

Imaginings

From Greg Giczi
Eight / KAET / Phoenix

From the Viewer's Living Room

I settle into my easy chair for the evening. I've just returned home after an hour+ commute, after staying late at work. I don't intend leaving the house tonight.

I grab the remote control to the media center and hit the power button. The video display comes to life, the surround audio system activates and the room lights are dimmed. Tonight, I'm going to use the mini-speakers built into my chair so I don't disturb others in the room.

I've chosen Eight, the public broadcasting station in the Phoenix region as my media home. You see, the choices have become so immense, you need a home base from which to navigate. Our family has chosen Eight because of the portfolio of choices offered that appeal to members of my family. Naturally, we can make go to any other of the 5000 media choices offered, but Eight is our home base.

We've grown up with Eight. Years ago, when it was founded in 1961 as only a television station and everyone called it Channel 8. My father tells of learning his alphabet by watching the old version of Sesame Street. We still call it Eight, but now there are many more media choices than one selection. Let me hit my menu key and I'll show you.

There. Each one of those small icon screens represents an Eight video site. First, I have Eight PBS which has a variety of programs, really the "best of" programs from the other video sites. Eight Create has a lot of hobby and home improvement programs. Eight PBS Kids has shows geared from my three year old, although on this channel you pay an additional fee. Eight PBS Kids Go is my 2nd graders favorite. I stay in touch with my community on Eight Town Square. That video site brings me programs on issues that are relevant to the nation and neighborhood.

Feel like a little culture tonight, choose Eight Arts . . . need some advice about raising that 11 year old going on 16? Chose Eight Talks . . . later tonight I'm going to sit back in front of the really big screen, slip on my 3-D glasses and watch *Nova* in UltraHD.

Eight has content for my that fulfills my need for knowledge. The varied content fits my various technology devices from portable small screens on my cell phone to that really-really big screen when I watch *Nova* and the NFL (I don't always watch Eight) in UltraHD.

From the Board Room of a Local Foundation

“ It is a pleasure to have with us today the new general manager of Eight, our public media partner in the Phoenix area. Before I let her speak, I just want to share some of my feelings about this remarkable organization.

It wasn't that many years ago that her predecessor, Greg Giczi, arrived on the scene and began a transformation of the station. We are all still shocked how Greg was tragically run over by a beer truck, but at least it was the brand he preferred. However, Greg left a legacy at Eight, one built upon a belief in his community and his medium.

You see, nine or ten years ago, we only thought of the then “Channel 8” as a nice public TV station to watch. When Greg arrived, his message was that the station was not doing its job if it just sat on the sidelines and observed “things happening.” He wanted a station that could make “things happen.”

I remember when he was just starting to go around the community as describe his vision. When he made appointments with the well-to-do leadership in Phoenix, most expected him to have his hand out for money. He asked for something more important than that. Greg would ask for their influence. He described the needs of the community to improve education, community health, the Arts and other issues and asked these men and women of power to speak up for Channel 8. As they were in their power-broker meetings discussing community issues, Greg wanted them to introduce Channel 8 as one of the ways to finding solutions. He knew that Channel 8 attracted a civically engaged audience and by creating weekly programs which focused on our community issues, and by offering opportunities for viewers to take action, the community would be better mobilized to finding solutions.

It worked. And after Greg's long struggle to find funding for the first of these programs, the others came more easily. He built upon the television program to pioneer video-on-demand. While Arts budgets were being cut in the schools, Eight used its educational outreach organization, ASSET, to bring video arts performances into the classroom.

Now, the entire community can't imagine tackling an issue without the full participation of Eight. They are totally woven into the fabric of Arizona as what I would consider an essential service. I don't think this state could do without what they provide in support of children, lifelong education, unbiased news and public affairs and support of the Arts. They are the best and a true asset to our state.

So now, it is time to consider Eight's request for \$10-million dollars from this foundation, and so, let me turn this over to new general manager of KAET”

From Inside the Station

I just checked the time on my new watch, which I received as a recognition of my 10-year anniversary with Eight. I'm waiting by the elevator for our pledge drive volunteers to arrive on the studio level. We moved into this building four years ago thinking we had plenty of extra room, but it has quickly disappeared.

I don't know why we still do pledge drives, we raise plenty of money from wealthy individuals and foundations. Our general manager says it is a way to maintain our roots and for every viewer to feel they still have "ownership" in the station with their \$50-dollar donations. I guess I can go along with that. Everything has turned out pretty well for the station in the last several years.

It's just remarkable what the focus on local programming had done for us. The commercial stations in town still do their newscasts, but most of the news is about traffic accidents, crime, sensational events, sports and weather. We're the only stations that does any serious reporting and special programming on the issues that really affect the quality of life here in Phoenix – education, health, sustainability, the Arts, and our growing science / technology economy.

I'm sure I could make more money at another station or career, but somehow, it makes me feel pretty good to introduce myself to someone and have them tell me how much they admire what Eight does for our community.

It's also funny how people still call us a TV "station," yet we've gone way beyond that! Although the whole country has just made the switch to digital transmission, we're already talking about another great leap. Better compression for more channels and Ultra High Definition. The really big thing, however is how cable and the internet have evolved. It's like a merger. They used to be separate, but now it's all one thing. The early days of video steaming and video on demand have all come together with cable channels. Eight is now a web destination with all of our services grouped together. We've got our one "main" service, plus five other complimentary services. On top of that, our video on demand library is totally searchable and our ASSET educational services, which started as a K-12 service, added pre-K about five years ago, has now added a full adult education component. Our mission of "lifelong learning" is really true.

I hear the elevator coming up. Another batch of volunteers arriving. They all seem to love coming here. They love Eight. They love what we stand for and what we do for the community. Just like me, they enjoy serving an organization that helps lead the community to finding solutions to its problems. We are the modern town hall. This is where community views truly get expressed.

What a difference this station has made in the community.