balance 7/1/89	\$ 759.25

Note: From the inception of NPTM to date, telephone charges, totalling approximately \$220, have been donated.

Our income from membership donations has so far covered operating expenses with a modest surplus, but expenses are increasing as our activities expand. Our major financial outlay ~~for~~ the projected press campaign requires substantial assistance from corporate and/or foundation sources. We are currently exploring these possibilities.

for

WHAT ARE WE EXPORTING THESE DAYS?
(Our trade deficit may be worse than you think.)

In the days before the trade deficit, not the least valued of our exports was our political and social leadership (some flaws notwithstanding) and our Constitutional ideals of human freedom and dignity. Our government was a model for the world and our shores beckoned to the oppressed.

They still do, of course. Right now we are seeing students in China who are risking their lives in pursuit of our standards of freedom.

How much longer, though, can we maintain our position of social leadership and enlightenment, when the very fabric of the nation is being rent by social crises and cultural deterioration?

Unless we change course, with the help of honest and able government and responsible media support, the struggling peoples of the world will sooner or later discover, with deep disillusion, that our great republic is fading into a corporate financial oligarchy that is exploiting our once-proud citizens.

Eric Mink, in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch (his article printed in the Wilmington News Journal 6/23/89), reporting on the recent 10th Annual Banff Television Festival -- an international gathering -- notes that "there seems to be a deep well of resentment toward the U.S. TV industry". He quotes Francesco de Crescenzo, head of co-productions and acquisitions for RAI, Italy's public television company: "We have been absorbing the flood of U.S. television product -- the good, the bad and the worse -- becoming aware only too late that we were irresistibly being dragged into the whirlpool of a genocide of the mind --- This influx of U.S. made productions, while feeding our programming needs, has slowly poisoned them, contributing to the progressive dis-education of audiences which---are---receptive [to] much more intelligent material."

THEN and NOW

In the 1790s the French Reign of Terror
Brought heads rolling wholesale from the guillotine.
The mobs came to watch and rated the action
The best cure for boredom they'd ever seen.

In the 1980s in our Reign of Error,
The guillotine's out but the TV screen's in.
Now Nielsen knows best about what's titillating---
You guessed it: the mobs still want blood, gore and sin.

Terse Verse for Televiewers
K. Lynch

Let's not forget that the adult viewing public shares heavy responsibility for the current climate of television. A whole generation of couch potatoes has acquiesced all too willingly to unintelligent and demeaning entertainment.

* * * * *

QUOTATION SHOWCASE

"Educators are not unaware of the effects of television on their students --- they discuss it a great deal --- which is to say, they have become somewhat 'media conscious'. It is true enough that much of their consciousness centers on the question, How can we use television --- to control education? They have not yet got to the question, How can we use education to control television?"

Amusing Ourselves to Death
by Neil Postman
Penguin Books 1986



**MESSAGE TO THE MEDIA
(Incorporated)**

THE PROMPTER

- Quarterly Newsletter -

January 1990

Vol. III No. 1

To all our members and friends we wish a Happy New Year. We hope the new decade will bring progress toward solving the nation's and the world's serious social and environmental problems, not the least of which is television's currently flawed role.

We envision the new decade as a time when Message To The Media and kindred organizations will foster greatly increased citizen understanding of commercially controlled mass communication. Education and understanding lead to responsible citizen action, and that is the only sure and democratic route to correction of current media malpractices.

As someone in the news media recently pointed out, the dramatic political and social events in Eastern Europe prove that the power of change for human progress and betterment is very much alive in the world. Accordingly, we must hold to the realization that within the vast system of commercial mass media there exists the power to change for the better those practices that serve instant megaprofits without regard to the social cost.

NEXT GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Wednesday, January 17, 1990, 7:00 p.m.

The place:

Salesianum School Library
18th and Broom Streets, Wilmington

The program:

With the gracious cooperation of Salesianum School and the assistance of Robert Mullins, teacher at "Sallies", we will show a taping of one of the programs in Bill Moyers' recent PBS series, The Public Mind. The program we will see is the first of that series, and focuses on television's role in influencing public reactions and social directions.

Those who saw this program on Channel 12 will welcome the opportunity to see it again. Those who missed it will find it well worth seeing on January 17th.

Discussion will follow.

MESSAGE TO THE MEDIA, P. O. Box 236, MONTCHANIN, DELAWARE 19710

October 25th Dinner Meeting An Outstanding Event

Ninety-four persons gathered at the Du Pont Country Club on Wednesday evening, October 25th, for our First Annual Dinner Meeting on Television, Children and American Values. The dinner was capably chaired by Mary Jane Gregroy and Joe Halloran and expertly m.c.'d by Bill McLaughlin.

Many who attended commented on the enjoyable camaraderie and the good food. However, all agreed that the evening's richest fare was Dr. George Gerbner's scholarly (but digestible) talk on "Liberal Education in the Age of Television". Dr. Gerbner reviewed and interpreted for us the findings of communications research conducted by him and his associates at the Annenberg School of Communications, University of Pennsylvania, where he is now Dean Emeritus. (See October 1989 Prompter for biographical notes on Dr. Gerbner.)

We learned in impressive detail how the research data have demonstrated television's distorted representations of demographic and other social realities; and how these distortions are reflected in the viewing public's changing perceptions of society and human relations. Dr. Gerbner stressed the negative impact these phenomena have on children's views of the world.

The other "ratings success" of the evening was Dr. Robert Lewis Shayon's presentation of awards to the prize winners and runners up in the MTM Essay Contest (See October 1989 Prompter for names of winners and contest details.)

Dr. Shayon took the occasion also (at our request) to give us some of his views on the problematic status of television today. He emphasized the urgent need for schools at all levels to include in their curricula instruction about how television operates -- its commercially determined process -- so that students can become enlightened users of the medium rather than unwary targets of consumer manipulation.

Dr. Shayon's eminence in the communications field relates not only to his role of scholar and professor (at the Annenberg School) but also his distinguished work as writer, producer, director and consultant in broadcasting and related areas. He established, for example, the first CBS Documentary Unit, under Edward R. Murrow; and he was creator - producer - director for CBS's YOU ARE THERE series. From 1950 to 1972 he was television-radio critic and Contributing Editor for Saturday Review magazine. He has received widespread recognition for his work in mass media.

* * * * *

WHITTLING AWAY AT WHAT'S LEFT OF HONEST EDUCATION?

Whittle Communications - a business enterprise with a shrewd eye on the juvenile market - has developed a 15 minute news program called CHANNEL ONE, for use in participating schools. It sells commercial time on the program to advertisers huckstering products that appeal to the youth market. Dressing this business up as an opportunity for educational enrichment, Whittle gives it another big sales push as well: In return for providing Whittle's ad sponsors with a captive youth audience, the participating schools receive, without charge, expensive video equipment that they would own and use freely.

Much controversy has broken out over the idea. Opponents point out that kids already are bombarded with advertising on the tube. Education officials in several states have said "No" to the idea. In Delaware, some schools seem to be finding Channel One enticing. MTTM urges a more thorough assessment of it, on the part of school officials, public and private, throughout the state. The implications of Channel One need to be understood in their totality: a few plums being tossed to schools in return for a new marketplace for advertisers? Is this honest education?

Dr. Robert Lewis Shayon, in an article in the Philadelphia Inquirer's Newspaper in Education supplement, Dec. 19, 1989, reports that Whittle's goal is to get Channel One into 8000 schools by 1990. By November 1989 Whittle had signed three-year contracts with 1050 schools. It isn't only children who need help in becoming media-wise. It's their educators as well.

SCIENCE NEWS FLASH

A team of American anthropologists have been observing in the population of heavy TV viewers what appears to be the emergence of a mutant humanoid sub-species. As a diminished variation of *HOMO SAPIENS*, it is being called *HOMO SAP*.

We asked the co-directors of the team, Dr. A. Trocious and Dr. U. R. Pondrus, to tell us in lay terms something about the new breed. They report that *HOMO SAP* is observed to have a diminished capacity for reasoning and judgment, hyperactive responses to sensory stimuli and emotional excitation, and an exaggerated grasping reflex.

As Dr. Pondrus put it: "By way of a rough comparison, we might think of it this way -- if *HOMO SAPIENS* is a little lower than the angels, *HOMO SAP* is a lot lower."

HELP!

Calling all members to renew annual membership when due and/or make additional contributions if possible. We are pleased to have emerged from both the essay Contest and the Annual Dinner in the black, but barely so. We are still as poor as the proverbial church mice. Our object is not to raise funds but to raise media consciousness. Money, however, is needed to accomplish our work.

Ode to Feminine Sales Resistance

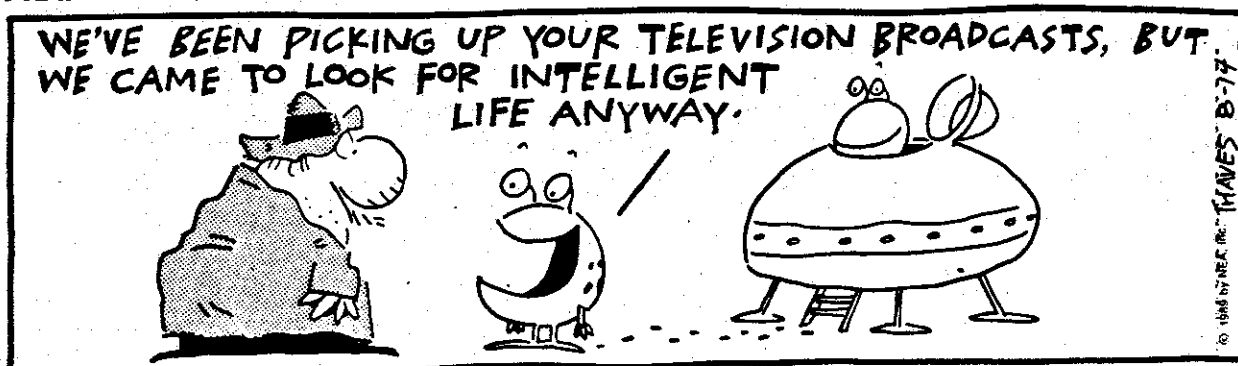
Look sharp, my sisters, and you will see
A lucrative TV conspiracy
To wed you to hair styles long and loose
So you will buy more shampoo and mousse.
Products that promise hair glamor and shine
Have made your tresses a market gold mine.

If you must, go ahead and be Barbie doll typed -
Tell all the world you're consumer hyped
With ingenu hair, expensively arrangeable
That makes mothers and daughters look quite interchangeable.

But quite a few women find it deplorable
To let marketing moguls decide what's adorable.
They say women aren't very liberated
Who submit to being TV glamor-rated.

Bravo to those who show feminine bravery
By standing up to marketing knavery
And wearing their hair however it suits them.
Blest be these women -- wisdom salutes them!

K. B. Lynch
- Terse Verse for Televiewers

FRANK AND ERNEST



**MESSAGE TO THE MEDIA
(Incorporated)**

THE PROMPTER

April 1990

Quarterly Newsletter

Vol. III, No. 2

NEXT GENERAL MEETING

Wednesday, May 2, 1990 @ 7:00 p.m.
The Place: Concord Pike Library
3406 Concord Pike (Rt. 202)
Wilmington

Chris Largent and Denise Breton will conduct a follow-up session on consumer manipulation in commercial mass media. Time will be allowed for questions and discussion. Those who attended our 2/28/90 meeting with Chris and Denise (who are MTTM members) will welcome the opportunity to pursue the subject further with this outstanding teaching couple.

Our meetings are open to the public.

****Speaking of Meetings****

We want to take this opportunity to thank the Concord Pike Library for the valued service they have provided us over the past three years in the use of their Community Room.

TO THE CYNICS WHO SAY WE'RE WASTING OUR TIME:

If oppressive political systems in Eastern Europe could move swiftly and dramatically in the direction of enlightened change, once the vision opened up to them, it's preposterous to assume that we are stuck fast and forever with an off-track commercial media system. Why wouldn't this system be equally capable of dramatic reforms, once they see the long-run economic advantages, as well as the societal balance sheet? There is, after all, a case here for corporate enlightened self-interest. If nothing else will light a fire under

MESSAGE TO THE MEDIA, P. O. Box 236, MONTCHANIN, DELAWARE 19710
TELEPHONE: 302-654-1288

the industry, perhaps it will be belated recognition of the socio-economic fallout of mass marketing practices in conflict with education and human development: a deteriorating work force, a population declining in mental and physical health, a social heritage profoundly at risk for all children.

Realization is bound to come that mass communication means much more than corraling consumers to the marketplace!

IS THE COMMERCIAL TV CULTURE HELPING TO BREED THE DRUG CULTURE?

Let's look at some of the medium's messages, framed by adults, that speak powerfully to young people:

- Discretion and restraint are not our thing. WE WANT YOU TO GO FOR IT ALL, GET YOUR KICKS, SPEND BIG -- but how you get your hands on the money is no concern of ours.
- Self-discipline is not our thing. We're for the no-holds-barred lifestyle. CONSUMERS, WE LOVE YOU TO BE IMPULSIVE, ITCHING FOR NEW THRILLS, AND HOOKED ON INSTANT SELF-GRATIFICATION. (Good for big sales.)
- Forget what parents, teachers and other professionals tell you about healthful habits. WE MAKE ADDITIVE JUNK FOOD IRRESISTIBLE, DITTO CAFFEINE-LOADED COLAS. (Step #1 in substance abuse.)
- Be a permanent adolescent. We give you fantasies that blow adolescent minds of all ages and keep you locked to that video screen: macho power, hot sex, flashy luxuries, the "IN" thing, the fast lane, violence. Kid stuff that sells big. LET FANTASIES BE YOUR LIFESTYLE.
- ESCAPISM IS GREAT. ADDICTION TO SENSATIONAL ENTERTAINMENT IS INNOCENT FUN. If it sidetracks your education, your creativity, your development, why worry? You're having a ball and you're escalating our profits.
- When reality collides with our dream world, and you get an extra-strength headache, OUR PAIN-RELIEVING SPONSORS PROVIDE AN INSTANT FIX.
- When you're surrounded by confusion and contradictions about what matters, and it all looks depressingly like the road to nowhere, you're on your own. If you get into alcohol and drugs to be one of the crowd and drown out the stress, just remember: TV LOVES YOU TO BE ONE OF THE CROWN AND TO SAY "YES" TO THE "IN" THINGS.

AN INDUSTRY WILLING TO FACE ITS ROLE HONESTLY CAN CHANGE ALL THIS!

PASS THE WORD AND ADVERTISE THE MISSION

As most of you know, MTTM depends primarily on person-to-person communication to increase membership. Thus far we have not had the staff or financial resources for mass mailing.

We are asking members to redouble their efforts to interest relatives, friends, work associates in our action. Some have done very well in this respect. Others, we believe, could also be very helpful in attracting new members.

Admittedly, it isn't easy to arouse the average person's interest in an issue such as ours which, viewed in its broad cultural dimensions, and as a socially dysfunctional system, hasn't yet fully penetrated the public mind. Most people are still just looking at the "output" rather than understanding the "input" -- the commercially determined practices that are "fouling the pipeline," to use Joseph Quinlan's phrase*.

Sharing our mission statement is a basic networking tool. If an interested person has questions that you may not feel fully prepared to answer, he or she may telephone (302) 654-1288.

RANDOM MEMOS

On March 29th, seven members of MTTM attended in Philadelphia the lunch with the Broadcasters held annually by Citizens' Action for Better Television - the Greater Philadelphia organization.

The lunch speaker (following an excellent morning panel session) was Dr. Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Dean of The Annenberg School of Communications, University of Pennsylvania. Dean Jamieson spoke eloquently about the deteriorating quality of election campaigning. She described, and illustrated with slides, the departure from honest discourse on issues and candidates' stands on them in favor of media marketing of candidates' personalities and manipulative strategies for seducing voters.

Those of us who heard Dr. Jamieson were left with the impression that she is a worthy successor to our good friend, Dean Emeritus George Gerbner. In a brief conversation with your editor at the close of the meeting, Dean Jamieson modestly referred to Dr. Gerbner as "a hard act to follow."

*Joseph P. Quinlan, Fellow, Gannett Center for Media Studies, Columbia University. Talk given at CABTV Workshop, 3/29/90.

There have been a couple of speaking engagements on our side of the fence.

On February 7th, Judy Melman, Edith Beck and Kay Lynch presented a program at the monthly lunch meeting of the American Association of University Women, Wilmington Branch.

On March 26th, Edith Beck and Kay Lynch spoke informally at the monthly meeting of Chapter B, P.E.O. We met with this thoughtful and responsive group of women at the invitation of Gwen Cameron, who is also an MTTM member.

CAN FREEDOM OF INFORMATION BE SAVED
FROM THE CORPORATE BUYOUT BOYS?

Marketing empires -- that's what they love,
Conglomerates are their treasure trove.

But woe to us since their diverse aggregations
Started owning our communications,
Thus controlling our mass media milieu!
Think about that for a moment, will you?

What facts are unprofitable, they can suppress,
On their bought-out airwaves and in their "free press".

These moguls can't be bothered with the Bill of Rights,
While Wall Street dominates their days and nights.

When values boil down to money,
Forget the Constitution, Honey!

K. B. Lynch



**MESSAGE TO THE MEDIA
(Incorporated)**

July 1990

THE PROMPTER

Vol. III No. 3

Quarterly Newsletter

Attention, parents: How about rounding up the teens and pre-teens and turning to page 3? Good to read together and discuss.

NEXT GENERAL MEETING

Wednesday, September 19, 1990, 7:00 p.m.
Salesianum School Library
18th and Broom Streets, Wilmington

Barbara Broadway will tell us about the TV Turn-Off project with first graders at Immaculate Heart of Mary School.

Bob Mullins will present a tape (edited) of a program in the Bill Moyers series, *The Public Mind*, which looks at television's impact on society. We first showed this excellent tape at our January 1990 meeting and have had requests to repeat it. This time we have an added interest in the tape. One of the people interviewed on it is Mark Crispin Miller, who will be our dinner meeting speaker this fall.

THINK AUTUMN: MTTM'S SECOND ANNUAL DINNER MEETING

Thursday, November 1, 1990, Black Gates Room, duPont Country Club

This year's theme:

The Commercial Scene on the Screen -- Friend or Foe of Progress?

We are privileged to have as our speaker Mark Crispin Miller, Ph.D., whose provocative topic will be "The End of Advertising". Dr. Miller has written on mass media and literary topics for various national magazines, most recently the *Atlantic*, April 1990. He is editor of a just-published book, Seeing Through Movies (Pantheon Books) - a collection of essays on what has been happening to the art of film-making. Dinner details and invitations will be forthcoming.

MESSAGE TO THE MEDIA, P. O. Box 236, MONTCHANIN, DELAWARE 19710

Telephone (302) 654-1288

MTTM ANNUAL BOARD MEETING HELD JUNE 23, 1990

A dozen Board members attended the breakfast meeting at Syter's Restaurant, north of Wilmington, on Saturday, June 23rd. The year's activity was reviewed and future plans were discussed.

Judith Melman was elected treasurer for a two year term, replacing James Daley, whose resignation was regretfully accepted. Other current officers are: Kathleen Lynch, president; Barbara Broadway, vice-president; Jane Hollowell, secretary; and John Bader, assistant secretary and counsel.

Kay Lynch was pleased to announce that we now have six valued members of our Advisory Council: Lorna Forbes; George Gerbner, Ph. D., E. Melvin Jewett; Delaware State Rep. Jane Maroney; Rev. Clifford Parke; and Robert Lewis Shayon, Ph. D. We expect the Council to further expand.

MEMBERSHIP DUES RAISED TO \$15. Yearly

After reviewing the need for this action, the Board voted unanimously on June 23rd to raise our annual dues to fifteen dollars. With the hope of foundation funding built into our plans from the outset, we felt we might manage with the "token" dues of five dollars. This has proved unrealistic. Foundation funding does not come quickly, and in the meantime postage and other operating expenses have increased. The increase in dues is effective immediately. Currently in process is a plan for sending out notices when renewals are due. However, your own initiative in that regard is always appreciated.

In order to give grateful recognition to members who give us additional help totalling fifty dollars or more in a membership year, we designate them as "MTTM SPECIAL PRODUCERS". This is a good time to thank ALL of our members for their wonderful support.

T. K. and C. K.: Socially Redeeming Television

The major networks are a mess, but these two aren't at fault;
We've come to count on worthwhile things from Koppel and Kuralt.
That woefully adolescent stuff of ratings formulae
You do not find infecting what Kuralt and Koppel say.

Their shows can sell most anything from cars to macaroni,
But marketing has not induced these two pros to be phony.
Ted gives us nighttime food for thought before our heads do nod -
While Charles rescues Sundays, and I think appeases God.

K. Lynch
Terse Verse for Televiewers

***** TEENS TAKE NOTE *****

Learning to understand television is much more than
learning to choose programs wisely and limit viewing hours ...

Who could doubt that television is a boon to humanity? We've shared wonderful experiences, great moments, that only TV could bring us. In fact, it has changed the world. Across the globe this magic box has brought people closer together and helped remove barriers of misunderstanding. Here at home, though, television is having problems that look bigger than its blessings -- problems that affect all of us, but especially you who are young.

In no time at all the nation will be in your hands. Difficult matters will face you. One will be mass media - its rights and responsibilities. You'll begin to realize that TV is not just fun and entertainment alone, but also the most powerful means of mass communication the world has ever known. Now is the time to get wiser about it.

In our democracy the broadcast airwaves are a public resource, belonging to the people. When TV was new we turned it over to private enterprise to develop and produce it. The government licensed three corporations, the major networks, to broadcast "in the public interest" and to finance it by selling advertising time to sponsors. They in turn would reach a big market and all parties would profit in a balanced way - broadcasters, sponsors, and viewing public. That was the vision.

But over the years the system got off track. Government regulation became lax. Corporate power became greedy. Mass marketing on a fantastic scale took over and forgot about public interest.

Today the major networks are mainly a live-in super sales force, drumming away at us around the clock. We have let it turn us into a nation of fanatic consumers and spendthrifts, always in frantic "need" of more money to support our discontent. You and your younger brothers and sisters are caught up in it. You need more help with it than you are getting.

It's a tough thing for children and teens to deal with. The networks do a mind-blowing job of tapping into psychology and technical arts and sciences to make their messages powerful - messages constantly aimed at YOU. In general the sales pitch is about salvation, of sorts: buy this or that, imitate your favorite hot celebrities, and you'll be saved - from unpopularity, lack of sexiness, desperate hunger and thirst, the "wrong" labels on jeans and shoes. The price is very high but you've got to obey the TV commandments. It's like a sin, Man, if it's not "in"! Sounds like a new religion, doesn't it? When did you last listen to a sermon in a house of worship with the devoted attention you give to TV?

Smart kids, though, are thinking twice about all this reverence for the tube. They're getting on to the fact that selling products is the real game and shows are just to round up consumers: what Dr. Robert Lewis Shayon, at Penn, calls the "glue" that keeps couch potatoes connected with the screen. So they'll have a ball? Not really. So they'll eyeball the ads (some even planted in the shows) and rush off to the malls.

This kind of TV doesn't interest most mature and thinking people. So producers concentrate on "targeting" the couch potato masses who are less mature and less choosy. This, of course, includes kids and the educationally disadvantaged. In this population the majority watch mainly to escape from boredom. They usually aren't fussy about what they watch as long as it gives them

Cont'd -- Teens Take Note

enough kicks and jollies to stay tuned. That suits the networks and explains the heavy diet of sleazy soaps, violent crime, childish sitcoms and talk shows that dredge up everything sensational and morbid.

In our time this level of programming and the commercial assault so dominate American TV that we are all suffering from its "pollution" of our social environment, whether we watch the stuff on the screen or not. Media scholars and researchers have been trying to get the word out. Common sense tells us, too. How could we possibly escape the consequences of a media culture that celebrates uncivilized behavior and doesn't even begin to mesh with education of the real kind?

On, now, to better news. Public television and some good cable channels are keeping the right idea alive. Better still, we hear you of the teen generation say more often that you are getting bored with phony hype and celebrity worship and dumb shows. Many of you are beginning to sense that THE BEST DEFENSE AGAINST DRUGS IS TO SHAKE OFF THE BOOB TUBE STUPOR, LEARN TO THINK FOR YOURSELVES, AND GET ON WITH GROWING UP.

Sensible teens seem to be turning more to mature and caring adults as their role models - people who have kids' best interests at heart and want them to discover life's genuine riches. There are so many, but to name a few: unselfish love, fidelity to principle, a good education and rewarding work. Trustworthiness and self-discipline are important ones, too. So is respect for all people, with all their differences. And regardless of what they possess or wear.

If the pursuit of those riches sounds like a far cry from what comes shouting at you and insulting your intelligence on the screen, you've got it right. And if you think that America's ideals are founded on those riches, you are right again! Go for them!

In the meantime we adults in all walks of life have work to do. With the help of the nation's wisest leaders - in the professions, the universities, government and the television industry itself - we need to figure out how to give back to television the great vision that got it started. When your day comes, you can take it from there.

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Note: Special donations (all sizes) will help MTM get "Teens Take Note" published in prominent newspaper ads as an open letter to teens. Send them to MTM at P.O. Box 236, Montchanin, DE 19710, with the notation "letter to teens".