

Leitrim's First TV Station

BALLINAMORE ON THE BOX

Kevan Murphy

'Where's Mark? Any guests for tonight?'

'I dunno, I dunno'.

It was the same thing every evening, the same questions followed by the same answers.

This was television as we knew it, not television as we wanted it, but television as we knew it. When we were young gasúns running round the town of Ballinamore we'd have given our eye teeth to be on television, well not just on it but in it, to be in there with Wanderly Wagon, Kojak, The Six Million Dollar Man and the rest of them. Nowadays it seemed nobody wanted to be on or in television, at least not on our television, the first television channel in Leitrim. One of the few channels broadcasting in Ireland, and nobody, it seemed, wanted to be on BBSEEtV!

Let me explain! BBSEEtV was established in August 2000 by the Ballinamore Bachelor Club (BBC), it was the brain child of Mark Megahey, he had dreamt of a television channel for the town as far back as 1995. The Bachelor Club had it's own slot on Ceannabó FM radio back then and so Mark thought it a natural progression to move into television from there. Week after week after month after year we would listen to him talking about his dream of local television, of course we only pretended to be listening and usually he would



change subjects and talk about flying a microlite instead. Who'd have thought he'd come up with the goods? After all, he was running a very busy alarm business, he had his hands full as treasurer of the BBC as well as paradoxically keeping up with a very busy girlfriend schedule, where did he find the time to become the self-styled Director General of BBSEEtV?.

Liberty Hill, Ballinamore became the location for BBSEEtV Studios, Dessie and Aileen Wisley kindly offered their newly constructed garage as Studio 1 in 2000, then in 2001 we moved into about a quarter of their newly constructed house which we called Studio 2, at the rate we're going we'll have the whole house and three more studios by 2004.

Of course this was all voluntary, non-profit making, part-time television. We had only planned to run the

channel for roughly two weeks of the year around Festival Week in August and if the mood took us, maybe again around the Christmas time.

Immediately we put the appeal out to the people of Ballinamore and surrounding areas to make videos and send them in, even archive video material was acceptable as long as they weren't wedding videos, after all the Bachelor Club was paying for BBSEEtV.

The result of our appeal was both interesting and surprising, not one videotape arrived. We then decided to run with a live show for about two hours per evening for the two-week duration starting the 8th of August 2000.

Peter McCrann took up the position of host for the two hour show He was professional, diligent and calm under pressure, important considering there was practically no show for him to host The rest of us became the guests We were the same guests every evening but luckily we could also call on the Megahey/Sweeney House of Music for a break from the chat or whatever you wanted to call it that was coming from that garage studio set.

In 2001 we had bigger plans, BBSEEtV (take 2) would be 100 times better than the previous year.



Mark Megahy, Director General BBSeeTV

Mark, as usual, had the biggest plans of all, he wanted a camera crew broadcasting live pictures from any location in the town at any given time; he wanted game shows never ever seen before on television; he wanted hard line political talk shows; he wanted to make a new series of Starsky and Hutch; he talked about broadcasting simultaneously onto the web; he talked about editing previously filmed material into eye and ear catching short programmes; he talked about producing 'promos' using elaborate electro-mechanical props.

He talked, we listened, but come broadcasting day 2001, none of Mark's plans had come to being. After all, he was running a very busy alarm business, he had his hands full as treasurer of the BBC and he was still keeping up with his very busy girlfriend schedule! Regardless, we went ahead with

BBSEETV 2001, it took weeks of hard work but we had studio 2 looking like a state of the art television studio set, complete with a 'green room' where free beer on draught would be served by the resident bar man, Sean Mc Gloin and drank by the resident barfly John O'Hara. Peter Mc Crann again took up the position of host for the two hour show, Dessie Wisley became 'floor manager', Julian O'Donovan was chief camera man. Mark was sound and vision engineer, programme controller and 'Director General'.

Through no decision of my own, I became the person who organised the 'guests' for the evening's entertainment. This you may think is probably the easiest position of all in a small time television station, but in Ballinamore, I can assure you, this is not the case. Oh sure if you were from the other BBC or from RTE they

would be queuing up to appear in front of your camera They'd even do their best to speak as Gaeilge to get onto TG4, but if you mentioned BBSEETV they just weren't interested.

Well ok, there were professional celebrities like Paul Williams, Eleanor Shanley and Gerry Reynolds and it was no problem getting them up to Liberty Hill Studios, in fact we had trouble keeping them away. Most evenings when we heard a car pull up to the studio in the middle of the show, all eyes would turn to the door.

'Who is it, who is it?' 'Aw never mind, it's only Paul Williams again'.

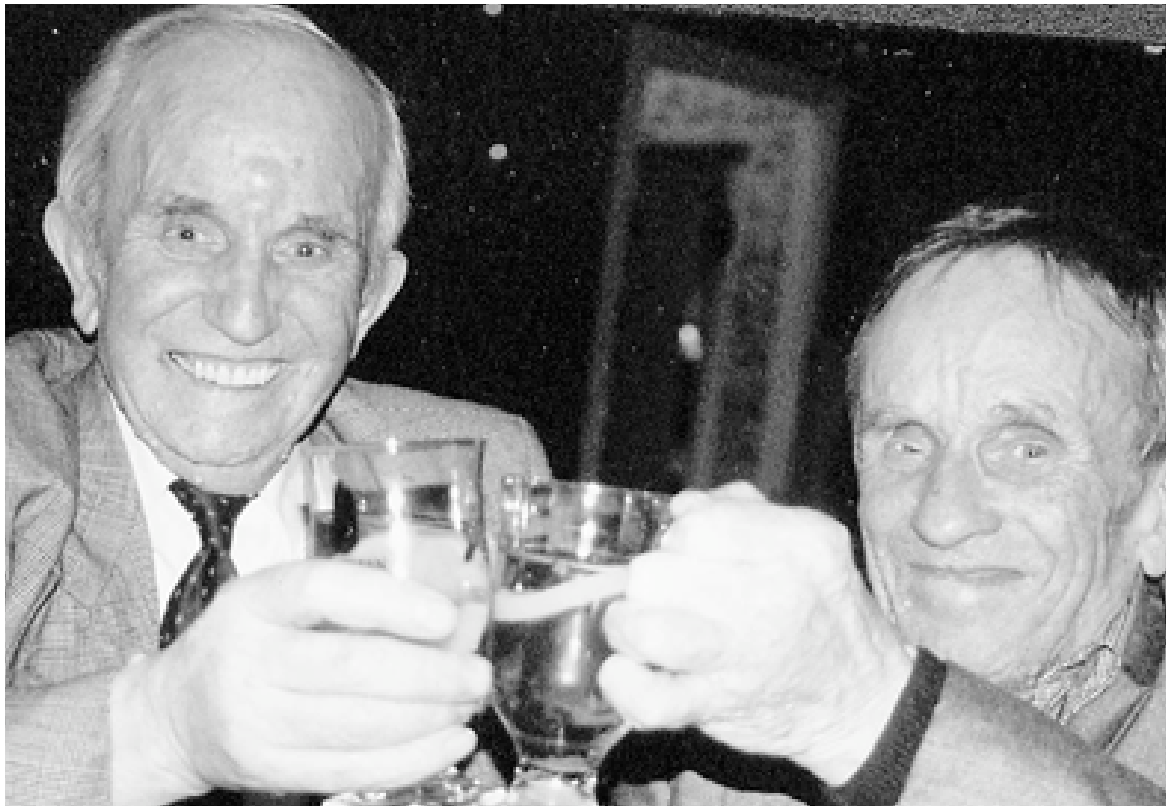
In the middle of the town we installed a 2 metre diameter satellite dish complete with flashing strobe light mounted on the back of Dessie's tractor, this we called our 'Outside Broadcasting Unit', on the

dish 'BBSEEtV' read out loud and clear in big black letters, there was no excuse for not knowing about BBSEEtV.

But filling a show was a real problem. Each evening the crew would look at me and say 'Where are the guests for tonight?' Panic stations again. Then it was time to call on the old reliable, Benny Gilronan, he has to be in Priors, I search bar and lounge, he's nowhere to be found and nobody will give any information as to his whereabouts, I check across the road in Mc Allisters, then down to Freddie's, then Creamers, Shortts, Pat Joes's, *An Capall Dubh*, 'Jesus Christ where could he be? He's hardly up in his house?'

Back up the town then, to uimhir a 16 Tráthnóna, Knock, knock, knock, knock, knock. 'BENNY ARE YOU IN?' 'Television Benny, we're on television in two minutes'. Seems like there's nobody home but I swear I hear him hiding inside.

It was much the same strategy every evening, scouring the town for anybody at all who was prepared to stand in front of a TV camera. One morning while myself and Dessie were driving down the town who did we spot only yer man, Dick Warner. We made a dash for him, 'Dick, Dick, do you want to be on local tel-



Benny & Johnny Gilronan enjoy BBSeeTV

evision?' He seemed startled and made a quick note of his escape routes. 'Well I'm on holidays at present, but if you give me your number, I'll see what I can do'. He didn't seem to take us seriously, real TV executives don't just book guests off the street? I suppose we didn't look like real tv executives either dressed in torn raincoats and wellies and driving a tractor and trailer full of asses.

Without doubt BBSEEtV would have been nothing in the end, if it wasn't for the help of our neighbouring town Mohill and it's hinterland. People such as Niall Millar came on without question for a chat and a laugh with Peter our host, then came the likes of Gerry Bohan to talk about his days of running after kangaroos in Australia, Richie Flynn entertained us with his stories of running with the bulls in the Basque country and then

came James Reynolds who told us of running from the women in Canada. All great entertainers and television naturals, with long successful careers ahead of them.

On August 18th 2001 BBSEEtV closed down for another year at least, the studio set was dismantled, transmitting gear was taken down, cables rolled up, equipment returned to those kind enough to lend it, the list of people to thank for making BBSEEtV possible is endless. Their motive for helping out was simple, 'Shur, won't it be a bit of craic'.

Sensing a possible threat, RTE sent their 'Nationwide' team to find and film the phenomenon that was BBSEEtV on the first day of broadcasting 2001, their report can be viewed on the web:

<http://www.rte.ie/news/2001/0903/nationwide.html>