

WUIS money woes force two terminations

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WUIS-FM, the public radio station based at the University of Illinois at Springfield, is cutting two part-time news anchor positions to save money.

Bill Wheelhouse, general manager of the station since August 2005, said he's been chipping away during his tenure at an "ongoing internal deficit" at the station. He expects that imbalance in internal accounts to be eliminated within a few months.

Wheelhouse said he is laying off morning news anchor Kim Howard, who goes by her maiden name, Kim Woosley, on air; and afternoon news anchor Kathy

LeComte. Each works 15 hours per week, and each is leaving by the end of June. They have been paid \$13 per hour.

"I'm really trying to get our budget in check," Wheelhouse said. "I hated to let anyone go. It was not performance-related for either one."

Howard, in a separate job with the state, is also manager of Illinois Information Service radio.

Rich Bradley, news director and morning host at WUIS, will now also read morning news reports, Wheelhouse said. Afternoon news will be read about one day per week each by Statehouse bureau chief Sean Crawford and Statehouse reporter Amanda Vinicky and three days a week by Jenna Dooley.

Dooley, a graduate student in Public Affairs Reporting at UIS, has been Statehouse intern with the station this year — a position that will end Monday — and is in the process of being hired to work 37½ hours weekly in an "academic hourly" position that includes pay but not benefits, Wheelhouse said.

The plan is for Dooley to work out of both the Statehouse and the main station at UIS. She will fill a vacancy left when Kavitha Cardoza recently joined WAMU-FM at American University in Washington, D.C.

Wheelhouse said the cuts will allow savings without losing programs.

The station also is in the process of raising matching money for a

\$137,000 federal grant specifically designed to remodel its studios.

The work will upgrade some 30-year-old infrastructure while also allowing for a second, high-definition digital channel that will feature "alternative music for a younger demographic" of 50 and younger, for which listeners will need a computer or special HD receiver, Wheelhouse said. A third channel is a long-term goal, he said.

"Daily operating money is not being used to fund this project," he said.

The station runs on an annual budget of about \$1 million. Fall and spring fundraising both set records for a combined \$281,000, Wheelhouse said, but state support in the year ending June 30 is down

about \$9,000 from the usual \$50,000.

The station has 10 full-time staffers, with an opening for a development director yet to be filled, he said.

With the layoffs, part-time staff is going from seven to five. Those remaining include the hosts of three Sunday night specialty shows.

Only four full-time staffers are state-paid, Wheelhouse said, adding that for each of those paid from other sources, such as grants, the station must pay the state the equivalent of 40 percent of their salary for benefits. The annual cost tops \$100,000.

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