racially profiled?” Doucette, looking uncomfortable in his chair, adamantly denied it.

McKend regularly reports on immigrants and refugees, and has spotlighted a number of artists and musicians of color. “She takes on stories that would be ignored otherwise,” said Traci Griffith, an associate professor of media studies at Saint Michael’s College. “She’s definitely playing a role in this market in particular.”

Garrity agreed. “I think Eva has added a perspective to our newsroom that was possibly lacking, not overtly or intentionally,” he said.

Not everyone appreciates the addition, however. “I have also heard complaints that she does too many of that type of story,” Griffith said.

“I am aware of the fact that sometimes, because I like those issues, it will be a lot of me covering those issues,” McKend said. She sometimes passes story tips and ideas along to colleagues, she noted: “I realize just because I’m interested in these issues surrounding people of color, doesn’t mean I have to do them all.”

McKend has always been drawn to the subject of beauty as it relates to women of color. In one of her college columns, she wrote, “Black women continue to have minimal representation in the media especially in all of our diverse hues, hair textures and body types. We all know that we very rarely see dark-skinned women, full-figured women and women who sport their God-given hair.”

One reason she originally pursued a career in television, McKend said, was to “challenge traditional perceptions of beauty.” Wearing the wig at WCAX, “in a way, it felt like I was not being my authentic self,” she said, but she didn’t feel ready to lose it.

Then, this January, after getting dumped by her boyfriend, McKend decided to take the wig off. “I was just like, ‘I want to be free. I need to shed the weight. I need to shed the pain.’”

“Everybody seems to have an opinion about it,” she said, with good-natured exasperation. “I get 10 emails a day about how I changed my hair.”

Most of the feedback she’s received from Vermonters has been positive; parents have thanked her for setting an example for their children.

“Especially being black in Vermont, I want to be a role model. I want little black girls in the community to look up to me and think they can be on television, too,” McKend said.

At times, that can be a burden. “None of my white colleagues have parents coming up to them in the City Market telling them, ‘What you’re doing with your hair is really making an impact on my child,’” McKend noted. “It’s such an honor, but it’s a lot to have to carry.”

She wonders: What will those viewers think if she decides to wear a wig, or a weave, again?

McKend is currently in South Africa, volunteering with a nonprofit that hosts media workshops for students in a Cape Town township. That country is also still coming to terms with black hair, she noted.

Case in point: Students of color at the Pretoria High School for Girls have been protesting rules that prohibit them from wearing their hair naturally.

While WCAX has been supportive, McKend said — unlike other stations, it doesn’t impose rules regarding appearance — the anchor isn’t beyond second-guessing herself.

Appearance matters in television, and the medium demands uniformity, she noted. “That’s what we’re told in the industry. You’re supposed to look the same. Don’t confuse the viewers.”

Since going natural, McKend has heard from some of her black journalist mentors in bigger media markets. “Out of concern for the health of my career, they say things like, ‘We know you’re discouraged. We know things are hard right now ... but going natural is not the answer. You’re only going to make it harder for yourself.’”

Griffith agreed that McKend’s choice comes with risks. “It declares her difference. It declares her blackness,” she observed. “I’m proud of her for doing it for herself.” Griffith said. “Whereas a white reporter may be able to blend and fade into a crowd, Eva will always stand out.”

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Disclosure: WCAX and Seven Days are media partners. Alicia Freese and other Seven Days reporters regularly appear on “The :30.”