

**COMMUNITY IMPACT REPORT**

# **OZARKS PUBLIC BROADCASTING**

**2025**



**A YEAR OF SERVICE  
AND STORYTELLING**

**KSMU OZARKS PUBLIC RADIO  
OZARKS PUBLIC TELEVISION**

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# 2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2025, Ozarks Public Broadcasting deepened its service to the region through trusted reporting, high-quality educational media, and meaningful community engagement. KSMU and OPT connected neighbors through public affairs programming, celebrated local arts and culture, and expanded access to lifelong learning across on air, online, and in person platforms. From the *Sense of Community* series on caregiving, climate change, and food insecurity, to educational initiatives like *Seuss Science Day* and the OPT PBS KIDS® *Writers Contest*, to nonpartisan voter coverage and campus partnerships, KSMU and OPT continued to inform, educate, and inspire. OPT celebrated its 50th anniversary with a year of events that honored our history and looked to the future. Through free over-the-air and online access, Ozarks Public Broadcasting is available to every household in the Ozarks. This ensured all families, regardless of income or location, could learn, participate, and belong.



**Rachel Knight**  
General Manager  
Ozarks Public Broadcasting

## KSMU OZARKS PUBLIC RADIO

*91.1 FM • Springfield*  
*90.5 FM • Point Lookout / Branson*  
*90.3 FM • West Plains*  
*103.7 FM • Neosho*  
*88.7 FM • Mountain Grove*

## OZARKS PUBLIC TELEVISION

*KOZK • Springfield*  
*KOZJ • Joplin*

# 3 OUR MISSION

## LOCAL VALUE

KSMU Radio and Ozarks Public Television work everyday to keep people across the Ozarks informed, entertained, and inspired through in-depth reporting, exceptional educational programming, and the civil exchange of ideas. By offering a rich blend of trusted local and national content across multiple platforms, KSMU and OPT help the community stay connected to the world and to one another.

Grounded in a mission to explore ideas and deepen shared understanding, the stations focus on delivering high-quality content, building strong community partnerships, and ensuring long-term sustainability. Together, KSMU and OPT provide a reliable source of information and storytelling that reflects the diverse experiences and aspirations of the Ozarks.

“*Ozarks Public Broadcasting is a shining example of Missouri State University's public affairs mission in action, with programs that inform, educate, inspire, challenge, and encourage active participation in the community.*”

- *About Broadcast Services, Missouri State University (MSU) Website*



# 4 OUR MISSION

## KEY SERVICES

- **Engaging community members** through outreach, events, and meaningful local programming.
- **Educating families at every stage of life**, from early childhood development to lifelong learning.
- **Reaching, reflecting, and celebrating our entire community**, ensuring that all voices and perspectives are represented and valued.
- **Documenting, presenting, and preserving the history and culture of the Ozarks**, strengthening regional identity and pride.

## LOCAL IMPACT

Ozarks Public Broadcasting serves the entire community, reaching people where they are and removing barriers to access. Because Ozarks Public Television and KSMU Radio are available free of charge both over the air and through online streaming, every household in the region can benefit from trusted news, educational content, and enriching programs, regardless of income or location.

This universal accessibility ensures that every child in the Ozarks can benefit from high-quality educational media that supports school readiness and learning, audiences of all ages have access to information, ideas, and civic resources that encourage engagement and strengthen community life. Together, KSMU and OPT help build a more informed, connected, and empowered Ozarks.



# 5 COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Beyond the airwaves, our community events brought people together for learning, conversation, and pure fun—strengthening the civic fabric of the Ozarks.



## KSMU Trivia Night

KSMU continued its popular partnership with Springfield Brewing Company in 2025, hosting quarterly **Trivia Nights** that brought listeners and neighbors together for friendly competition. Guided by trivia masters and local favorites Lauryl Wagoner and Kyle Jeffries, teams of two to six players put their knowledge to the test for prizes and bragging rights while enjoying buffet dinners and drinks in a welcoming setting. These evenings reinforce KSMU’s mission to build community through shared experiences.

## Studio Live and Social Hour

**Studio Live** brought the sound of the Ozarks directly to listeners as local musicians performed live from the KSMU studios the second Friday of every month. Every hour blended conversation and performance, offering an intimate look at the artists and the stories behind their music. Those evenings, the music moved from the airwaves to the stage at **Studio Live Social Hour**, a free concert from 6–8 p.m. at Springfield Brewing Company. This turned each Studio Live Friday into a full day of celebrating local talent.



# 6 COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

## Virtual Wine Tasting with Public Television Travel Host Rick Steves

In February, Ozarks Public Television hosted a special virtual evening with travel writer and host **Rick Steves**. This passport-free European escape from the comfort of home was guided by Rick and a professional sommelier. Participants explored six curated wines, learning the stories, places, and people behind every pour. One attendee noted it felt “like an intimate night of conversation in a café somewhere in Europe,” underscoring how public media connects people through storytelling, culture, and shared discovery.



“like an intimate night of conversation in a café somewhere in Europe”  
- 2025 Virtual Wine Tasting Participant

## NPR Science Correspondent Nell Greenfieldboyce at MSU’s Public Affairs Conference

As part of Missouri State University’s Public Affairs Conference, KSMU welcomed NPR science correspondent and author **Nell Greenfieldboyce**. Known for her exploration of how applied science intersects with everyday life, she delivered a presentation aligned with the theme “**Resilient People, Resilient Future,**” met with MSU students, held a lively Q&A with children at Summit Preparatory School, and visited with station supporters. Her visit offered audiences of all ages a firsthand look at science journalism in action.



# 7 COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

## An Evening with LeVar Burton

In April, OPT partnered with the Missouri Humanities Council to stream **An Evening with LeVar Burton**. The acclaimed actor, director, author, and champion for literacy spoke to a full house about how reading empowers civic participation and strengthens community bonds, reminding audiences of the lifelong impact of literacy and public media.



## OPT's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

2025 marked **50 years** of Ozarks Public Television. The year-long celebration began with a mayoral proclamation, followed by a robust social media campaign featuring #ThrowbackThursday nostalgia, "50 Ways to Celebrate" the Public Broadcasting Act, and quotes from iconic PBS figures. A community party in September on Missouri State University's campus featured station tours, meet-and-greets, PBS characters, family-friendly games, live music, refreshments, and a commemorative poster. Ozarks residents also contributed messages and mementos to an **OPT Time Capsule** to be opened on the 75th anniversary. OPT is already looking ahead to the next 50 years of storytelling, learning, and connection across the Ozarks.



# 8 LOCAL NEWS

Our newsroom and local programming informed civic understanding, uplifted the arts, and reflected the people and places that define the Ozarks.

## *Sense of Community*

***Sense of Community*** is a quarterly, multi-platform (tv broadcast, radio broadcast and online) public affairs series from KSMU and OPT. In 2025, it spotlighted three pressing regional issues:

- ***Caregiving in the Ozarks*** elevated the experiences of unpaid family caregivers and connected audiences with vital support resources.
- ***Climate Change in the Ozarks*** explored how shifting weather patterns, flash floods, and rising temperatures are affecting agriculture, rural economies, and public health while highlighting innovative local solutions.
- ***Food Insecurity in the Ozarks*** examined economic and access-related realities facing families today through stories from organizations and volunteers on the front lines.

The *Sense of Community* series deepens public understanding, elevates local voices, and inspires meaningful civic connection, strengthening the fabric of the Ozarks one story at a time.



# 9 LOCAL NEWS



## *Making Democracy Work*

In partnership with the **League of Women Voters of Southwest Missouri**, this weekly *Making Democracy Work* series explored the intersection of civic life and community well-being. In 2025, topics included citizen-led petition initiatives, legislative proposals in the Missouri General Assembly that could affect voter rights, and ways residents can stay informed and engaged with their elected officials. These topics empowered KSMU listeners to participate more fully in the democratic process.



## Candidate Forums and Election Coverage

KSMU continued its long tradition of nonpartisan, accessible election coverage as a member of the **Informed Voter Coalition**, in partnership with 13 other community organizations. The coalition produced in-depth interviews with **candidates for mayor in Springfield and Ozark**, as well as candidates for the **Springfield School Board** and **Springfield City Council**, providing them on air and online so voters could hear each candidate's priorities and policy positions before heading to the polls.



# 10 LOCAL NEWS

## Arts News

Every Friday at 10:00 a.m., **Arts News** brought listeners inside the region's vibrant creative community. Host **Jimmy Rea** spoke with artists, performers, directors, and arts administrators and shared a comprehensive calendar of upcoming events. In 2025, highlights ranged from the **Springfield Youth Symphony String Quartet** preparing for a milestone performance at Carnegie Hall, to **New York Times** bestselling author **Cullen Bunn** on his new novel *Bones of Our Stars, Blood of Our World*, to a conversation with **Kate Francis**, the first executive director of the **Friends of the Springfield Art Museum**.



## The Green Room

Launched in 2025, **The Green Room** is KSMU's weekly arts newsletter spotlighting the people, places, and creative energy that make the Ozarks' cultural scene thrive. Hosted by arts reporter and storyteller **Jimmy Rea**, each edition blends thoughtful conversation, human-centered storytelling, and practical inspiration for exploring the arts close to home. More than just a guide to what's happening, *The Green Room* strengthens the local arts ecosystem by connecting audiences with makers and venues, amplifying local voices, and building appreciation for the role creativity plays in a resilient community.



# 11 EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH

Educational service remained a cornerstone of our mission, helping children and families learn together through trusted, entertaining programming.

## SEUSS SCIENCE DAY

OPT and the **Ozarks Regional YMCA** brought the **14th Annual Seuss Science Day** to life in March. Inspired by the PBS KIDS series *The Cat in the Hat Knows a Lot About That!*, the event builds early literacy and foundational science skills through playful, hands-on learning. Families enjoyed Seuss-themed science demonstrations, creative activities, live story readings, meet-and-greets with beloved characters, a special birthday party for Dr. Seuss with ice cream generously provided by **Hiland Springs Dairy**, and the crowd favorite **Oh, the Places You'll Go! Big Rig Exploration Area**.

This free family event welcomed nearly 1,300 attendees!



# 12 EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH



## THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

OPT connected local communities with the history and ongoing relevance of America's founding through a Scout-focused initiative inspired by *The American Revolution, a PBS documentary by Ken Burns, Sarah Botstein & David Schmidt*. Middle and high school age Scouts explored the ideals of liberty, freedom, and democracy while completing requirements for Scouting America's American Heritage Merit Badge. A well-attended **Kickoff Rally** featured preview clips and discussions led by local historians and educators. A recording of the rally was posted to OPT's website to ensure access for anyone in the community. Continuing through July 2026, the project gives Scouts ample time to complete activities and add their voices to a shared exploration of civic ideals.

## OPT PBS KIDS WRITERS CONTEST

Children in kindergarten through third grade unleashed their imaginations in the **2025 OPT PBS KIDS Writers Contest**, crafting and illustrating original stories. Local winners were honored at a celebratory banquet. Their work was showcased at **Waverly House Gifts & Gallery** and featured at a children's literacy festival, giving young authors a chance to see their creativity shine in the community. Partners, including the **Laura Ingalls Wilder Children's Literature Festival** and **The Urban Cup**, provided prizes, treats, and encouragement.



# 13 DIVERSE PROGRAMMING & REGIONAL REFLECTION

We reflected the full spectrum of curiosity through local history, science, culture, and conversation that broadens perspective.

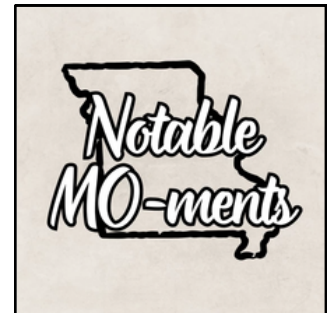
## GROWING THE OZARKS

Launched in 2025, **Growing the Ozarks** airs on the third Wednesday of every month at 9:45 a.m. on KSMU. Hosted by MU Extension’s **Kelly McGowan**, the show offers practical, science-based gardening guidance tailored to the Ozarks. Conversations with local **Master Gardeners** and **Master Naturalists** invite listeners to cultivate thriving gardens and explore the region’s distinctive ecosystems, deepening appreciation for the Ozarks’ natural heritage.



## NOTABLE MO-MENTS

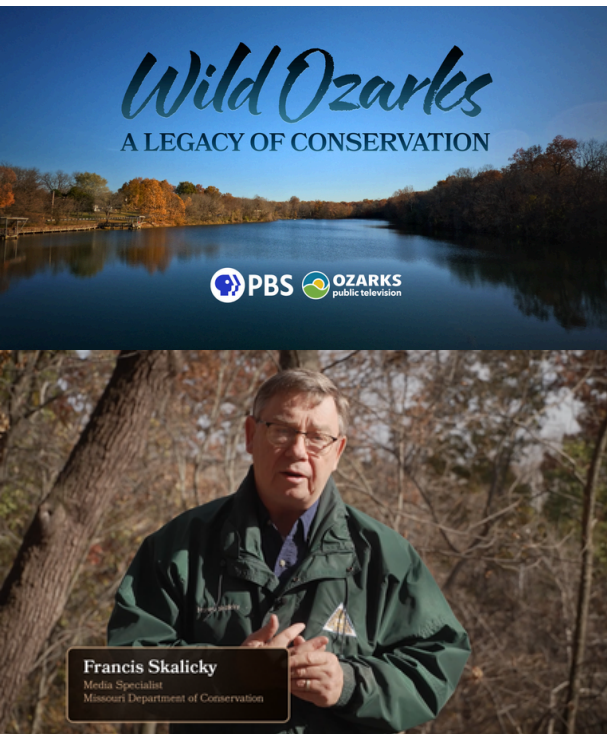
With support from the **Missouri Humanities Council**, KSMU partnered with historian **Kaitlyn McConnell’s** cultural preservation project, **Ozarks Alive!**, to launch **Notable MO-ments**. This 12-part audio series honored the Ozarks’ rich heritage during America’s 250th anniversary year. Episodes explored the legacy of one room schoolhouses, the region’s prominence in early commercial fruit growing, the community clubs that sustain small towns, and **Porter Wagoner’s** rise to national fame. This series bridged past and present through the voices of historians, community leaders, and everyday residents.



# 14 DIVERSE PROGRAMMING & REGIONAL REFLECTION

## SHAD HELLER: MASTER OF HIS CRAFT

Premiering in June 2025, **Shad Heller: Master of His Craft** celebrated the enduring legacy of **Lloyd “Shad” Heller** and his influence on generations of Ozarks entertainers. This OPT film traced his journey from carnival worker to beloved Branson actor and craftsman. Shad was best known as the iconic blacksmith at **Silver Dollar City**, a creative force behind the **Toby Show**, and the original shepherd and cowriter of the outdoor drama **Shepherd of the Hills**. Featuring interviews with historians, fellow crafters, and friends, along with rare footage of performances and blacksmithing technique, the documentary honors Shad’s showmanship, mentorship, humor, heart, and the community he helped build.



## WILD OZARKS: A LEGACY OF CONSERVATION

**Wild Ozarks: A Legacy of Conservation** took viewers deep into the region’s extraordinary biodiversity and the decades-long efforts to protect it. Through compelling storytelling and striking visuals, this OPT film explored how climate change, development, and other human impacts are reshaping local landscapes and the species that depend on them while highlighting science-based stewardship, grassroots advocacy, and ongoing restoration projects. By weaving together past achievements and present challenges, **Wild Ozarks** revealed a living legacy of environmental resilience and the vital role communities play in safeguarding the region’s natural heritage.

# 15 CAMPUS ENGAGEMENT

Partnerships with Missouri State University enriched our journalism, expanded our expertise, and connected us with campus and community.

## ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

*Engaging the Community* is a monthly KSMU program featuring conversations between **KSMU News Director Michele Skalicky** and **MSU President Dr. Biff Williams**. In 2025, topics included the completion of MSU's 2025–2030 strategic plan, the University's transition to **Conference USA** for most athletic programs, expanded services for veterans, and the impact of federal budget cuts on research, helping listeners understand how broader trends shape daily life in our region.



## MISSOURI STATE JOURNAL

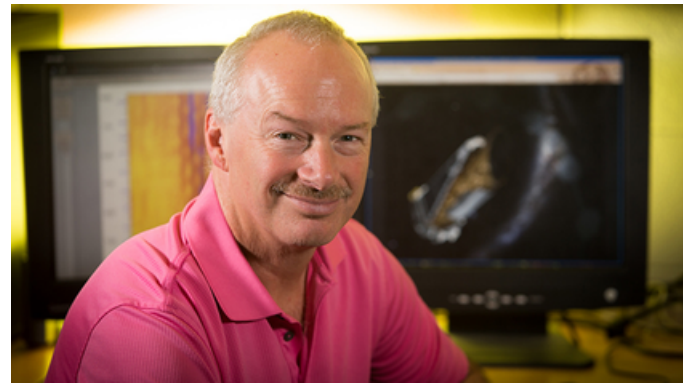
Co-produced with the **MSU Office of Strategic Communication**, the *Missouri State Journal* features faculty and staff sharing practical insights, expert analyses, and stories that connect university work to the wider community. In 2025, episodes ranged from what to expect from the **U.S. economy in 2026**, to a behind the scenes look at **Tour of the Globe**, to innovation at **MSU's Mountain Grove Fruit Experiment Station**, where teams advanced horticultural science and produced wine, spirits, and more.



# 16 CAMPUS ENGAGEMENT

## **ASTRO BRIEF**

In partnership with the **Missouri Space Grant** and the **MSU Department of Physics, Astronomy, and Materials Science**, *Astro Brief*, hosted by **Dr. Mike Reed**, brought cutting edge astronomy to listeners in an accessible format. In 2025, topics included the hunt for missing members of ancient star clusters, what lies in the vast void between stars and galaxies, and whether new measurements could reshape our understanding of **dark energy**.



**Missouri  
State**



## **TALKING HISTORY**

Co-produced with the **MSU Department of History** and hosted by **Djene Bajalan** and **Patrick Needham**, *Talking History* offered thoughtful conversations with historians and scholars. In 2025, the program explored topics such as **nation building and modernization theory**, **America's global role before the Civil War**, and the ways pop culture shapes our understanding of the past, making history feel relevant, alive, and connected to today's conversations.



# 17 CAMPUS ENGAGEMENT

## CAMPUS CONTRIBUTIONS TO COMMUNITY STORYTELLING

Missouri State University faculty and staff played a vital role in enriching ***Sense of Community*** and other public affairs programming in 2025.

- ***Sense of Community: Food Insecurity in the Ozarks*** featured **MSU's Bear Pantry**, a resource serving students and employees who may be struggling to afford groceries. The segment highlighted Bear Pantry's thoughtful "**client choice**" model, which treats every visitor with dignity and autonomy, reducing waste and ensuring people bring home food they will use and enjoy.
- For ***Sense of Community: Climate Change in the Ozarks*** and OPT's ***Wild Ozarks*** documentary, **Mark Owen, Director of MSU's School of Earth, Environment, and Sustainability**, provided scientific context on how climate shifts affect Ozarks landscapes, ecosystems, and communities, grounding storytelling in real world data.
- In ***Sense of Community: Caregiving in the Ozarks***, **Dr. Maureen Templeman, Assistant Professor in MSU's Sociology and Anthropology Department**, offered expertise on family dynamics and the social and emotional toll on unpaid caregivers, adding depth and compassion to the series.
- At **The American Revolution – A Gen Z Perspective** Kickoff Rally, **Dr. Jeremy Neely, MSU's History Undergraduate Program Director**, answered student questions and provided historical context on the ideals of liberty and democracy, helping young audiences connect past and present.

Together, these campus partners brought their academic expertise into community conversations helping viewers, listeners and participants connect more deeply with the issues that shape our shared future.

# 18 CAMPUS ENGAGEMENT

## HANDS ON EXPERIENCE, REAL WORLD IMPACT

Students play an essential role in KSMU and OPT's work and both stations are committed to giving them meaningful, real world experience that prepares them for careers in media, communications, and community leadership. Through student positions and internships, they gain hands-on experience in reporting, on-air announcing, special events, production, graphic design, marketing, and other facets of public media operations, contributing to a range of projects for broadcast, online, social media, and community service.

Beyond on-the-job experience, students benefit from close mentorship with professional staff and opportunities to network with industry partners, local organizations, and community leaders. Many have used these connections to launch successful careers in journalism, broadcasting, nonprofit communications, and the creative industries. By investing in their student teams, KSMU and OPT help to build the next generation of storytellers, innovators, and engaged citizens who will continue strengthening the Ozarks.

In 2025, Ozarks Public Broadcasting had 14 student employees.



# 19 TOGETHER, WE MOVE THE OZARKS FORWARD

In 2025, Ozarks Public Broadcasting connected neighbors, elevated local voices, and opened doors to learning for all. But none of this would have happened without you, the listeners, viewers, donors, educators, artists, students, and partners. Your curiosity, compassion, and support powered everything Ozarks Public Broadcasting does. OPB is honored to serve the Ozarks and excited to continue building a more informed, connected, and creative region together.

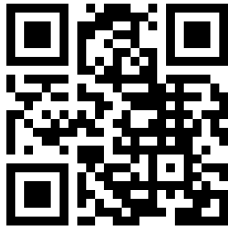
As the journey continues forward, OPB will keep doing what matters most: providing trusted journalism, joyful educational content, and spaces where our community can learn, listen, and belong.

## THANK YOU FOR BEING PART OF THE STORY.



# 20 STAY CONNECTED

## KSMU



[ksmu.org](http://ksmu.org)



KSMU - Ozarks Public Radio



[@ksmuradio](https://www.instagram.com/ksmuradio)



[@ksmuradio91.1](https://www.youtube.com/ksmuradio91.1)

## OPT



[optv.org](http://optv.org)



Ozarks Public Television



[@ozarkspubliectv](https://www.instagram.com/ozarkspubliectv)



[@OzarksPublicTV](https://www.youtube.com/OzarksPublicTV)

