

## Long-time television station tunes out

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Marty Shields doesn't look like he wants to handle the lizard that the folks from pet store "Pet and Jungle" brought to the taping of the final episode of Marty's Corner at KCAT Channel 3 Studios in Hacienda Heights on Saturday February 21, 2009. (SGVN/Correspondent photo by William Hallstrom)

**HACIENDA HEIGHTS** - For more than 20 years, KCAT Channel 3 provided some of the most local content on television - area Fourth of July parades, football games and even backyard wrestling.

But that all came to an end Saturday, when station officials killed the lights at their Wedgeworth Drive studios in Hacienda Heights for the last time.

Effective Monday, the Puente Hills Community

Programming Corporation - which broadcast public access television to La Puente, Hacienda Heights, Industry, Valinda, Bassett, Avocado Heights and parts of north and south Whittier - will shut the station's doors for good.

Dried up financial support in an economic recession forced the corporation's five-member board of directors to make the decision earlier this month.

"It's been a long run. It's been a good run," board President Mike Williams said. "But like I tell a lot of people, all things come to pass. So has this."

The award-winning station started broadcasting in the early 1980s, and has since been home to several popular shows including the Latino-themed "Thee Mr. Duran," "Marty's Corner," and even "Insane Wrestling."

Over the years, it has also broadcast community events, like the Hacienda Heights Fourth of July parade and the Industry Pro Rodeo.

But the station has run out of funding, Williams said, and simply can't afford the operational costs nor equipment upgrades needed as broadcasters make the transition from standard definition to high definition television.

"I have interned, worked and volunteered hours upon hours to this TV station for the last 13 years ..." Marty's Corner director John Garside wrote in an e-mail on Feb. 18. The show has plans to continue production online. "KCAT is my clubhouse, my safe haven and my second home.

I'm going to miss this place."

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**PHOTO GALLERY**



KCAT signing off

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Industry experts say KCAT's fate mirrors a near extinction of public access programming throughout California.

"Part of it is just the changing nature of the media itself, and the reality of cable and broadcast television," said Larry Scher, who has been teaching television production at Rio Hondo College since 1979. Scher is also a board member for the Puente Hills Community Programming Corporation.

"You've got just so many avenues of delivery that weren't there when the whole cable movement started," he said.

Advocates for public access television also blame a California law passed in 2006 for the recent demise of community programming.

The law, which took effect Jan. 1 of this year, relieves cable television providers of a once historical obligation to fund studios, equipment and training for public access TV.

"(The cable companies) are able to save money by eliminating the overhead of the studios, the equipment and the upkeep," said David Hernandez, president of the Los Angeles Public Access Coalition.

The organization is fighting to keep public access television alive in the city of Los Angeles, which lost about a dozen studios on Jan. 1 after Time Warner Cable shut them down, Hernandez said.

In the case of KCAT, the station received money for years from a franchise agreement between Time Warner Cable and Los Angeles County, Williams said.

But several years ago the county dropped its franchise agreement, and with it went KCAT's funding.

Officials with Time Warner Cable did not return calls seeking comment Friday.

"We still had the channel, and we had enough money to go on for several years," Williams said. "Everything kind of ran on automatic."

Station employees worked as volunteers, an agreement with the Bassett Unified School District drew in some money and producers made due with aging equipment.

But in December, Bassett ended their agreement with KCAT, and donations have dried up, Williams said.

"The real problem is there just simply is no economic basis for keeping it going," Scher said.

Williams estimated it costs anywhere between \$60,000 to \$80,000 a year to operate the studio and broadcast 10 to 12 hours of programming a day.

"There is just no extra money laying around," he said. "We figured if we close now we'll have no debt and we'll leave with a good reputation."

Officials in the community say the loss of the station will be tremendous.

"I think it's a resource we will miss," La Puente Councilman Dan Holloway said. "It was the only place on TV you could get that sort of programming."

La Puente - which has since taken over the franchise agreement with Time Warner - is mulling using the channel for government access programming, like broadcasting City Council meetings.

"This is a priority to us, but it's not a top-shelf priority," La Puente Mayor Louie Lujan said, adding that no concrete plans have been discussed.

Lujan said he would like to include community programming as well, but that will depend on resources.

"(Public access television) gives people in the community a voice," Scher said. "(KCAT) allowed

them to really put their own points of view forward. It's just too bad it can't continue."

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