

# TV guides



Framingham High's 'Flyer News' team brings students up to date first thing every morning



PHOTOS BY BILL POLO/GLOBE STAFF

Anchors Katie Greenwood (left) and Jake Levine shake off sleepiness then go live with Framingham High's morning TV news show.

By Tanya Pérez-Brennan  
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**It's 6:45 a.m.,** and the studio lights are so bright they almost seem to cut through the fog of early morning.

But the crew doesn't seem to notice. They do this every day — huddle in the control room, hover over computer screens, fiddle with controls to adjust the graphics.

Then, they go live. Anchors Jake Levine and Katie Greenwood look into the cameras, smiles automatically spreading across their faces.

This is “Flyer News,” not your typical local news broadcast, even though it airs on three cable-access channels. This news show is produced by students at Framingham High School. It's FHS-TV, broadcasting live 170 mornings a year.

“It is children being asked to do an adult thing every morning while other kids are walking around bleary-eyed,” said Danny Devlen, administrative media director for FHS-TV.

On Dec. 1, “Flyer News” marked its 10th anniversary. The show broadcasts to Framingham High homerooms and to the town's cable-television customers via Comcast Channel 8, RCN Channel 15, and Channel 39 on the Verizon lineup. The newscast reaches 19,500 households.

One morning during the holiday season, just before the live broadcast, Devlen, wearing a black leather jacket with the word “affliction” written across the back, walked into the studio.

The song “I Don't Feel like Dancin'” by the Scissor Sisters started to play over a loudspeaker. Then, it was abruptly turned off.

“Hey — play that!” Devlen roared at the students in the control room in the back. “I said,

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School media director Danny Devlen (left) takes notes and student Casey Curran (right) operates a camera as the teleprompter rolls.

# Students wake up to 'Flyer News'

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play it!" The song came back on. "Devlen is FHS-TV," said Frank Martino, 19, a freshman at Franklin Pierce University in New Hampshire who won five first-place High School Emmy Awards in his days at Framingham High (he graduated last spring). "He took it from nothing and turned it into an Emmy-Award-winning" operation.

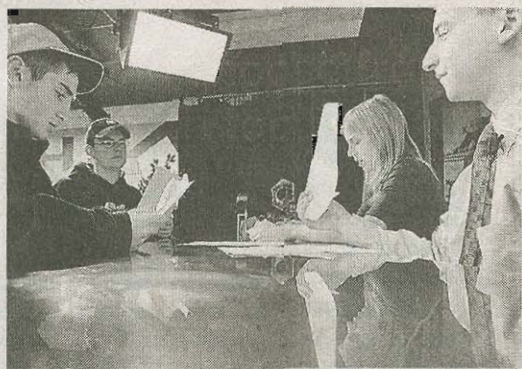
A decade ago, the school's television studio, built in 1963, left much to be desired. The set consisted of a light-blue sheet hung behind a desk; there was no microphone in sight. The studio long lay abandoned, a de facto storage area for old computers and other equipment until "Flyer News" came on the air in 1997, Devlen said. The last time the school had broadcast anything was in 1969, he said.

"There were still wires hanging down," Devlen said. "It was flat-out dangerous."

But Devlen, who studied television writing at Emerson College and worked as an associate producer for Fox-TV, decided to take on the challenge of bringing the studio back to life.

And so, after a week of heavy cleaning, "Flyer News" went on the air for the first time.

In 2000, Framingham allocated \$60 million in renovation funds for the high school. All FHS-TV got



PHOTOS BY BILL POLO/GLOBE STAFF

Acting director Matt Caron oversees the control room (at left) and a preshow meet (above) with floor manager Jason Stark (left) and anchors Katie Greenwood and Jake Levine.

from that money, though, were four Dell computers with editing software and \$50,000 worth of lighting. So last year, Devlen wrote letters to parents requesting donations, and raised more than \$5,000 that he used to buy teleprompters. This year, the school gave FHS-TV \$47,000, which went toward 10 Macintosh computers due to arrive shortly, Devlen said.

Many of the students say they know they're privileged to have access to such resources.

"Not a lot of high schools have this," said coanchor Levine, 17, a junior. "It's rare."

Devlen declines to take credit for the station's success, which has earned the students nine first place Emmy Awards from the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. FHS-TV also received two New England High School awards for excellence and an honorable mention last year.

"The kids run the show," Devlen said. "My favorite spot is to stand in the doorway. What an affirming way to start the day."

Over the years, students have learned to deliver a wide range of programming, from such scheduled segments as "Political Minute," "WeatherWatch," "International News," "Entertainment," and "Sports Update," to investigative pieces such as "Next Door Terror," a look at Framingham's high number of Level 3 convicted sex offenders, and "Hallway Horror," about the slaying of a Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High

School student last January.

But it's hard work, according to the students. The television production classes are divided into two semesters, open mostly to sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Only two freshmen are admitted each year.

This year, 110 students are involved in the effort, with most of them rotating through the different roles involved in producing TV broadcasts. It takes anywhere from 12 to 15 students to put on "Flyer News," according to Devlen. The only role that is voluntary is the "talent," or on-air announcers.

Greenwood, 16, a junior, was experiencing her first week as an anchor, and she admitted that she was nervous the first time she faced the camera. Like many of the students involved with FHS-TV, she wants to pursue a career in broadcast journalism.

"It's been fun," she said. "My parents love it."

About 36 percent of students who participate in FHS-TV pursue media-related careers, according to Devlen. Some of them find that the skills they learn in class are applicable in the real world.

Framingham High graduate Danny Zack, 22, was recently hired by the "Dr. Phil" show in Los Angeles as a production assistant. He just graduated from Emerson College, and said that his time at FHS-TV was one of his high school highlights.

"It was definitely unlike any other high school class," he said,

and taught the students "about commitment and working in a team . . . I think a lot of people around the school were impressed."

But television production may not be right for some students.

"You get some kids who want to learn and some who just want class credit," said Kait Peck, a 17-year-old senior who is the show's assistant producer and graphics technician. "They think it's an easy-breezy course."

But that notion is quickly dispelled, especially when little crises come up and have to be dealt with without jeopardizing the show's outcome.

A few minutes after the students go live, Casey Curran, a 14-year-old freshman, frowns and purses her lips.

"Devlen!" she yells across the studio. "Can you check this shot for me? It looks awful."

It is a little past 7:15 a.m. and producer and acting director Matt Caron had been running about, making sure everything was ready for the show.

"It's definitely crazy," Caron said later. The 18-year-old senior is hoping to get into Emerson to study media production.

Caron said it is challenging to have to work with a new crew every week to put on the show. But he joins his peers in saying that the hard work is worth it.

"We're down here having fun doing this," he said. "Overall, it's absolutely amazing."

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