

1-9-2006

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Recommended Citation

University Marketing and Communications, "01/09/2006 - Roche Named General Manager WEIU.pdf" (2006). 2006. 2.
http://thekeep.eiu.edu/press_releases_2006/2

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06-04

January 9, 2006

For Immediate Release:

ROCHE NAMED GENERAL MANAGER OF WEIU

CHARLESTON – Denis Roche was officially given the title of general manager of WEIU on Jan. 1, but after a year on the job in an interim capacity, he and his staff have already amassed quite a list of accomplishments.

As general manager, Roche oversees the television and radio operations at Eastern Illinois University, and he's happily accepting the challenge to move the stations forward.

"Denis brings to the role of general manager of WEIU years of experience in the television field," said Jill Nilsen, EIU vice president for external relations. "He has strong leadership and management skills that will guide the stations through the coming years. I am pleased to have someone of his caliber in the general manager position."

One of the most notable endeavors Roche has led has been the conversion of WEIU-TV to digital transmission capability. The offering should become apparent to the public when the service goes live in February.

The challenge of the digital conversion is actually what brought Roche to EIU in another position, director of engineering and distribution technologies, in May 2004. He immediately began working on the project.

He has overseen the conversion from "square one," he said, including purchasing land near Humboldt for the tower and transmitter building, purchasing the tower and transmitter, and project managing the entire build. Going forward, he will be deciding how to best use the digital bandwidth and further ready the station's infrastructure.

Others in the business say it's "extraordinary" that WEIU has been able to complete the conversion in just 1.5 years, Roche said.

"You'd be hard-pressed to find somebody in the business to say this wasn't something that was special," Roche said, but he was quick to give credit to those around him. "It's important to note that all these accomplishments have been a team effort. This place would be nothing without the people who work here. They're professional, dedicated people. It's really easy to come in here every day."

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For the first time in his 32-year career, Roche works in a university setting, and he's enjoying the new experience of working with students. He is especially proud of how the station's top-notch quality benefits the students.

"We are, I think, one of the top two or three schools in the country for broadcast news," Roche said. "Anything you want to learn in television and radio, you can be trained in here."

Students get experience in every aspect of television news production, including operating a camera, reporting, directing and producing, using the best equipment in the industry, Roche said.

Similarly, the students who decide on radio as a career have an opportunity to work in a format that is prevalent in the industry and can focus in the areas of production, sales, programming and on-air work as a disc jockey.

Under Roche's guide, WEIU is also continuing its commitment to the community.

WEIU's literacy program, called Ready to Lead in Literacy, is a partially federally funded PBS initiative that provides daily programming of non-violent, commercial-free, educational children's television programming. In addition, parents and child-care providers are taught how to increase children's literacy through workshops, and books are distributed to children who otherwise wouldn't own them.

"We are making an effort to help," Roche said. "If we reach 1,000 to 2,000 people, and five children end up better than they were, then to me, it's very worth it."

WEIU-TV is also doing what it can to reduce the negative effects of methamphetamine. The station produces programs in cooperation with the Coles County Meth Awareness Coalition and I Sing the Body Electric, which promotes healthy lifestyle choices to teens.

"Everyone here has put in some time" working with the coalition, Roche said.

The station's footprint on the community can be further seen by those who subscribe to Consolidated Communications' digital cable service (DVS). WEIU is paid to produce the "Your 13" channel, which focuses on local events, such as governmental meetings and school athletic contests.

To ensure that the station is not completely dependent upon state funding, Roche, a self-described "capitalist," is working on increasing revenue.

One way he's accomplishing this goal is through the new 9th Street Productions, which creates commercials, employee education spots and similar products for businesses.

Additional revenue is created by renting the use of the WEIU tower at Buzzard Hall to cell companies, and Roche is on the lookout for similar opportunities for the new, much larger tower near Humboldt.

Roche is also working with his sales team on securing more underwriting support to cover the costs of some programs.