



Citizens' Media Corps

THE ANNUAL MEETING of Citizens' Media Corps has come to order. Two dozen activists sit around a conference table at St. Elizabeth's Medical Center, in Brighton, a crucifix on the wall and cold pizza before them. On the agenda: helping students at a new charter school with their media skills; working with a Vietnamese-language public-access show on cable television; and soliciting grants for an "Alternative Media Network" to help grassroots organizations raise their public profiles.

To judge from this polite, soft-spoken gathering, you would not guess that Citizens' Media Corps grew out of a federal raid.

On October 28, 1997, two agents from the Federal Communications Commission showed up at the makeshift studio of Radio Free Allston and politely but firmly ordered the station's founder, Steve Provizer, to cease operations.

Radio Free Allston was what some might call a pirate station. But Provizer was no buccaneer. For nine months he broadcast openly, on an unused

FM frequency, offering foreign-language shows, religious programs, public-affairs and talk shows, and political debates. He even received a commendation from the Boston City Council. But in the end Provizer couldn't outrun the feds, who busted him for broadcasting without a license.

Forced to carry on his media crusade by other means, Provizer founded Citizens' Media Corps to fight the power of the enormous corporations that control much of the media.

Not surprisingly, CMC's top priority is joining with other pirate broadcasters around the country in pressuring the FCC to make it possible for low-power, community-oriented stations such as Radio Free Allston to broadcast legally. It seems likely to happen: FCC commissioner William Kennard has touted low-power radio as a way for minorities and women to diversify the airwaves. Still, obstacles remain, given that the National Association of Broadcasters — one of Washington's most influential lobbies — is opposed.

But CMC is not a single-issue organization. It

sponsors the nightly Pacifica newscast on MIT's radio station, WMBR. It collaborates with Boston Neighborhood News, a public-affairs cable operation. And Provizer is planning to work with the Media and Technology Charter School (MATCH), in Allston, using student labor to help people in the neighborhood tell their stories. "We're going to bring them in to the fabric of the community," Provizer says.

CMC's most ambitious project is the "Alternative Media Network," for which Provizer hopes to raise \$50,000. The idea is to help community groups work together and to publicize themselves through subway ads, leafleting, and public-access cable. "Unfortunately, nonprofit organizations don't get how important media is," says Provizer. He envisions a cooperative effort that mimics in a small way the cross-platform power of corporate media. "If they can have synergy," he asks, "why can't we?"

Citizens' Media Corps is located on the Web at <http://www.citizensmedia.org>.

— Dan Kennedy