

SENIOR LIFESTYLES

Reachout Radio puts printed word on the air

By Lee Strong
Associate editor

ROCHESTER — For many people, Wednesday afternoon at 1 p.m. is often just part of the lunch hour.

For some people, however, it's time to listen to the *Catholic Courier* on the radio.

That's right: on the radio. But not just any radio. And not just any radio station.

The *Courier* is among the potpourri of newspapers, magazines, grocery ads, books, obituaries and other printed materials read for broadcast to special receivers by WXXI Reachout Radio. Reachout Radio is a reading service of WXXI and the Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired of Greater Rochester, Inc.

The 24-hour-a-day service provides the free receivers to individuals throughout nine Rochester-area counties, and parts of two others. The signal is broadcast on a sub-carrier frequency of WXXI FM 91.5

More than 1,500 people have obtained the receivers from WXXI, reported Ruth Phinney, director of Reachout Radio. But, she added, that number represents only a small part of the potential audience.

"I always say it's one of the best kept secrets in Rochester," Phinney observed.

Part of the problem, she continued, is that "a lot of people think that it's just the radio reading service for the blind, and that's not true."

Indeed, the 11-year-old service is available for individuals with a variety of problems, including strokes, arthritis, dyslexia, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, wheelchair dependence, and temporary disability due to surgery or an accident.

"Probably everyone knows someone who can use this service," Phinney said.

One of the people who already makes use of it is Lisa Hoffman, a parishioner at Rochester's St. Peter and Paul Church.

"I think it's an important service," observed Hoffman, who is blind. "I like to catch things like the shopping ads — which is really helpful. That's just basic to life: everybody needs groceries, everybody's looking for bargains."

Hoffman said she does not always have a chance to tune in because she is often busy. But the broadcast is "ideal



Anita Nicoletta, a volunteer with Reachout Radio, reads from the *Catholic Courier* at WXXI's Rochester studios. The program is sponsored by WXXI and the Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired of Greater Rochester, Inc. S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

for people who are in the hospital or in a nursing-home setting," she said. "I think it's an excellent service."

Phinney noted that the service is expanding to include television programs as well. Currently Reachout Radio offers the Descriptive Video Service for the Public Broadcasting System programs "Mystery" and "Nature." As part of this service, the action, setting, clothing, and other details shown on the television are described so that even the blind can follow what is going on.

"We're working to add new DVS programming," Phinney added.

A person interested in receiving the service for themselves or someone they know who could use it need only contact Reachout Radio to obtain an application. As part of the form, the applicant must include a brief description of the disability that would make him or her eli-

gible for the service.

The service meets a vital need for people in the community, Phinney stated.

"People who are visually impaired have a right to information just like everyone else does — and we provide that

for them," Phinney concluded.

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EDITORS' NOTE: For information about Reachout Radio, call 716/258-0333, or write WXXI Reachout Radio, P.O. Box 21, Rochester, N.Y. 14601.

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