



# East Village Magazine

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## New multimedia company emphasizes education

By Donna Ullrich Apr 2010

Individually, their professional experiences took them around the world and across the country before landing them in Flint, where positions at WFUM and the UM-Flint caused their paths to cross.

As different as their experiences and interests are, the one commonality – teaching others while doing – has caused them to collectively launch a new multi-media production company to produce quality programming and create learning experiences for K-12 and college students, as well as Michigan's lifelong learners.

iMichigan Productions, a Grand Blanc nonprofit production company incorporated this year, was founded by Rodney Brown of Grand Blanc, Leon Collins of Houston, Texas and Donna Ullrich of East Lansing.

Each, with as many years in educational as media environments, say there is a need for professional quality experiences for media students in the evolving 21st century digital technology industry. At the same time, they say, there is a great opportunity to develop programming that entertains and educates.

With these two goals in mind – providing educating experiences for future professionals and creating educational complementary media to accompany their programs – the three have begun production on two series tentatively slated for public television distribution. Production of each program will include internship opportunities for media students and online classrooms and curriculum materials meeting state standards for use in any learning environment in the state at no cost.

The first production, *The Michigan Experience: The American Civil War Years*, grew out of Brown's master of American culture project at UM-Flint. Seeking to tell just one piece of Michigan's Civil War

history turned into a three-part series for broadcast as Brown's research led him around the state and put him in contact with Civil War reenactors and state historians who called for a factual depiction of the state's role.

The project comes just in time for Michigan's Civil War Sesquicentennial Celebration slated to run April 2011 to 2015. *The Michigan Experience* will be presented by WKAR, East Lansing, with the first episode scheduled for April 2011.

The three one-hour episodes cover Michigan's role in the Civil War including its 90,000 soldiers, its senator who orchestrated the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments, its agricultural and equestrian contributions to the war effort, its navy, calvary and ambulance builders and its Civil War cemeteries.

Through the state's Civil War reenactor community and historians, the stories of its many regiments and government are told through the voices of the soldiers, government leaders and citizens. These stories include those of the 102nd Regiment of Detroit, Michigan's only black regiment to fight in the war.

With the support of state historical museum and history buff partners, iMp is seeking status for this production as an official activity of state's Civil War Sesquicentennial Celebration.

The second program in development is *American Jazz Greats* featuring Detroit's The Giant Steps, as known for their accomplished musical feats as they are for their commitment to education. From the legendary Baker's Key Board Lounge to the Detroit Public Library, the band is noteworthy for its conversation with audiences about the legendary musicians and styles they pay homage to in their performances.

*American Jazz Greats* featuring The Giant Steps will pay tribute to Louis Armstrong, Miles Davis, Coleman Hawkins, Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Ella Fitzgerald, Duke Ellington, Dave Brubeck, Max Roach, Billie Holiday, Chet Baker, Sonny Rollins, Charles Mingus, Art Blakey, Clifford Brown, Cannonball Adderly, Stan Getz, Wayne Shorter, Sarah Vaughn, Teddy Wilson, Horace Silver, Donald Byrd and John Coltrane.

WKAR will be the presenting station for this program as well. In addition, the content of each series is designed to meet K-12 curriculum standards and will be made available at no cost to the 1.6 million public school children of the state, the 130,000 private school children, their home schooled counterparts, higher education and Michigan's rich population of life-long learners via an internet classroom.

Brown is completing his master of arts in American culture from UM-Flint. He has a master's in education from the university and a bachelor's in communication from Stanford University.

As the senior executive producer for Michigan Public Television, WFUM-Flint, he created and produced over 300 hours annually of original programming for and about Michigan.

Brown produced *Jazzland*, a one-hour special that aired on Michigan public television stations WFUM, WTVS, WCMU and WKAR. He has also produced *MotorTown Music Central*, a 13-part series for Detroit public television, WTVS, which aired in 22 states and all of Canada for two seasons.

Also airing on WTVS was his one-hour prime time special *Blues Detroit Style* that also aired in 40 markets and all of Canada.

Collins was director of telecommunications and general manager of University of Michigan Public Television, WFUM TV 28, from 1995-2002. He served as professional director on the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) board of directors and as executive director of broadcasting of University of Houston PBS TV 8.

He has received numerous awards including Cable Industry Telley Award for scriptwriter BET Jazz 2006 and Flint Advertising Federation ADDY Award for Public Service Announcement 2002.

He has been the project director of the Career Path Enhancement Program for Mott Community College; assistant professor of media and communications at Antioch College Center for Social Research and Action in Baltimore, Md.; consultant to the Washington, D.C. secondary schools where he developed a four-year curriculum for media studies at the Duke Ellington School for the Arts; instructor of video production at the Duke Ellington School for the Arts Washington, D.C.; and media instructor for the George Washington University Workshop for Careers in the Arts.

He is a senior fellow of the Houston Chapter of the American Leadership Forum and planning committee member for the 2010 Convocation on Public Education.

Ullrich has nearly 20 years of grant development experience and 30 years of public relations and promotions experience. In her role as a university faculty member, she has built a journalism program for the University of Detroit-Mercy and taught journalism, public relations, media and First Amendment law, small group communication, conflict management and organizational communication courses for the UM-Flint.

She is currently a member of University of Maryland University Center faculty teaching proposal writing online to students located throughout the world. As a communications professional, she has organized a visit by the president of the United States, written a statement presented to a U.S. congressional committee, coordinated publication of a variety of printed, multi-media and electronic materials, facilitated task forces, managed a variety of special events and written grants worth nearly \$2.4 million for a PBS affiliate.

She has served as the public relations director for the city of Independence, Mo., as the director of university and alumni relations for UM-Flint and as director of communications for WFUM TV 28 in Flint.

iMp is seeking grant and sponsorship support for these programs.

Additional information about iMp and the series is available at [www.imichiganproductions.org](http://www.imichiganproductions.org).

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