



THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM

July 8, 2025

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Amy Burkett, General Manager, WTVI PBS Charlotte

by Susie Masotti

Charlotte Rotary Club was pleased to have Amy Burkett, General Manager of [WTVI](#) PBS Charlotte, serve as our speaker this week.

Amy was introduced by the enthusiastic [Dr. Tony Zeiss](#). Tony shared that in 2012, Central Piedmont Community College agreed to take over WTVI/PBS Charlotte to keep the station alive. In 2013, he hired Amy Burkett to lead the station. Tony shared that when he hired Amy, he knew he was hiring someone with passion for Public Television. At the time, WTVI had only 800 donors and was more than \$3 million in debt (which he chose not to share with her before hiring her). Her credentials were impeccable – she served as a news anchor in commercial television before spending 14 years as EVP at WLVT PBS 39 in Pennsylvania. Today, WTVI is proudly the most locally produced channel in our area. She has authored two books on leadership and has the distinction of being mentored by John Maxwell. Amy is married to her husband, Rob, and has one son, RJ.

Amy thanked Tony for his kind introduction and reminded him that on her first day at WTVI, he told her they had a meeting to attend – he brought her to this same room for a Rotary Club of Charlotte meeting where then-[Governor Pat McCrory](#) was speaking. Governor McCrory now has a show – *Unspun* – on WTVI. She admits her job was challenging at the beginning – she began her new position by working to create a platform based on service first. Today, WTVI boasts 14,960 donors, of whom just 150 people give more than \$1,000 each year.

There are three different PBS channels you can watch – NC PBS, which receives \$9.2 million in tax dollars, SC PBS, which receives \$7.3 million in tax dollars, and WTVI, which receives no tax dollars, making their hill a little harder to climb. You can watch all national PBS programming on WTVI, as well as locally produced shows such as

Unspun and *Carolina Impact*, reaching 1.3 million households. But WTVI PBS Charlotte doesn't just produce and show local and national programs. They are also a resource for teachers, parents, and grandparents of students. There are more than 100,000 lesson plans, videos, and learning aids on WTVI.org through PBS learning. These plans are from K-12, but there is a heavier influence on 4th grade by WTVI because that is the year public schools are teaching NC history.

National Public Broadcasting started with federal funding. There is a vote on the floor in Congress next week that may defund PBS. Thankfully, WTVI is funded two years in advance, which means they will receive their federal funding (25% of their budget) - \$1.2 million through 2027. The hard truth of that funding is that all of that funding goes directly back to National PBS for their programming. It's a new challenge that must be faced!

Because of the need for new sources of funding a new campaign has begun – “Because of You” in hopes to attract new donors and support. YouTube video links can be found at the end of this Report for your viewing pleasure!

PBS is America's first classroom for our children, as all our children and grandchildren have grown up watching educational and fun programming. Research has shown that their viewership is strong amongst children, but there is a serious drop in viewership as people age out into school, college, etc. Thankfully, many people are interested in the grown-up programming as they get older, which makes up another huge part of their viewership. To assist with reclaiming our viewers in those “middle” years, they are working through today's technology, making their programming more accessible. The PBS CLT Plus App can screen both local and national programs and is free! Creating a [YouTube channel](#) has allowed those who have “unplugged” from cable television to watch entire programs, and research shows that young people are interested in watching; they are just watching in different ways.

We're proud that we've won 6 Emmy awards over the past 12 years for our local produced programs. WTVI's longest-running program is *Carolina Business Review*. *Trail of History* (started by **Dr. Tony Zeiss**) features a walk down memory lane with stories that built our community. *Carolina Collectibles* is the local version of *Antiques Roadshow*. *Unspun*, led by Governor McCrory, aims to cut through partisan political spin.

WTVI doesn't just produce weekly programming – they partnered with Druid Hills Academy in creating “The Great Migration” documentary that features the middle schoolers who spent 6 weeks telling and creating the stories of how their own families migrated to our area. It was a great learning opportunity for the kids and anyone who tunes in to watch. Upcoming documentaries through the Living History Series feature Freedom's Footsteps, which will literally put the Meck Dec on “trial” with high school students presenting evidence to a real jury of their peers and overseen by a real judge. “*Echoes of the 60's*” will take us all back to a transformative time in our country (premiering August 9th). Amy is beyond excited to see Ken Burns' release of a new documentary this fall – a 6-part, 12-hour series about the American Revolution.

Amy closed with reminding everyone that PBS has been and remains America's storytellers – important programming is created for all ages, and she is proud to lead WTVI. Amy thanked the audience and then asked if there were any questions:

A member asked if there is an ability to put WTVI programming into NC, SC, or National PBS programming? Amy replied that it is a very difficult process. In her decades working with PBS, she has only had one locally produced program, and that was in Philadelphia. The odds are just not good.

Another member inquired about what new technologies WTVI is working with as our technology advances. Amy replied that with the App and YouTube (mentioned earlier), along with cable, June's numbers topped 485,000 people touched by WTVI. YouTube is a huge piece of their future.

Amy was asked about the limitations on advertising as a PBS organization. Amy stated that less than \$30,000 of their budget comes from corporate support. The challenge is that advertisers want a "call to action," and PBS strictly prohibits that kind of corporate advertising. A follow-up question was asked: if Federal Funding is eliminated, will the FCC loosen the rules on corporate support? Amy said that she is hopeful but has no crystal ball.

Another member asked, with the reduction in funding, how WTVI is securing space for younger people. Amy stated that we need to <https://protectmypublicmedia.org/>, to call/write/e-mail your legislators (both State and Federal) and ask that support either appear (on a state level in the case of WTVI) or remain on a Federal level. They are also taking new risks in how they fundraise – recently they worked with a digital fundraiser where they invested \$15,000 and ended up making over \$100,000. It's always a challenge.

Finally, Amy was asked how the advertising specifically plays into YouTube. The hard truth is that the rules in place for traditional advertising remain in place for online programming. Since 2013, WTVI has made \$82 from YouTube, where dollars are made through viewership on their platform. Currently WTVI has 12,000 subscribers, but need to add more to monetize this valuable revenue stream

Below are links to the YouTube videos mentioned in this summary report:

<https://youtu.be/3ZnU2p1qdQs?si=mdzQd4c8t9vbFdsQ> 90,000 Families Rely on our App

<https://youtu.be/48qa5hZUapA?si=byMNY2B0djghSBiH> CI

<https://youtu.be/CeoiKwvN1F4?si=la73OTcjM3dYsyzD> PBS CLT Learning Media

https://youtu.be/9jip_Otn5U50?si=8UwqLi8iLs4NQtz- Unspun

https://youtu.be/lbOH7bzN0C0?si=mXx8uxCJjtDrFa_F Middle School Druid Hills Academy

<https://youtu.be/nRdKgpOnHk4?si=bzugxyss2JO-0Prx> CBR

https://youtu.be/_I2NIBu9y0w?si=9-Ark7ak1IGcWrl7 TOH

https://youtu.be/aKMxVcyw_tk?si=w-Tib7vEExmQRQfG Living History Documentary Series

[The American Revolution | Premieres Nov. 16 | PBS](#) Ken Burns Documentary

A recording of the meeting can be found here:

With Slides: <https://vimeo.com/1100004503?p=0s>

Without Slides: <https://vimeo.com/1100008806?p=0s>

Your program introduction begins at 23 minutes.