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## Listen up, shareholders

April proxy statements bring May shareholders meetings.

After reviewing dozens of proxies for local companies, I can safely say that I could start nearly every workday listening to some management team talk about how it created shareholder value over the last year.

I counted 60 meetings from May 1 to May 30. There are 11 meetings on May 22 alone.

Don't get me wrong. I think the annual meeting is a good thing. Company executives need to be able to look out over a hotel ballroom or conference center and see the faces of their shareholders. They need to hear the questions and concerns of the people who own their company.

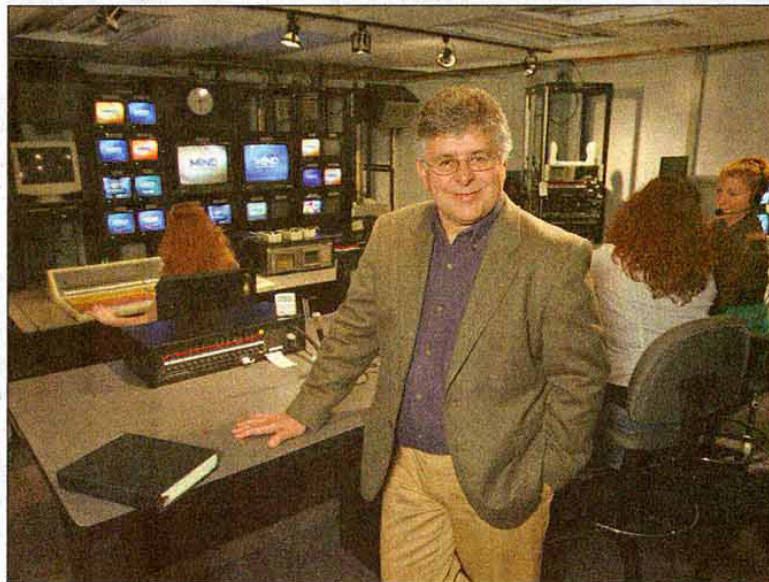
But frankly, most annual meetings are incredibly boring.

**DuPont Co.**, which meets in Wilmington on Wednesday, usually attracts some colorful protesters outside, and shareholders will be considering a variety of corporate governance questions that could provoke lively discussion.

But **Sunoco Inc.**, which meets at Moore College of Art & Design on Thursday, does not list any shareholder-sponsored proposals. It will elect the board, rubber-stamp the choice of accounting firm, and sign off on a stock-based incentive plan. Are you telling me everything's hunky dory for shareholders of an oil refiner?

It's interesting to look at where companies hold their meetings. (I've posted the list of May annual meetings on the PhillyInc blog, [www.phillyinc.biz](http://www.phillyinc.biz)) Most are in hotels. Some are held in companies' corporate offices, or what looks to be their lawyer's offices.

Some are creative. **Comcast Corp.** has been holding its shareholders meeting at the Wachovia Complex for the last few years. You can do that when you own the sports arenas.



MICHAEL S. WIRTZ / Inquirer Staff Photographer

WYBE CEO Howard Blumenthal. "It's short-form programming ... viewers tell us what they want," he said.

## Public-television revolutionary

WYBE's new model offers 5-minute shorts.

By Joseph N. DiStefano  
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

WYBE-35, Philadelphia's tiny, nonprofit, old-fashioned broadcast TV station, is betting its future on digital shows for the YouTube generation.

The station is programming its signals and Web site with five-minute shorts that producers pay to play, set in a new studio built as part of a signal-swapping deal with General Electric Co.'s NBC Universal networks.

"It's short-form programming, in which we let the community come to us and let them and viewers tell us what they want," says Howard Blumenthal, the station's chief executive and a 30-year veteran of the business, including stints as a brand executive for Bertelsmann AG and a senior executive at CDNOW Inc.

"These are not infomercials," he adds. WYBE's program affiliate, Mind Media Independence (Mind TV), controls content, with no obligation to use programs it doesn't want. No home-shopping programs; no racist propaganda.

The station offers technical assistance and training to member-donors who want to make their own programs, for a yearly fee ranging from \$75 for individuals



Web-streamed program in WYBE lobby. "In 20 years in the [public-TV] business, I've never seen anything quite like this," an official said.

to \$1,000 for corporations.

The business model reverses the usual TV business patterns. Like Philadelphia-based vanity publisher Xlibris Corp., WYBE is now getting paid to carry content, not paying for it. It's giving paying members — there are 50 so far, pending the service's formal launch next month — the power to put their own work on television and the Internet.

That's a switch from the coffee mugs and CDs given member-donors by other public stations. "In my 20 years in the business, I've never seen anything quite like this," said Sylvia L. Strobel, president and general manager of the Hershey-based Pennsylvania Public Television Network, which funnels state subsidies to WYBE and other public stations.

See WYBE on D8

## Low-cost fashion stalwart's last sale

Architecture, a high-cost lease and bad timing all helped sink the Center City Loehmann's.

By Melissa Dribben  
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Two weeks ago, the funeral notice went up.

Loehmann's, that doyenne de retail, that wink-and-a-smile purveyor of the good stuff, our lady of the perpetual discount designer, announced she is closing up shop in Center City.

Within hours, women were tearing through the place. Moschino and Tahari lay in crumpled tangles on the floor. Calvin Klein suits were cleaved, skirt from jacket, with the brutish rendering of Britney from her children. DKNY was left hanging by a thread.

For those who loved Mother Lo's racks, relied on her sophisticated taste, waited to get quarterly coupons from her — plus extra on their birthdays — it is a sad and perplexing passing.

"I'm really upset," said Gwendyolyn Breen, a well-dressed young woman who works in King of Prussia but had taken to coming into the city regularly to shop at Loehmann's. "They had great designers for really cheap."

That has been the chain's lucrative formula since the 1920s, when Frieda Loehmann, a New York department store buyer, began selling overstock out of an automobile showroom in Brooklyn.

At its peak in 1999, Loehmann's had about 100 stores in 17 states.

Two years ago, the chain came to Philadelphia, settling into a high-ceilinged beauty of a building at 1538 Chestnut, half a block from Liberty Place — perfectly situated for officer workers, professional women and friends meeting up for a midday shop.

So what happened? Loehmann's predicament was due in part to architecture, an expensive lease and bad timing.

More than anything else, though, the store's demise was an object lesson in the vagaries of Center City retail, where a single block can weirdly divide a chic shopping district from a See LOEHMANN'S on D3

# WYBE's risky shift in television

**WYBE** from D1  
er public stations in the state.

"The new model is risky for WYBE," but appealing to viewers raised on iPods and YouTube, Strobel added. If it works, "I expect it will be adopted by public television stations across the country."

The early version of the new lineup — available at [www.mindtv.org](http://www.mindtv.org), a Web site for the station's nonprofit parent, Independence Public Media of Philadelphia Inc. — is a grab-bag of museum-exhibit tours and Christian rappers, tattooed performance artists, and a green-building primer by local corporate landlord Liberty Property Trust.

These programs supplement, and will partly replace, WYBE's current broadcast lineup of PBS, foreign and locally produced programs, though some of the most popular — including BBC news reports and Korean soap operas — will continue. WYBE says its audience is too small to measure through Nielsen's and other rating services; it estimates the highest-rated shows draw a few thousand viewers.

Once the station has collected enough five-minute segments, Blumenthal says, a majority of WYBE's current programming, including local music and documentary and travel shows, will end or migrate into five-minute segments.

The station is aiming for a marriage of the often-frustrated community-TV ideal of locally produced original programming and the convenience and short-attention-span exuberance of free digital media-on-demand.

"We want people who are new to media-making to feel comfortable making a five-minute program to start out," said WYBE project manager



MICHAEL S. WIRTZ / Inquirer Staff Photographer

**Intern Kashaka Irwin** works in the screening room at WYBE, which is gambling on shows for the YouTube generation.

Kimberly Kunda.

Blumenthal joined WYBE three years ago, backed by a board that includes long-serving members like David Haas, chairman of the William Penn Foundation and director of the Rohm & Haas chemical company, and a founding director of WYBE 20 years ago.

The station, with a small and fragmented viewership and a precarious \$2 million yearly budget, mostly from government grants, "had to change," Blumenthal said. The FCC-mandated expansion of digital signals and viewers' increasing preference for the Internet demanded more programming. Independence Public Media faced a challenge: how to keep the broadcast station going while preparing for new media.

Resources for the change, including a new studio, came from NBC, which coveted one of two digital channels allotted to WYBE by the Federal Communications Commission for its own local affiliate,

WCAU.

In exchange for access to WYBE's signal, NBC supplied serviceable studio equipment plus training and support for Mind's operations and program staff. "Our old studio looked like a dangerous place to shoot television," Kunda said. "They put together an awesome studio for us."

WYBE is "revolutionizing public independent television with their new format," said Robert Miller, a digital TV executive at NBC Universal. "Their stories are all in bite-size pieces, for today's channel-surfers. I look forward to seeing their plan in action."

For Blumenthal, the new video model has its roots in classic television. The new multimedia programming on Mind TV is "Sesame Street for grown-ups," he said. "It's like the early MTV, but with more than music."

Contact staff writer Joseph N. DiStefano at 215-854-5194 or [jdistefano@phillynews.com](mailto:jdistefano@phillynews.com).

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