

# airwaves

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Investing in  
the future

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# A LETTER FROM THE CEO

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PHOTO: LIZ LINDER PHOTOGRAPHY

Dear WBUR Members,

The WBUR newsroom has felt strangely quiet, with so many colleagues working remotely since March of 2020, but we've accomplished a breathtaking amount. Thanks to an ambitious and fiercely dedicated team, we've deepened our coverage and created new beats and new programming on-air, online, on demand and onstage. We've also brought a number of brilliant new colleagues to WBUR, who will help define our future. I can't wait for you to meet them on the following pages.

This includes our new *Morning Edition* host, **Rupa Shenoy**. We'll take you behind the scenes in the wee hours of the morning to see how the show gets on the air. The team has managed a seamless crossfade (that's a radio term of art!) from Boston's beloved **Bob Oakes** to Rupa. It was the end of an era when he handed over the *Morning Edition* mic. As former Governor Deval Patrick said to me, "How am I supposed to know when it's morning?"

I love that so many people, like our former governor and like you, can't imagine a day without

WBUR. Your enduring support of our work, throughout this treacherous time, enabled us to up our game on so many fronts. Among other things, we advanced our investigative journalism and data reporting and expanded our coverage of climate change. Many of our members contributed to our first-ever capital campaign, making a significant investment in WBUR's long-term future.

By the time you read this letter, nearly half of my colleagues will be back at WBUR. Vaccinated. Tested every week and still wearing masks. The newsroom will no longer be quite so quiet. It's like we've been in battle — together, but apart — for a very important cause. To be a trusted source of information, to help make sense of an increasingly complicated world, to uncover hidden truths and to occasionally bring a little comfort and joy to those who rely on us. The feeling of shared purpose runs deep. With our colleagues and with you. You make all this possible. Thank you for your belief in WBUR — it sustains and inspires us.

With appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Margaret Low". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Margaret Low  
CEO, WBUR



# morning edition

## PIECING THE PUZZLE TOGETHER

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**DAN GUZMAN'S** ALARM rings, for the first time, at about 1:12 a.m. By 1:45 a.m. he's getting ready for the day — showering, dressing and packing his lunch. By 2:30, he's at WBUR.

While most of us are fast asleep, it's Dan's job to decide what Bostonians need to know when they wake up. He's the executive producer of WBUR's *Morning Edition*, responsible for leading the team that gets the four-hour live program on the air each weekday morning.

Dan is the first person to arrive. He spends an hour reading the news, catching up on developing stories, and reviewing a breadcrumb trail of notes and suggestions left by editors the previous evening.

Then, Dan has to quickly decide how the morning broadcast will sound. Which local stories will air? Which national stories from NPR will run? Which stories will lead the newscast? And which stories can the *Morning Edition* team help advance, with a reporting call or an on-air interview?

The rest of the team arrives, in-person or via Zoom, around 4 a.m. — just in time for a brief editorial meeting, where Dan catches everybody up on his plan for the day. But in our era of constantly breaking news, everything rarely goes according to plan. “I always have plan A, B, C, D and E, but sometimes we end up on plan Q or R,” Dan says.

By 5 a.m. they are on the air, so there is no time to waste.

**Sara-Rose Brenner**, *Morning Edition's* senior news writer, crafts the newscast scripts that

punctuate the show, working with Associate Producer **Caroline Llanes** who helps with the writing and makes edits on recorded interviews. Digital Producer **Laney Ruckstuhl** readies pieces for wbur.org. Technical Director **Mike Toda** lines up the studio for broadcast and selects the music listeners hear throughout the program.

The most recent member of the team is the show's new host, **Rupa Shenoy**. She arrived at WBUR to step in for the inimitable **Bob Oakes**, who decided to return to reporting after nearly 30 years as morning host. (See more about Rupa: p. 4.)

Throughout the broadcast, Dan continues to figure out how the puzzle pieces of the morning go together, giving listeners a comprehensive view of what's happening, locally and nationally. As a long-time WBUR listener you probably have a sixth sense for how the show unfolds, even if you don't realize it. There are five segments to each hour of *Morning Edition* that vary in length from four minutes to 11 and a half minutes. Each segment is separated from the next by music, show promotions and messages from WBUR supporters.

By the time many people tune in at 7:30 or 8 a.m., during their morning commutes, the show is sailing, because so many difficult decisions have been made in the hours before.

“Morning is the one time of day when people don't know what's going on in the world,” Dan says. “We tell you if the world turned upside down, what the weather is and if the local team won. Morning news is fun. You get people started for the day.” ■

## NEW FACES, FAMILIAR VOICES

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*WBUR's commitment to world-class, local journalism and national programming is built on the talent and experience of more than 200 people. Among them are the people whose voices you hear. The people who produce the images you see. And the people who work behind-the-scenes to keep you informed around the clock. Among those who've joined us over the past year:*



**RUPA SHENOY**

*Morning Edition* host

Listeners woke up to a new host this fall. That's when Rupa joined WBUR's *Morning Edition* team after longtime host **Bob Oakes** announced his plans to return to reporting.

For many, Rupa is a familiar voice. She was an investigative journalist at GBH and a reporter for *The World*. Last year Rupa won the Kaleidoscope Award from the Radio Television Digital News Association for "400 Years" — her year-long series exploring the legacy of slavery and institutional racism in the Americas, with reporting and interviews that connected dots from Ghana, Brazil and the U.S. Rupa also hosted *The World's Otherhood* podcast.

Rupa started her career in the Midwest working for Minnesota Public Radio, the Associated Press, the Daily Herald in Illinois and The Chicago Reporter. Her parents emigrated from southern India and settled in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.



**SCOTT TONG**

*Here & Now* co-host

After 16 years of reporting for American Public Media's *Marketplace*, Scott is another voice that many WBUR listeners recognize. Over the summer, he joined fellow hosts **Tonya Mosley** and **Robin Young** behind the mic for *Here & Now*, the midday news program WBUR produces in collaboration with NPR. And Scott will be based in Washington to build on that eight-year collaboration.

Scott was a senior correspondent for *Marketplace* and part of the program's Sustainability desk. Before that, he was China bureau chief in Shanghai. In 2017, Scott published a book following five members of his own family — a multigenerational account of China's economic expansion, called "A Village with My Name: A Family History of China's Opening to the World."





**VICTOR  
HERNANDEZ**

**Chief Content Officer**

Victor is a journalism innovator and a champion of diversity, inclusion and equity, helping lead NBC stations in California before a 12-year run at CNN, where he oversaw national news coverage and served as the network's "news futurist." He was the director of media innovation at a tech startup before returning to the news business as executive editor at Cascade Public Media in Seattle. Victor has been a research fellow at the Reynolds Journalism Institute and an at-large board member of the Society of Professional Journalists.



**CARLINE  
WATSON**

**Executive Producer  
of *Here & Now***

Carline came to WBUR from NPR, where she was known for cultivating talent and building teams. Her time at NPR included roles as manager of talent development and executive producer at *All Things Considered* and *Tell Me More*. She also led the *Code Switch* podcast and multi-platform reporting team.

Programs such as *Talk of the Nation*, *The Tavis Smiley Show*, *News and Notes* and *Weekend Edition Sunday* are also among her credits. Prior to NPR, Carline worked for Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.



**JONATHAN  
DYER**

**Executive Producer  
of *On Point***

Before Jonathan crossed the Atlantic to work in U.S. public media, he spent six years producing national and international programs for the BBC in London. During the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the first Gulf War in 1991, he served as a producer in NPR's London bureau, coordinating coverage with its international correspondents. Boston has been Jonathan's U.S. home for more than two decades. He was the longtime managing editor of *The World*. He also helped launch *The Takeaway* and created and edited *Boston Calling*, a weekly program and podcast for the BBC World Service.



ON POINT

## SERIES GOES BIG ON BIG TECH

DESCRIBING THE VAST ambition and influence of a company the size of Amazon is a massive undertaking. To tell that story, WBUR's *On Point* went big too — applying the show's new mix of high-touch storytelling and live conversation with great audio journalism.



WBUR's nationally distributed program rolled out its Amazon series last spring as part of its ongoing mission to explore complex issues, fairly and with depth and nuance.

Presented in eight parts, "The Prime Effect" appeared on-air and as a podcast, with digital extras and a live event. As host **Meghna Chakrabarti** said, *On Point* set out to help the audience fully grasp the impact of this sprawling enterprise that's changing how people "live, shop and work."

That meant conveying the scale and impact of the Seattle-based technology company, which has grown from an online bookseller and retailer in 1994, to the all-encompassing conglomerate it is today. "At best, Amazon can be seen as a customer-obsessed corporation that treats customer interests, such as privacy, as sacrosanct," Meghna said in an episode focused on privacy, security and the company's work with law enforcement. "At worst, Amazon's corporate surveillance capacity makes it an unblinking digital panopticon that never, ever stops watching you, learning about you."

The series dug deep into all parts of the Amazon story. One of the first episodes used the development of Amazon's voice-activated assistant, Echo, to explain founder Jeff Bezos' hands-on role. Other topics included concerns

about anti-competitive conduct, the significance of its highly profitable web services operation, and the treatment of its workers and contractors.

*On Point* expanded the scope of the project by linking up with Seattle-area public radio station KUOW, where local journalist **Joshua McNichols** contributed reporting on Amazon's impact in the community that is home to its corporate headquarters.

The format of the series was based in part on "What the President Knew" — an *On Point* special about crisis decision-making at the White House, from 9/11 to the pandemic. The special aired shortly after the program changed to its current one-hour format in October 2020 and later earned a National Edward R. Murrow Award from the Radio Television Digital News Association.





One key ingredient is the use of real-time conversations with guests. In "The Prime Effect," Meghna interviewed 14 live guests, some of whom appeared in multiple episodes. In addition, the series also featured 20 pre-recorded interviews. Those appeared in the episodes as short audio documentaries, with music and other components produced by Senior Editor **Dorey Scheimer** and Sound Designer **Tim Skoog**. "Those pre-produced pieces allow us to have a sound that is more familiar to the podcast listener, but not abandon the liveness that the show will always have," Dorey explained.

Meghna and Dorey spoke to numerous Amazon employees, vendors and contractors for the series. They also spoke to several current and former Amazon executives — which meant navigating the company's protective public relations apparatus.

As usual for *On Point*, the audience played a significant role too — but not in the way the show did in the past. The team is taking a more modern approach. Rather than relying on live phone calls, *On Point* now features audience voice messages, social media posts and online survey responses to share relevant experiences. That's helpful because many member stations broadcast *On Point* live at 10 a.m. ET. Changing the way the program engages with its audience means many more of its listeners can now join the conversation and producers can now integrate the audience at the most relevant points of the conversation.

"It has helped us incredibly to get

more diversity — diversity in all kinds of meanings of the word," Dorey said.

The Amazon episodes ran from April to late September. But *On Point's* podcast and online presence allowed the team to bundle the series together for listeners to consume anytime and in multiple ways.

Another element *On Point* offered was an event, in-person and virtually at WBUR's CitySpace at The Lavine Broadcast Center. For this 75-minute program, Meghna and Dorey spoke with two guests from the series — Tim Bray, a former Amazon executive and distinguished engineer, and McNichols, the KUOW reporter.

*On Point's* new executive producer, **Jonathan Dyer**, said the aim of the series format and other recent changes is to tell stories that "rise above the drumbeat coverage" of daily news, "asking questions in ways that maybe aren't being asked." ■



Meghna Chakrabarti serves as host and editor of *On Point*. (Liz Linder Photography)



PHOTO: OJ SLAUGHTER PHOTOGRAPHY

## INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

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WITH YOUR GENEROUS support, WBUR has raised \$35 million through its first-ever capital campaign, enabling the organization to invest in its journalism. This long-term funding allows us to double down on our local coverage and report stories of consequence to our city and our region — on-air, online, on demand and in person.

“When we launched The Campaign for WBUR, our goal was to address the rapidly changing world we were living in,” said **Paul Gannon**, chair of WBUR's board of directors. “The media landscape has shifted and the way that we consume news continues to evolve. We want to meet our audiences where they are and provide them with local coverage that enriches their lives.”

Through the support from the

campaign, WBUR is bolstering its coverage and has developed critical new beats. We created a team dedicated to climate change and the environment. We launched an award-winning investigations unit and expanded our arts and culture reporting. We strengthened our education coverage — which has been essential as the pandemic closed schools, turned living rooms into classrooms, and created a multitude of challenges for students and parents alike. And our iLab embodies WBUR's commitment to exploring and incubating new programming in its podcasts: *Endless Thread*, *Circle Round*, *Last Seen* and *Anything for Selena*.

The capital campaign also helped create a new, in-person space for our community. CitySpace at the Lavine Broadcast Center is WBUR's home for in-person inquiry and civic engagement.

Since opening in 2019, journalists, local partners and the public have come to CitySpace to grapple with some of the most vexing issues of our time. And these gatherings continued in virtual form throughout the pandemic, including political debates, policy discussions, environmental talks, cooking demonstrations and artistic performances.

CEO **Margaret Low** says she is grateful for the enormous generosity of our donors. “It’s meaningful to know that so many people believe in WBUR’s journalism and programming and the vital role we play in Boston and beyond,” she said. “Their investments fuel everything we do. And with The Campaign, WBUR will be able to provide rich and distinctive coverage to an ever-growing audience.” ■

# INVESTIGATIONS

## INVESTIGATIONS EDITOR CHRISTINE

**Willmsen** arrived at WBUR three years ago with a vision and mission to produce groundbreaking reporting that made a difference in the lives of WBUR's listeners and readers.

With more than 25 years experience as a journalist, Christine felt she could enhance WBUR's local and regional news coverage by creating an investigations unit that held the powerful accountable.

To produce that kind of impactful work, she gathered a talented team of collaborative journalists who each had their own skill sets and strengths. Among those strengths, she wanted a well-seasoned investigative reporter, a data journalist and a reporter with radio storytelling experience.

She hired **Saurabh Datar**, formerly of The Boston Globe and The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, as data journalist last fall. Data journalists like Saurabh specialize in collecting information by scraping websites, cleaning spreadsheets and filing public

records requests. Then they transform raw, numerical data through calculations to find patterns. The results provide key elements to the storytelling and can illustrate complex ideas through infographics.

Over the past year, Saurabh has made significant contributions as the lead reporter on several stories as well as helping other journalists in the newsroom gather and explore data.

Shortly after Saurabh's arrival, he worked to analyze COVID-19 information from the Department of Labor Standards. He identified employers who were forcing sick people to work or failing to implement health and safety rules like masks and indoor capacity limits.

"I love using computational journalism to examine issues at the systemic level and hold authorities accountable," Saurabh says. "But at the same time, we also tell stories on a human, personal level through radio. So that people engage with the story and also understand how decisions made by computer code affect their lives on a regular basis."

Christine agrees. She says the best investigative projects marry anecdotal stories of people affected by injustice with public records and data analysis. A perfect example was a recent investigation,



*continued from back page*

## HONORS FOR WBUR'S COMMITMENT TO EDITORIAL EXCELLENCE

Our new investigative team did just that with "Dying on the Sheriff's Watch," a four-part report documenting death and suffering in jails across Massachusetts. This reporting earned numerous awards, including:

**A national Edward R. Murrow Award** for a large market news series from the Radio Television Digital News Association

**First place for investigative reporting** from the Public Media Journalism Association, along with two second-place prizes for a news series and multimedia presentation

**First place for a news series** from the National Headliner Awards For Excellence In Radio Journalism

PHOTO: RADIO TELEVISION DIGITAL NEWS ASSOCIATION



funded in part by the prestigious Pulitzer Center, into civil forfeiture in Massachusetts — a story that showed the law is one of the worst in the country.

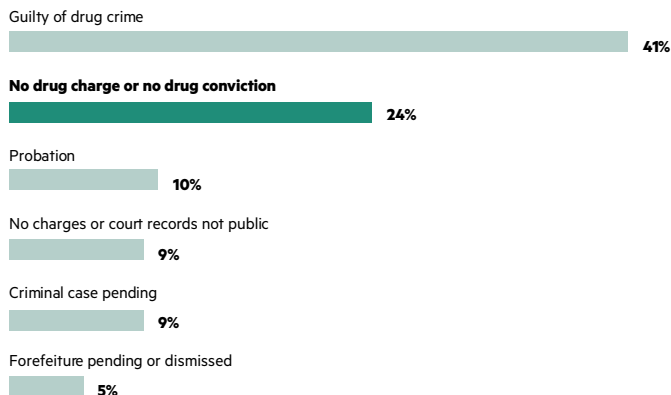
Christine said Saurabh pulled out all the stops for that one. He analyzed 2018 forfeitures cases and discovered that one in four incidents had no accompanying drug conviction or criminal drug case. Yet the Worcester County District Attorney’s Office stockpiled the money and later spent it on everything from the upkeep of tennis courts to a Zamboni, an ice rink resurfacers.

Saurabh and Investigations Reporter **Shannon Dooling** visited multiple courthouses in Worcester County, grabbed case files and typed information into their custom-built spreadsheet. This became the foundation of the team’s investigation, which showed that the district attorney’s office held onto innocent people’s money for decades.

Hidden in the data was a case in which the district attorney kept a 21-year-old college student’s money despite dismissing criminal charges. His story became the lead example highlighting the problems with the Massachusetts’ forfeiture laws.

### Criminal Cases Associated With Civil Forfeitures

In 2018, more than 90 seizures out of 396 had no related drug conviction or drug charge.



Source: WBUR analysis of Worcester County forfeiture case filings in 2018. The remaining 2% of the cases were excluded because they involved juveniles or criminal files that have been sealed or expunged.

This reporting wouldn’t have been possible if WBUR hadn’t hired Saurabh.

The story grabbed the attention of lawyers, civil rights advocates and state legislators who were outraged by the findings. WBUR and ProPublica also produced a follow-up story in which elected officials demanded the state legislature change the laws — and there is more to come. ■

Overall, WBUR's journalism received tremendous recognition this year, winning more than a dozen and a half regional and national awards. These awards included:

**A national Murrow Award** for a news documentary for "What the President Knew" — an *On Point* program hosted by **Meghna Chakrabarti** about how the White House has handled emerging threats — from 9/11 to COVID-19

**A regional Murrow Award** for innovation that went to "Mass. Election Prep" — a bilingual newsletter series produced in partnership with *El Planeta* that also was among the finalists for an award from the Online News Association

**Additional regional Murrow Awards**, including one for a hard news report on mounting COVID-19 cases in Chelsea; one for WBUR's reporting across digital platforms; and another for excellence in news writing

**Six additional PMJA honors**, including four first place prizes — two for our coverage of the 2020 protests following the murder of George Floyd; one for an accountability story on delays in expanding the Boston Police Department's body camera policy; and another for the writing in a news feature about a snow day during the pandemic ■

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# airwaves

## **HONORS FOR WBUR'S COMMITMENT TO EDITORIAL EXCELLENCE**

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*Jericka Duncan presents one of many awards to Christine Willmsen and Beth Healy of the investigative team for "Dying on the Sheriff's Watch." (video screenshot: Radio Television Digital News Association)*

RECOGNITION FOR OUR reporting and innovation rolled in over the past year, with awards and honors that reveal the breadth and depth of our work and the scale of our ambitions.

WBUR aims to amplify the voices of those who go unheard, and hold those in power accountable for their actions and failures.

*continues on page 10*