

I am Frank Lynn and I have been a community organizer in Grand Rapids for almost twenty years. One of the biggest challenges we face, as organizers, is getting our story out. We organize around issues and the last thing local TV news wants to do is investigative reporting. News people want already made stories. They want one of two things. Something sensational. If it bleeds, it leads. A shooting, but don't look at root causes. Car accidents are good. Or they want a press release with the 5Ws and a celebrity speaker. No controversy. Something nice. Something easy.

The ABC affiliate-13 is often referred to as the happy station or the fluff station. They like to do happy stories like Journey's with Joe. They do the on target weather although the parameters are so wide its hard to understand how they miss the target. Last night they did a story on a citizen thanking the cross-lake ferry service. The NBC affiliate –8 isn't much better. Last night they did a story on which movies made the most money last week without any comment on their content, not that a review would have been of value. After all, many of the movies are made by their sister company, Disney. And, oh yes, they did a story on the opening of Disneyland in Hong Kong as if that was relevant to residents of my neighborhood.

The issues that form our city get little coverage and no explanation. When the city has to cut services like police and fire or housing inspectors the causes for budget short falls are never explained. There is no explanation about the state not keeping its commitment to revenue sharing. There are no stories on the federal government cutting community development funding while it gives tax breaks to the wealthiest Americans.

We work on issues like health care and education and neighborhood development but find it extremely difficult to get coverage. Amway projects downtown are regular news, be they good or bad. Neighborhood development issues go uncovered. When neighbors stopped a McDonalds and identified a better project no one heard. But a convention center that is going to cost taxpayers millions gets positive coverage on a regular basis. Parents trying to get involved in improving their schools are never mentioned. Negative test scores and school closings are big news.

It's little wonder that the average citizen doesn't understand why their neighborhoods are failing. There is little opportunity for them to get all the information. Most of the stories on local TV news reflect the interests of the companies that advertise on the TV stations. After all, it's the oil companies, the Amways, big business that is bring you the news. We can do better. These are public air-waves. They should serve the public.