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Tennessee Drive- Everything Knoxville

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UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM

SENIOR PROJECT - APPROVAL

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Faculty Mentor: Bob Legg (James R. Legg, Jr.)

PROJECT TITLE: Tennessee Drive - Every Train Knoxville

I have reviewed this completed senior honors thesis with this student and certify that it is a project commensurate with honors level undergraduate research in this field.

Signed: [Signature] Faculty Mentor

Date: 09/30/05

Comments (Optional):
Tennessee Drive
Everything Knoxville

Like completing your senior honors project, only better.

Trey Sarten
Senior Honors Project
For my senior honors project, I created, developed, ran, and hosted a local, entertainment television show called *Tennessee Drive*. The show was a thirty minute news magazine that aired on The Volunteer Channel, UT’s campus cable channel. I served as creator and executive producer for the show. It ran through the fall semester, and had support from Knoxville’s *Metro Pulse* and Bliss Home and Art store. The show was staffed by juniors and seniors from the College of Communication and Information, especially journalism and electronic media majors.

In the spring of 2003, I began thinking about my senior honors project. I knew that I wanted to do something involving my major, but was not quite sure what angle to take. I began surveying UT students to find out an area that they felt was not being currently covered by TVC. After several discussions with students, I found out that they wanted to know more about what is going on in Knoxville. Children of the MTV generation, Knoxville’s *Metro Pulse* or other newspapers were not getting that information out to students in a way we are used to—quick and easy.

Another aspect that helped me form my decision to establish a local entertainment news show was my feelings for Knoxville. I felt that Knoxville offered plenty of entertainment opportunities throughout each week; however, one just has to know where to look. I was tired of hearing my peers complain that Knoxville was boring or that there was nothing to do. I wanted to form a fast-paced, MTV-style show that would inform the audience on what to do, when and where.

After deciding I wanted to produce an entertainment news show, I need a staff to support the project. I began recruiting through personal contacts. I did not want to send out a mass email asking for help or recruit for the lower level classes. I wanted to form a staff of the best and most skilled students in my college. I met with Josh Queener, who advises TVC, and he and I
established how many people it would take to run the program. I made a list of the different positions, and then I began recruiting students who were skilled in those areas. Throughout the last part of the spring semester and over the summer, I contacted these students and asked them to become a part of the show.

I also began thinking of sponsors who could help aid the show either through donations or information sharing. I met with the *Metro Pulse* in late summer to discuss a partnership with our show. I pitched the concept to them (appendix a), and I asked for their support throughout the project. They would share information, leads, or stories with us, and we would dedicate a spot in the show to them. Thus, offering them free advertising.

I also began to identify different merchants who might be willing to donate furniture and other décor to our set. I met with Nicole Henrich of WBIR-TV, to discuss the possibility of them donating old parts of their sets to UT for our use. I also met with several stores in the downtown and West Knoxville areas, who could possibly loan or donate décor for us to use as well. Things looked promising, as most places seemed to be willing to help.

Finally, I had to meet with Josh Queener again during the late summer to discuss the logistics of the show—taping time, advertisers, studio space. Josh was very supportive, and he played an integral role in making sure we were ready to tape in the fall.

In the early fall, I sent out an email to about twenty students announcing the first meeting for the new show. Approximately fifteen students attended that first meeting, held in the University Center. Everyone was very excited about the show, and the response was encouraging. During that first meeting, we discussed the concept for the show, the different roles each member would play, and I announced the name of the show...Tennessee Drive—Everything Knoxville. My peers
were very excited at the possibilities to come, and we set our first tape date for mid-September.

Before the first show aired, we had to assign stories to reporters, meet with sponsors again, and prepare the studio for the first taping. Assigning stories went well. Reporters were able to check out cameras from the broadcasting office in order to get footage. The stories that the reporters and myself had come up with were good ideas, and I was excited about seeing the final products.

Meeting with sponsors again was not as encouraging. The *Metro Pulse* was still on board, but other sponsors had faded. *WBIR* was not getting rid of their set as soon as they thought. So, we would have to make do with what we had. Other places, like Flashback Jack’s and Nouveau Classics no longer were interested in loaning pieces to our set. However, Bliss was still very supportive. The owner agreed to loan us pieces from her store each week to decorate the set, and we agreed to cite her as a sponsor of the show each week. Again, free advertising.

September 18th came, and I was excited and nervous about the first show. I along with Matt Joyner, who was serving as producer and director of the show, got to the studio early to prepare. From this point on, it gets wild. We thought there would be furniture in the studio for us to use as well as a backdrop for the set. We were wrong. We had to pull an old buffet table, two office chairs, and a TV monitor together to make our set. Problem solved.

Then, I suddenly remembered that I had not even thought about how the show would open. I had not selected any music or graphics for an intro. Quickly, we put together our logo with a cartoon version of downtown Knoxville, and we displayed it on the TV monitor. We decided that the show would open with a camera zoomed in on the screen and would then zoom
out to the hosts. Russ Torbett, who worked with audio, selected some music for the opening.

Problem number two, solved.

Next, reporters began showing up, ready to give me their completed stories...or so I thought. It turns out that most did not have anything, and those who did, lacked video. "Classes really started getting busy, I didn’t have time...I forgot...My story didn’t pan out...," were all excuses I heard. Quickly, we all grabbed a Metro Pulse and began skimming it for story ideas. Fine, the show would be more of a discussion; we would discuss issues in the entertainment world and entertainment events coming up in Knoxville. It would have Live with Regis and Kathie Lee feel. Problem three, solved.

Finally, the biggest problem of all arose—no host. Well, I was there, but the girl who was to serve as my co-host did not show up to the taping. I was freaking out. I could not host the show alone. But Cortney Jacobs, a reporter for the show, was there. At the last minute, she was named my new co-host, and we got in our positions for the first taping.

For as crazy as things were right before we went on air, the first show went really well. There were some issues with lighting and sound, and of course, the show was not very visually stimulating. However, overall, it was a good first run. After the show, my director, Matt, and I critiqued the show and listed what we could do to improve for the following taping.

The shows began to come more naturally. We would meet every other week to discuss what to cover and how the show should run. I continued to lead those meetings, as executive producer. Reporters began to fall into their schedules more comfortably and were able to get good story footage. We began to have more and more actual stories instead of doing the show on the fly as
Things came together, and in the end, we had a core group of ten people who worked hard each week to produce a quality show. Each week became smoother, and we began taping 'as-live,' which means we would do the show without stopping, not even for mistakes. Each Thursday that we got together to tape Tennessee Drive, we all looked forward to our time together. We were working hard for one goal, and doing so, caused us to form quality relationships. This all led to the show progressively getting better.

Serving as creator and executive producer as well as host of Tennessee Drive taught me many valuable lessons about my future profession that I may not have ever learned in the classroom. I obtained invaluable experiences producing a full length newscast that I probably would not have gotten until I entered the real world. Doing this project helped me understand the entire process of producing a show and all the many aspects involved. It got me thinking about the process in a whole new way.

Here are some of the things I learned because of this project:

- **Start early.** Things never go as planned. In order to ensure success, plan for the unexpected. If you are thinking about all the different scenarios, you will not be startled when something does not go right. Even though I started in the spring planning for the show, not everything was planned correctly.

- **Surround yourself with the best.** This will only help you out and make you look better. By recruiting a staff of experienced, skilled broadcasters, I was able to handle a lot of different situations that arose during the taping. Also, the
The show always looked good because reporters and the production staff knew what they were doing. The show turned out great because of their expertise.

- **Hurry up...and wait.** I learned this valuable lesson about broadcasting. When you are working on a story, you may have to get there quickly, only to find yourself waiting for the action. I learned that lesson when I went to do a story on Sundown in the City. We were getting an interview with a band, but we did not know when. We rushed to the venue, only to wait for three hours before we were able to interview.

- **Patience in the process.** I learned the art of patience during taping. Some people were not as skilled or needed longer to get things done. I had to be patient with them because they had to learn somewhere. I could not get frustrated because it would ruin the morale of the staff and me. If things went wrong, I had to be patient as I waited for them to be corrected or finished.

- **Some people are just talk.** I learned that some people will tell you anything, even your friends. Some people said they would help or show up, some people said they would do this or that story, some people said they could get us in for an interview here or there, but sometimes these people were all talk. I learned that sometimes good friends are not necessarily good co-workers.

- **It's all about who you know.** I also learned that a lot of what happens in the broadcasting is because of who someone knows. If we had a contact at a venue or with an organization, we were much more likely to get an interview for our
story. Also, because we aligned ourselves with Metro Pulse, we were able to get a lot of information about happenings in Knoxville.

- **Those who want to, will.** And those who don’t, won’t. I learned that if someone really wants to do something, he or she will make that happen. If a reporter really wants a story, he or she will get it. If someone really wants to help with the show, he or she will.

- **Keep everyone involved.** The times that the show was hurt the most was when not everyone was participating. It is important to keep everyone involved, whether they are hosting or directing or running the TelePrompTer. If everyone feels a sense of ownership and responsibility, the show will turn out a lot better.

*Tennessee Drive* was a success. Not because we won some prestigious award (or any award for that matter) and not because we made a lot of money or broke an important story. It was a success because everyone learned. *Tennessee Drive* offered an opportunity for broadcasting students and even some who were in advertising or journalism to learn about producing a full-length television show. More than that, *Tennessee Drive* created an out of the classroom learning experience that got students excited about the field all the while facilitating experimentation and creativity that might otherwise be looked at negatively in the classroom setting. Students were free from the pressures of the classroom and because of that were able to feel more comfortable in the production process.

*Tennessee Drive* may have not been nationally syndicated or even shown outside of the UT community; however, where the show was shown does not matter. It could have never aired,
yet students would still have been able to learn the same lessons—invaluable lessons that some never learn until hitting the 'real world.'
Appendix A
Tennessee Drive
Everything Knoxville

Like striking oil in your backyard, only better.
Tennessee Drive is a local entertainment news program that will air on The Volunteer Channel, which is the local cable channel on the University of Tennessee campus.

Tennessee Drive is run by college students for college students.

Tennessee Drive focuses on local entertainment news, events, and happenings in the industry as well as national entertainment news.

Tennessee Drive is more than a local events calendar! It will report on actual happenings in the local entertainment industry. From theater openings to record deals, this show is designed to put college students in the know about what's going on in Knoxville's entertainment scene.

Tennessee Drive is designed to allow broadcasting students to learn all about the production of a television show—from start to finish. This is an out-of-the-classroom experience!

Tennessee Drive is here to stay! This isn't one of those here today, gone tomorrow television shows. It's being built to last.

Tennessee Drive needs the Metro Pulse's help!
How can the Metro Pulse be involved?
Contacts

"I never knew a show like this existed" is NOT something we want to hear!

Tennessee Drive needs to make sure that the "movers and shakers" of the local entertainment industry know we exist. We want press releases, emails, phone calls, etc. letting us know what's going on in the industry.

Tennessee Drive wants to send letters to band managers, venue owners, and leaders in the field, letting them know we exist...and that we want to highlight their events.

Therefore...

The first way the Metro Pulse can become involved is through sharing contact information.

Tennessee Drive can be sent press releases, etc. through fax or email as they are received by the Metro Pulse.

or

Tennessee Drive can contact the Metro Pulse on an as-needed basis for information on a story.
Tennessee Drive can advertise for the Metro Pulse in several ways:

**Experts**

*Metro Pulse* writers and staffers can be interviewed by *Tennessee Drive* reporters for their insight on certain stories.

**Plug**

*Tennessee Drive* can plug the *Metro Pulse* during the show by suggesting that viewers pick up the current issue for information on a story.

**Beat**

*Tennessee Drive* can offer a segment that previews the upcoming *Metro Pulse* issue for that week.

*Tennessee Drive* will get University of Tennessee students thinking about reading the *Metro Pulse*. 
Credibility

The *Metro Pulse* can lend credibility to *Tennessee Drive* through several ways:

By using *Metro Pulse* staffers and reporters as experts, *Tennessee Drive* will be interviewing some of the most well-informed journalists in the Knoxville area.

By having segments dedicated to a *Metro Pulse* preview, *Tennessee Drive* viewers will associate the television show with the award-winning newspaper.

By having the *Metro Pulse* associated with *Tennessee Drive*, members of the local entertainment industry will know that *Tennessee Drive* is more than a bunch of kids playing with audio-video equipment. They’ll know we mean business!