Socal CONNECTED:
Ten years of change-making journalism
Socal Connected is now ten years old! This is an achievement considering local news is under threat in Southern California and beyond. When I began as one of the show’s founding producers in 2008, the Los Angeles Times was undergoing one of its most severe layoffs. Over two hundred positions were eliminated by the paper’s new owner, Tribune. It was the first of many downsizings.

Ten years later Socal Connected produced a half hour episode on the rescue of the paper by a billionaire with a desire to bolster the fourth estate. Also part of that story: the shuttering of local papers like the LA Weekly, OC Weekly and the hollowing out of newsrooms at La Opinion, the Daily Breeze, among others.

Our staff was not immune from the contractions. Our staff has shrunk by over fifty percent. Despite a smaller team our viewership and ratings are at nearly all time highs.

Clearly communities are looking to local journalists to hold the powerful accountable and the truth revealed.

Sincerely,
Karen Foshay
Executive producer
Socal Connected

Socal Connected continues to be one of the most honored news-doc series in the country. In 2019, the show earned a record-breaking 10 awards at the Los Angeles Press Club event, including Journalist of the Year for executive producer Karen Foshay.

By The Numbers

10 Seasons
310 Episodes
130 Awards
2 Alfred I. duPont-Columbia Silver Batons
1 George Foster Peabody

A Decade of Award-Winning Local Journalism
Original Stories with Impact

Socal Connected has produced over one thousand stories, ranging from the environment, local politics, the arts, entertainment, public health and criminal justice. Through cinematic storytelling and diligent journalism, we deliver a news product unlike any other. We also produce impact.

Here are a few recent examples stories that made a difference.

Access Denied
For decades cities, developers and the California Coastal Commission have ignored a little known state law that encourages affordable lodging along the coast. Developers flouted the law denying the public access to upscale beaches. Our two-month investigation put a spotlight on an illegally built luxury hotel. The developers were later fined and required to provide 70 affordable hotel rooms for the public.

The People V Kiera Newsome
Socal Connected producers were given unprecedented access to a group of law professors and students from Loyola Law School as they fought for the release of convicted murderer Kiera Newsome. The documentary presented newly uncovered evidence that cast doubt on Newsome’s conviction and raised questions about racial and economic inequities within LA’s criminal justice system. After the episode aired, Gov. Jerry Brown commuted the sentence of Newsome. After nearly two decades in prison, Newsome was freed in April 2020. Socal Connected’s reporting is credited for playing a part in her release.
Out of Bounds
In one of the most watched episodes in the show’s history, Socal Connected traced the life of a former high school football star Antonio Carrion, as tragedy and mental illness forces him from the field to Skid Row and eventually to jail. Like so many others, Antonio cycled in and out of LA’s jails and courts despite the desperate efforts by his mother to get him help. After the story aired, the Los Angeles District Attorney’s office dropped all criminal charges against Carrion and assisted with transferring him to a mental health facility where he is doing well. The DA has said it is one of the best documentaries on the mental health challenges among LA’s homeless.

Life in Plastic
The public may think that what goes in their recycling bin get recycled, but in reality very little is. Socal Connected producers investigated one of the most powerful and profitable corporations in America, Dart Industries, one of the largest manufacturers of foam cups and containers in the world. We revealed how it and other plastic manufacturers spread misleading information about recycling while spending big on lobbying efforts to keep their products on the shelves. Days after the story aired, several Los Angeles City Council members revived a motion to discuss the banning the use of foam products among city businesses. The documentary was also the centerpiece of several community panel discussions. More events are planned in 2020, especially if a proposition banning all single use plastic products ends up on the November ballot.
Social Connected is a vital and trusted source of local news. Getting the story requires building relationships with communities and occasionally venturing beyond the borders of those neighborhoods.

Whether it is hiking into the Emerald Triangle to uncover the black market marijuana groves or traveling to Kentucky for a rare glimpse into the lobbying efforts within the college admissions world, we go where the story takes us.

We believe all stories are local but some have a wide appeal. In an unprecedented collaboration, season ten’s “The Fight to Know” we partnered with KQED, the Orange County Register and forty other news organizations to report on California’s recently unsealed police misconduct records. The documentary took us across the state, investigating stories from big and small towns. The story was local in its focus but broad in its appeal to a statewide audience.

Going Where the Story Takes Us
One of the goals of season ten of Socal Connected was to host community conversations with our programs as the tent poles. We did just that with the Life in Plastic and Under Pressure episodes. Two documentaries were screened multiple times and were followed by panel discussions and lecture appearances between the production team, civic leaders, elected officials and the audience members. These events are important for several reasons, among them getting feedback on our reporting and learning what issues matter the most to our viewers and promoting community engagement.

Digital content is an essential tool for engaging with our audience. One particularly popular project was a digital quiz testing the public’s recycling knowledge. The interactive game was featured on our website and present on our social media platforms and was one of the most viewed videos of the year.

Digital consumption of our content will continue to increase as we find ways to build on our audience and attract new ones.
Adapting to a rapidly changing media environment while effectively providing public service journalism has required Socal Connected to expand onto multiple platforms. The traditional broadcast format is just one of several ways we reach consumers.

Socal Connected’s signature series, Props in a Minute is one of the most viewed digital content on the KCET site, generating close to a million views since its inception. Last year’s Immigration 101 digital series generated 295,000 views on Facebook and 360,000 page views on the KCET site.

Three of the five top Facebook videos in 2019 were Socal Connected stories, all involving breaking news events. The digital space is an effective and timely platform for the Socal Connected team to cover daily news and in depth stories that compliment rather than compete with the broadcast episodes.
Get to the bottom line before you reach the period. That’s a test we apply at Socal Connected. Whether it’s a thirty-second infographic or a half-hour investigative documentary, the story must clearly communicate a message that is in the public good.

Displaying our work is part of the storytelling process. Transparency is essential for maintaining legitimacy with viewers, especially when news is viewed with a disturbing level of distrust. During season ten’s investigations into the recycling industry and police misconduct, producers were filmed detailing their reporting processes, including how records were obtained and what they showed.

There has been an alarming decline in public support for journalism. Socal Connected is not immune from the crisis. It is critical local news is revitalized in the digital age. That means figuring out what topics and platforms bolster public viewership as well as innovative approaches to securing new revenue streams.
50% Increase in key content videos from 2017 to 2019
18% Growth in household ratings from 2018 to 2019
Second in household ranking among original episodic series in 2019
Second in overall ratings and streaming among original programs in 2019

Not slowing at all. In fact, stronger than ever

Season eight moved to a long form documentary series and it seems to resonate with the audience. It was the highest season debut in five years.

The series experienced a record high episodic rating in 2019, ten years after the show’s launch. The number demonstrates the program’s continued strength and popularity with audience members.

Our digital footprint increases year over year with particularly strong engagement and viewer growth on Facebook.

Social Connected continues to outperform nearly all of the other KCET original series on Twitter.
Looking Ahead

The Next Generation
Investing in the growth of the next generation of journalists is a priority. Our producers are mentors to journalism students at Daniel Pearl High School Journalism magnet in Encino and are frequent guest lecturers at local universities and high schools. Socal Connected has employed its previous two USC fellows. We are committed to fostering careers in the journalism profession.

Building Partnerships
Collaboration with other media partners not only strengthens our reporting, but heightens its visibility and impact. Joining forces with other media outlets generates journalism that is relevant, impactful and expansive. In future seasons we will continue to build quality partnerships that have the same goal in mind: a commitment to public service journalism.

Pushing Innovation
Local reporting is evolving. There are so many approaches and platforms available to tell stories and a public hungry to consume them. A cluttered media landscape and shrinking newsrooms make reaching that audience a challenge. That’s why we need to be implementing innovative ways to stand out among the crowd. Community engagement and solutions journalism, either online or in real life, are two we will emphasize going forward.
We hear it all of the time: There’s no other program around like Socal Connected. Nowhere else will you find a long form documentary series focused on local and regional original storytelling with this level of production quality and track record of impact journalism.

If Socal Connected goes away, there will be less eyes on those in power and fewer hands digging for the truth. This is how democracies die. We are needed now more than ever.

If you are interested in supporting Socal Connected, please reach out to PMG Social advancement associate director Jamie Carter at jcarter@pmgSocal.org.
The Ahmanson Foundation serves Los Angeles County by funding cultural projects in the arts and humanities, education at all levels, health care, programs related to homelessness and underserved populations as well as a wide range of human services. By supporting non-profit organizations that demonstrate sound fiscal management, efficient operation, and program integrity, the Foundation strives to enhance the quality of life and cultural legacy of the Los Angeles community.

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Socal Connected thanks its supporters throughout the years. Their generous contributions have kept public media journalism alive in Southern California.