

KRAM Radio expanding to cyberspace

Young broadcasters seek public support to put station on Internet

By Tom Cherveney

Staff Writer

MONTEVIDEO — Jake Niemand, 18, and Josiah Christoffer, 17, are one month from their final year of high school, but they've already learned that the federal government doesn't move fast enough for them.

Still waiting for the low-power broadcast license they applied for nearly two years ago, the founders of KRAM-FM Radio in Montevideo are looking to reach out to a larger audience without it.

They've just launched a campaign to raise \$5,000 to acquire the equipment to put KRAM-FM on the Internet.

They'd like to go on line as a cyber station on Aug. 20.

Along with reaching out to a world audience, they want to be prepared for the day when that lower power license does finally arrive, the two explained. The equipment needed to become a cyber station also will serve KRAM-FM when it becomes a licensed, low-power FM station.

Besides, they can't imagine spending their last year in high school without the radio station going full strength.

"It's fun to do and challenging," said Christoffer of the passion these two friends share.

They've been doing this since 1997. They proclaimed themselves deejays and began broadcasting over a CB Radio they kept in the hayloft of a barn on the Christoffer homestead.

They've come a long way since. The two have now scavenged, purchased and rigged together an estimated \$15,000 worth of electronic gadgetry and computers.

It's enough stuff to make the

KRAM-FM studio in Niemand's basement on the outskirts of Montevideo look like the cockpit of the space shuttle.

The gadgetry gives KRAM-FM every bit as big a bite as commercial radio stations. The two deejays broadcast in clear stereo sound. Their computerized software allows them to create audio mixes and programming as sophisticated as anything out there.

But KRAM-FM still lacks the bark of big dog, commercial stations.

The KRAM-FM signal beamed from atop the 37-foot tall tower in Niemand's backyard has about as much oomph as a hand-held walkie talkie.

On a good day, only people who happen to be within a half mile of the tower can pick up their meager signal at 96.7 on the FM dial.

Once they establish themselves on the World Wide Web, nearly everyone will have access to their eclectic mix of music, talk show programming, and live, Montevideo Thunderhawk sports coverage.

Niemand and Christoffer launched their FM broadcasting venture two years ago without a license by keeping their signal under one watt. They created a nonprofit organization, ThunderHawk Broadcasting Inc., and applied for a low-power license at the same time.

It would allow them to boost their signal to 100 watts.

That would give them enough voice to reach all the way to Clara City, they said.

Static from Washington, D.C., is making that harder to do than they expected. Congress yanked its leash on the FCC during the last session, and forced it to change the plans for issuing low-power licenses.



Tribune photo by Tom Cherveney

Still waiting for the low power, FM license they applied for in 1999, the founders of KRAM-FM are looking for public support to launch their station on the Internet. Josh Christoffer, foreground, and Jake Niemand, built the station and its studio in the basement of Niemand's home on the outskirts of Montevideo.

That's voided the original KRAM-FM license application, and put the station back to square one in the process.

It's not the only setback from Washington that these young broadcasting enthusiasts have faced. Previously, a complaint by an amateur radio operator and a visit by the FCC forced them to dial down their weak, less than one watt signal.

That's not enough to satisfy these two, who see the Internet as the solution to their dilemma.

They're hoping others will too. They're asking businesses and listeners alike to support their fund-

raising venture.

The fund-raising campaign is offering \$20 listener memberships. Organizations and businesses can make larger contributions and become sponsors of the commercial-free programming.

Niemand and Christoffer said supporting KRAM-FM is a good way for businesses to promote themselves, and for everyone to help their community.

To contact KRAM-FM, call 320-269-5224 or e-mail kramfm@kramfm.com. The station also has a web site at www.kram.fm.com.