

# WGLT.org

89.1FM



2019  
**Annual Report**

# A WGLT Year in review

from General Manager R.C. McBride

**W**elcome to WGLT's 2019 Annual Report! The past year will probably prove to be a milestone in WGLT's 50-plus year history, and I'm honored to share a few highlights with you.

Before I dive head on into the annual recap, I know new people are coming into the Bloomington-Normal community all the time. For the benefit of the uninitiated: WGLT is a National Public Radio (NPR) affiliated, non-profit, non-commercial radio station and digital content provider. WGLT is owned by, operated by, and licensed to Illinois State University. As a service of ISU, the station is part of the School of Communication within the College of Arts and Sciences. We take the educational portion of our mission seriously. We're proud to have a number of student employees and interns each semester.

As I write this, I'm looking at a roster of a dozen Redbird students who are a part of the WGLT team, including a combination of paid students and for-credit interns, with



Joi Adams



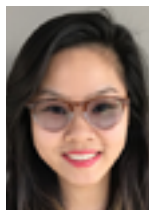
Ashley  
Binkowski



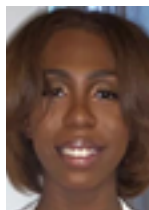
Cindy  
Hernandez



Tiffani Jackson



Cindy Le



Markisa Lewis



Vince Maltese



Megan  
McGowan



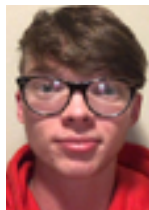
Darnysa  
Mitchell



John Murray



Jolie Sherman



Alex Soderlund

responsibilities including news reporting, audio editing, photography, on-air hosting, helping with development, and social media. Current students include Joi Adams, Ashley Binkowski, Cindy Hernandez, Tiffani Jackson, Cindy Le, Markisa Lewis, Vince Maltese, Megan McGowan, Darnysha Mitchell, John Murray, Jolie Sherman, and Alex Soderland.

### **WGLT Welcomes WCBU**

The biggest milestone of 2019 occurred on June 1. WGLT assumed management of day-to-day operations of WCBU, Peoria Public Radio. This resulted from almost a year of negotiations between Illinois State and Bradley universities after Bradley made it clear it could not continue to subsidize WCBU's operations at its then-current levels. Barring an intervention, the station would go dark at the end of May.



Our new business plan was pretty straightforward: combine the back-office and management operations for the two stations, while keeping the news operations separate and focused on the respective local communities. This meant double-duty for many, including Business Manager Nicole Welsh, Development Director Melissa Libert, Program Director Mike McCurdy, Operations Director Travis Meadors, Individual Giving Director Jennifer Armstrong, and myself.

Our new partnership allowed WCBU's staff to grow. We welcomed to the ISU family this year WCBU full-timers Anna Chumbley, Daniel Musisi, Tim Shelley, and Dana Vollmer, along with part-timer Kristin McHugh. The cost savings to WGLT after the first year will allow us to invest more in our local programming in McLean County.

### **New Radio Faces**

There were other staff changes. Pat Peterson retired as our longtime individual giving director in May, with Jennifer Armstrong joining us in the same capacity. In December, news reporter Mary Cullen left to be closer to family in North Carolina. Dana Vollmer will move to WGLT from WCBU in Peoria to fill that important vacancy after we fill her position in Peoria.



Pat Peterson

Meanwhile part-time news correspondents continue a key role in WGLT's local news coverage. Two long-time *Pantagraph* writers, Joe Deacon and Edith Brady-Lunny, joined the team, as well as experienced reporter Sarah Nardi and *Chicago Tribune* dance writer and critic Lauren Warnecke. The team of WGLT contributors includes Breanna Grow, Laura Kennedy, Willis Kern, Patrick Murphy, and Colleen Reynolds. That's an extremely impressive roster. Our ability to have them on the team is a direct result of your contributions.

Our staff received great news in November, when we learned Travis Meadors and Digital Content Director Ryan Denham were named recipients of ISU Distinguished Service Awards for the work at WGLT and across campus.



WGLT/WCBU staff celebrate at Radio Faces with NPR's Korva Coleman

## Station Highlights

Ryan Denham will have more on this in the newsroom roundup elsewhere in this publication, but the continued expansion of WGLT.org's reach warrants mention here. In April 2019, WGLT launched *The Leadoff*, a daily summary of the local news you need to know to start the day. Coming in at less than 10 minutes, you can hear the show every morning at 7:45 during *Morning Edition*, or you can find it available from your favorite podcast provider by 7 a.m. each weekday.

As of this writing, the podcast averages 1,500 unique user downloads daily, and that number is growing. Meanwhile monthly unique visitors to our website came in at 132,000 for January 2020—up from only 16,000 in January 2017. It's exhilarating to see the great work of our news team—including News Director Charlie Schlenker, reporter Eric Stock, Ryan Denham, and the part-time and student reporters mentioned above—continue to result in a larger audience.

WGLT's Summer Concert in downtown Bloomington was a smashing success. The crowd and weather were great and for the first time ever, the show featured four acts. Our headliner, Adia Victoria, had a great year in her own right. She was the subject of a lengthy feature in *The New York Times*, her latest album made *The Economist's* 10-best list for 2019, and one of her songs appeared on former President Barack Obama's annual playlist of his favorite tunes.

Speaking of tunes: Music Director and *Morning Edition* host Jon Norton and Assistant Music Director Ariele Jones launched a new music service titled *Highway 309* over the summer. The program features all sorts of roots-based music, new and old—including Americana, soul, gospel, jazz, blues, and rock. It's a lot of fun, and you're pretty much guaranteed to discover something new. You can hear *Highway 309* on weekends on WGLT and WCBU, or stream anytime on WGLT.org.

Our annual Radio Faces event took place in a new venue—the Marriott in Uptown Normal—and featured NPR News anchor Korva Coleman. Her presentation was a hit,

but most would agree the highlight of the night was the announcement of her decision to defer her honorarium and instead offer a one-time scholarship to students of color working in WGLT's newsroom. That meant Darnysha Mitchell and Tiffani Jackson each received \$1,000 for educational expenses!

I mentioned in this space last year that WGLT was in the early stages of a fundraising campaign to build a new master control studio. That effort continues, though we had to slow it down a bit while bringing WCBU online. WGLT's new studio space will feature enough microphones to allow us to host panel discussions with multiple guests, cameras for live social media telecasts, its own set for Tiny Desk concerts, and much more.

### **Financial Update**

Now a bit of good news/bad news, with the bad first. For the first time in four years, WGLT finished 2019 operationally in the red. The good news is the amount was only \$7,000. Still it's a good reminder that while Illinois State remains very supportive financially by funding five full-time positions, providing business resources and our building—and while WGLT has big plans and a vision to build its local journalism service progress can never be taken for granted.

More than half our annual operating budget comes from local individuals and businesses. Your support has never been more crucial. Journalism, especially on the local level, is in peril. I believe public media's business model works and is positioned to fill a big part of the need, but it will only happen if people like you recognize the importance of professional news coverage and step up to contribute. I continue to be excited by WGLT's growth and direction. The staff is talented and tireless.

This report was compiled in the spring of 2020. It would be an understatement to say a lot has already happened since the end of the year. I anticipate we'll have much to discuss when we look back.

Thanks for all you do, please keep it up, and tell your friends and neighbors about WGLT!



A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink. It features a large, looped 'M' and 'B' with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

R.C. McBride



# FROM THE WGLT NEWSROOM

## Here's a look at WGLT's best reporting of 2019:

### Series

**Down On The Farm**—Four-part series about how the USDA's trade relief payments are playing out in central Illinois. Produced in partnership with WCBU in Peoria.

**Child Care**—Three-part series about the high cost of child care straining McLean County families, especially for low- and middle-income earners.

### New podcast

The WGLT newsroom launched in May 2019 *The Leadoff*, Bloomington-Normal's first and only daily news podcast. New episodes are available by 7 a.m. every weekday, featuring the biggest story of the day, a rundown of important headlines, and a special feature or interview. Subscribe on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, or NPR One. Learn more at [WGLT.org/Leadoff](https://www.wgltnet.org/leadoff).



### Candidate Forums

WGLT again teamed with the League of Women Voters of McLean County to host two candidate forums ahead of the spring 2019 election for Bloomington City Council and Normal Town Council members. Hundreds of voters attended the events and watched or listened online before casting their ballot.



# WGLT.org's Most-Read Stories

For many news sites, the most-clicked stories aren't always the most important ones. We're proud to report that WGLT.org bucks that trend. The Top 10 most-read stories of 2019 on WGLT.org include some of our most impactful, important reporting from across the community.

1. Report: Insurance Industry Faces 'Talent Crisis'
2. State Farm To Demolish Downtown Building After Sale Falls Through
3. Failing Rica: B-N Girl's Death Exposes Holes In State's Child Protection System
4. Normal Police Officer Accused Of Stealing Money After 911 Call
5. Kirk Zimmerman Acquitted In Murder Trial
6. Unit 5 HR Director Faced Harassment Allegations Before Resignation
7. Unit 5 Teacher Charged With Abusing First Graders
8. 85 Years After Founding In Normal, Challenges Put Steak 'n Shake On The Brink
9. This Young Farmer Just Bought Her Own 20 Acres. Now Comes The Hard Part.
10. Plant Finds Second Life With Rivian—And So Do Ex-Mitsubishi Workers

## WGLT Is Award-Winning

We don't work for awards. We work for you. But getting some recognition along the way lets us know we're on the right track, and that happened a lot in 2019.

### **Regional Murrow Awards**

WGLT earned three regional Edward R. Murrow Awards for its local reporting and newscasts, and advanced to the prestigious National Murrow Award competition.

- Hard News—Failing Rica: reporting by Ryan Denham and Edith Brady-Lunny
- Newscast—Charlie Schlenker
- Investigative Reporting – School District HR Director Exits: reporting by Mary Cullen

### **Associated Press**

WGLT won eight awards from the Illinois Associated Press Broadcasters Association, including first-place honors for Outstanding News Operation and Best Digital Presence. WGLT tied with WBEZ in Chicago for the most awards of any radio station in Illinois.

### **Civic Engagement**

WGLT was honored with the Unit/Department Award for civic engagement at Illinois State University's 2019 Civic Engagement Celebration. The award recognized WGLT's local election forums and a series of Community Conversations that brought community members together for discussions on gun violence, journalism, and youth mental health.

# SUMMER CONCERT



**June 8, 2019**

**Summer Concert presented by CEFCU**

Featuring Adia Victoria, Rebirth Brass Band, The Something Brothers, and 3rd Street Down



**WGLT.org**  
**89.1FM**  
Bloomington-Normal's Public Media



**October 18, 2019**  
**Radio Faces presented by COUNTRY Financial**  
Live from Normal, it's Korva Coleman

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 Diane Zosky and Ramona  
 Beasley  
 \*Deceased

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