

# Live from the Boulder Theater, It's E-Town!

Nothing about E-Town, the Boulder-based national radio program, is business as usual. Unique from its conception, E-Town is not your typical show, and that's the way founders and co-hosts Nick and Helen Forster like it.

E-Town is taped Sunday nights at the Boulder Theatre before a live audience and is heard coast-to-coast each week on National Public Radio (NPR) affiliates and commercial stations. Fusing music, news and talk-show formats, it stands alone as a unique blend of radio formatting refusing to be typecast into a programming genre. To the Forsters it is an on-air community.

"We're using music to draw attention to social and environmental issues that concern us all," Helen says. "But instead of sermonizing, we want to let others tell their stories and be a media vehicle for entertainment." Starting with a diverse menu of music, E-Town brings together entertainers from across the musical spectrum including bluegrass, rock and roll, gospel and jazz. On any given week, one might hear Taj Mahal, Paul Winter or Shawn Colvin. Interspersed with the music are the equally important segments of the show that include interviews with authors, scientists, policy-makers, activists, poets and other leading thinkers of our age. Both Jimmy Carter and Jane Goodall are past guests of the show.

The concept for E-Town came to Nick, the former lead guitarist with the Grammy-award winning bluegrass band Hot Rize, while on tour in Eastern Europe with an "all-star" bluegrass band. In Sofia, Bulgaria, the band was part of the first concert in 40 years that was open to the general public. At a reception afterwards, Nick was amazed to watch Communists

and Democratic reformers not only mingle with one another but also rub elbows with poets, dissidents, students and international diplomats. The picture of the reception along with the environmental pollution he had witnessed in Eastern Europe stuck with him. Nick decided that there was a way to use the power of music to bring people together around issues that affect the health of communities and of the environment.

In 1991, the Forsters taped their first E-Town show at the Boulder Theater. "We started off as a national program from the start," Helen says. "It was unconventional, to say the least." Despite advice from NPR to produce and fund the program locally for several years before approaching its national service, the couple decided to tape a program and bring it to the desks of NPR execs. It worked. NPR loved the program and E-Town joined the broadcast service in fall of 1991, and last year the show celebrated its 10th anniversary with country singer Lyle Lovett.

## *Getting in on the Act*

Each week at the taping, audience members are treated to a rare viewing of radio as a visual medium. The occasional sound-checks, in which the audience participates with their applause, and instructions from Nick and Helen regarding broadcasting details are reminders that this is indeed a radio program as well as a live concert. At each show, the "E-chievement" award is pre-



Helen Forster reading from the script at an E-Town taping

sented to an ordinary citizen who has done extraordinary things. For instance, 25-year-old Chad Pregracke from East Moline, Ill., has personally cleaned up 1,500 miles of Mississippi River shoreline, removing 400,000 pounds of trash during the past four years. Most 'E-chievers' are nominated by listener letters to the E-Town staff who then research the candidates before choosing a weekly honoree.

It's been 10 years of a successful and innovative programming approach for E-Town. "When we decided to try for commercial radio stations, we heard over and over the question, 'What are you — a talk show or a music show? You can't be both,'" Helen says. "But we are. Now E-Town is totally accepted as its own unique format. We are an independently produced, nonprofit show that broadcasts a message of connectedness, community and hope."

E-Town can be heard locally on KBCO Sundays at 8 p.m., on KGNU Thursdays at noon, and on KUNC on Saturdays at 7 p.m. For tickets or to get a schedule of upcoming taping sessions and performers, call the Boulder Theater box office at 303-786-7030 or contact E-Town at 303-443-8696. Or check [www.ETOWN.org](http://www.ETOWN.org). ■

— Monica Emerich



Singer/songwriter Ben Harper (left) joins Nick Forster in E-Town