

Small BUSINESS

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Taking Live Wire to a national stage

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Portland's growing stature as a creative center could get a major boost from a local live radio show that is gaining an audience and looking to expand nationally.

"Live Wire," a monthly radio show on Oregon Public Broadcasting that hit the one-year mark in March, is drawing no less than 350 people to its live tapings at Aladdin Theater in Southeast Portland. The hour-long show features a comedy sketch, live music and a special guest.

National Public Radio and Public Radio International have both shown interest in the show, said Kate Sokoloff, co-owner of Moxiefish Productions, the company that co-produces the show with the OPB.

But "Live Wire" has some major milestones to hit before it can be picked up nationally.

Namely, it needs additional investors and sponsorships, said Sokoloff. That will help "Live Wire" transition from a monthly to a weekly show, a move that

Sokoloff and business partner Robyn Tenenbaum hope to make in 2006.

"Live Wire" currently has two sponsors — Rejuvenation, an antique hardware and lighting store; and Wordstock, a two-week literary festival that just finished its first year.

Tenenbaum said Moxiefish has been talking with the Oregon Economic & Community Development Department and the Oregon Tourism Commission about sponsorships as well.

The show is close to leveling off financially. Moxiefish can cover basic expenses through ticket sales, which cost \$7, said Sokoloff.

But "that won't let us go weekly," she said. A weekly format will require adding staff to work on content, marketing and development. Moxiefish also

wants to pay its existing employees more competitive salaries, including the Faces for Radio Theatre troupe that performs the show's comedy sketches.

Despite the many hurdles the radio show faces to become a hit nationwide,

Sokoloff and Tenenbaum aren't discouraged.

Response has been overwhelmingly positive, and the Moxiefish team thinks Portland is ripe to support a national radio show. Similar-format national shows, like "A Prairie Home Companion" and "Wait Wait ... Don't

Tell Me," have traveled to Portland and sold out, said Tenenbaum.

Written critiques the team received from the audience at the first taping of "Live Wire" were "about 98 percent positive," said Tenenbaum.

Moxiefish Productions

■ **Owners:** Kate Sokoloff, left, and Robyn Tenenbaum.

■ **What we do:** Produce local events and a radio show.

■ **Location:** Contact the home-based entrepreneurs at 503-997-5630. For more information on Live Wire go to www.opb.org.

At the first show, "when people started laughing, my shoulders went down about four inches," said Sokoloff. "People got it. Portland welcomed it."

Sokoloff, a transplant from San Francisco with a background in theater production, had the idea for "Live Wire" in early 2003. The idea for the show combined Sokoloff's interest in theater, live music and "just hearing interesting people talk about their lives," she said.

Special guests range "from the famous and fascinating to the unknown and unabashed, and some Oregon originals," said Tenenbaum. Though the show has featured high-profile Portlanders like Mayor Tom Potter and Mercy Corps CEO Neal Keny-Guyer, "we try and stay topical without being too issue-oriented," said Tenenbaum. "It's a true variety show."

Sokoloff wanted to model "Live Wire" after "West Coast Live," a national radio show based in San Francisco.

Live Wire: *Radio show's biggest fan is 7 years old*

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When Sokoloff met Tenenbaum through a mutual friend and found out Tenenbaum had worked on "West Coast Live" as a producer for four years, the two joined forces immediately and put together their company in March 2003.

Moxiefish did a demo that September and pitched it to OPB, with positive response.

The first show aired in March 2004 with featured guests Beth Harrington, a documentary filmmaker; musician Little Sue; and local restaurateur Lisa Schroeder.

About 150 guests came to the first taping of "Live Wire," some of whom the Moxiefish team knew and some who just showed up (it was the free beer, Sokoloff surmised).

Now, the show has no less than 350 people in the audience at Aladdin Theater. "Live Wire" drew over 500 people to a special show it produced in April for Wordstock, the literary festival that brought authors from all over the country to Portland in April.

The event featured an original excerpt from H.G. Wells' "The Island of Dr. Moreau" by Willamette Radio Workshop; hip-hop poet Libretto; Marc Acito, author of "How I Paid for College: A Novel of Sex, Theft, Friendship and Musical Theater"; John Wesley Harding, musician and novelist; and Colin Meloy, lead singer for The Decemberists. The show was recorded by Comcast and OPB for television.

The show's monthly audience is a mixed bag, Tenenbaum and Sokoloff said.

Many are young people who come to see local independent bands. They claim their biggest fan is a 7-year-old, though, and they also have a blogger who follows the show.

Many attendees won't miss a show. Heidi McBride, membership manager for the Portland Business Alliance and board member for Artists for the Arts, has been to all but a few of the tapings in the last year.

"It's so engrossing and engaging. It's not like anything else you can go to" in Portland, she said. McBride is energized by the show's intelligent humor, and she's proud that the show is coming out of Portland and featuring local artists.

While "Live Wire" is its signature project, Sokoloff and Tenenbaum formed Moxiefish as an umbrella for projects that could combine their talents — Sokoloff's theater experience and Tenenbaum's radio and festival production skills.

Last fall, for instance, Moxiefish organized a pre-inaugural event called Potterpalooza for Portland Mayor Tom Potter.

Moxiefish is putting those kinds of projects on the back burner for now, though, instead focusing on taking its Northwest radio show to the rest of the country.

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