When it comes to raising funds, Channel 12 officials realize the importance of BEING EARNEST

By Michael Murphy * Photos by David Kubecar

Raising money is something the staff and volunteers at WILL-TV, Channel 12, do better than any other PBS station in the nation. Here, Ann Martin holds a cue card.

The station raises $1 million a year from private sources. 51 percent of its total budget. Stuck in Indianapolis and St. Paul. Despite the national limits of a 198,000-household, WILL, known locally, is now the fourth most-watched station in all of them. A time-proven backhanded piece of the way people pass the time got out with the next morning's mail.

Cam of every time, argue the pledge drive nonetheless is an art form that WILL has reduced to a science. It takes preparation, no-nonsense professionalism and a few gifts to the make the needles click. And, otherwise, no gimmicks, no rush, no pressure, no salesmen: they don't answer the phone.

"Can you imagine an actor from New York City coming, on Channel 12, that he remembers Glenn Miller's time from when he was stationed at Chicago Air Force Base?" asks Debby Clay, WILL's highly regarded director of development (that is, fund raising). "This is a downtown job. In this market, it's about the thing. Preceding, of course, and the importance of being earnest."

"Public television operates nowhere else in the world like it does here," says media relations director Virginia Six. "We're the only station in the nation that has a dedicated fund-raising department. The rest is done by volunteers." In one case, the station's fund-raising director, Jeff Lyon, helped raise over $100,000 for the network.

Aiding the pledge drive is a group of dedicated volunteers, some of whom have been involved for over 20 years. They include the "Morning Show," a group of volunteers who meet every morning at the station to answer phones and take donations.

The pledge drive is also bolstered by the station's "Midnight Hour," a late-night show that airs every Thursday night and features guest DJs and a variety of music.

WILL-TV is currently seeking donations for its fall pledge drive, which runs until November 1. To contribute, please visit willtv.org or call 800-999-9999.
Camera operator Cathy Razor makes good use of a phone book during a catnap. The crew rests when they can during the hustle of a pledge drive.

From page 3A

run it," says Marge Owen, president of the EGADS. "It's like being a Cub fan; either you like it or you don't."

WILL is one of the few U.S. stations that airs the long-running British science fiction series seven days a week.

"Like a lot of our shows, most of the people who watch 'Doctor Who' watch only 'Doctor Who,'" says Pam Christman, WILL's new coordinator of volunteers. "They're not interested in anything else on public broadcasting."

Followers have asked the station to purchase 106 more episodes and seven "Doctor Who" movies. Glasser reminds viewers during the next pledge break. The EGADS have made the 90-mile drive to help cover the $27,000 cost.

"It's a great group to have," adds Rugg, who works by day at a nearby medical clinic. "They've done it before, and they work good as a group."

Continued on page 11A

Nancy Jeckel provides nearly instantaneous tallies of pledges. Pledge cards are usually in the mail the next day.
WILL's fundraising gets the dollars flowing

Kids by the hundredfold dragged their parents to the telephone. For $10 apiece, Charlie and Susie were about to become Friends of Sesame Street.

Better still, they could hear their names read on television.

It worked — 1,491 times during WILL-TV's recent winter fund drive. And the $43,445 raised during "Sesame Street" and "Mister Rogers Neighborhood" appeals — just like the $9,400 drawn by the MacNeill-Lehrer news show and the $7,000 from a Judy Garland special — illustrate how public television is headed.

When it comes to raising funds these days, you sell each menu item, not the smorgasbord.

"It's like the bise, some years back, that took out the studio lights only moments before a break.

"Somebody asked the question: 'What are we going to do? I said, 'Let's go do the pledge break.'" Glaser says.

"We went on and did it with the work lights.

"More troublesome, still, what if the phones don't ring, at all?

"If we have control, we can shorten the break," Glaser says. "But remember, once a station's up there, coming out of the MacNeill-Lehrer Report. The network was dark for eight minutes.

"We stood up there and did something. I don't remember what — but you can't take it personally.

"At one meeting together, the Day-Glaser-Marino triumvirate knows what does and doesn't attract pledges during public drives. They know, for instance, that someone has to be on the air or the phone.

The station meticulously tracks who watches what, Glaser says. Station officials know, for instance, that "Masterpiece Theater" appeals more to college-educated women, age 30 and older — and they know the pledging characteristics of the group.

Not surprisingly, the station's and PBS's public affairs lineup is most popular in Springfield. Arts and cultural programs are hot in Chicago (where fully 25 percent of WILL's viewer support is generated).

"Decatur likes country music, the same goes for Danville," Glaser says.

But all of the research, the years of experience, also can be said to have been done in the modern era of get-what-you-pay-for public television. The spiel may be impromptu, but scripts otherwise are drafted with specific targets in mind.

"We really gear to talking programs more than anything else," says Day. "If we took a break, and didn't know what the program was, it would be hopeless.

Winterfest '85, this month's drive for new supporters of Channel 12, fell about 13 percent short of expectations.

"Trying to figure out why is difficult, but one of the things we can speculate about is that we had a significant increase (during WILL-TV's spring fund drive) last March," says Day.

"Not surprisingly, her second explanation deals with programming. The full Public Broadcasting Service lineup was weaker than a year ago, she says, when critically acclaimed series like "The Brink" and "Civilization and the Jews" made debuts.

"The big, new, U.S.-made special run in a cycle that requires underwriting. To think about the market in advance," she says. "And you have to remember, three years ago, the network was funded by the impact of the big federal funding cuts.

That requires breaking in on a National Geographic production with a stuffed baby seal and an appeal to the nature lovers. It means running the tape of Ernie Ford's patriotism-and-gospel music show, with WILL's Rita Schulte interrupting to remind viewers:

"As Ernie says, 'If it don't rain, the creek ain't gonna rise.'"

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The baseline cuts in government funding, threatening the very existence of the PBS system, ultimately were headed off by Congress. This year's federal support to Channel 12 is $375,119, slightly less than 1984-85.

The University of Illinois, which holds the broadcast license for Channel 12, contributed $486,289.

The station is managed by Don Mulhally, the U of I's director of broadcasting. WILL airs educational programs during the mid-day hours, but it is far from a classic university-run station.

Slightly more than half of its $1.18 million budget comes from private sources, anywhere from $400,000 to $450,000.