

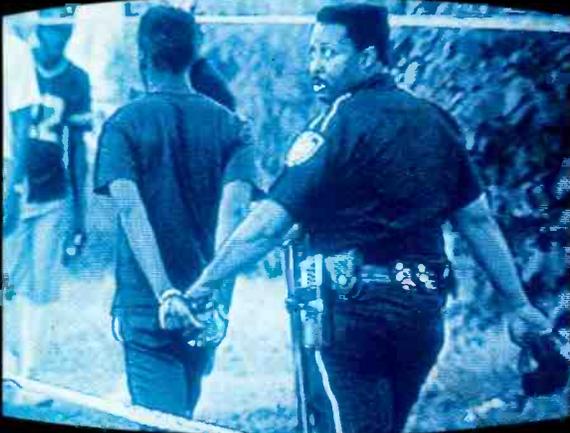
**IN FOCUS: MSO Balancing Acts  
.....  
Battling the TV News Gender Gap**

# CHANNELS

SEPTEMBER 24, 1990

THE BUSINESS OF COMMUNICATION'S

\$5.00



## THE KILLING BEAT

The daily tally mounts: another shooting, another death, another report to file. It's a numbing routine for local news teams—and their viewers. Facing a rising wave of violent crime, stations wonder how to make sense of it all.

KSLA reporter Murv Seymour (bottom)  
on the scene in Shreveport, La.

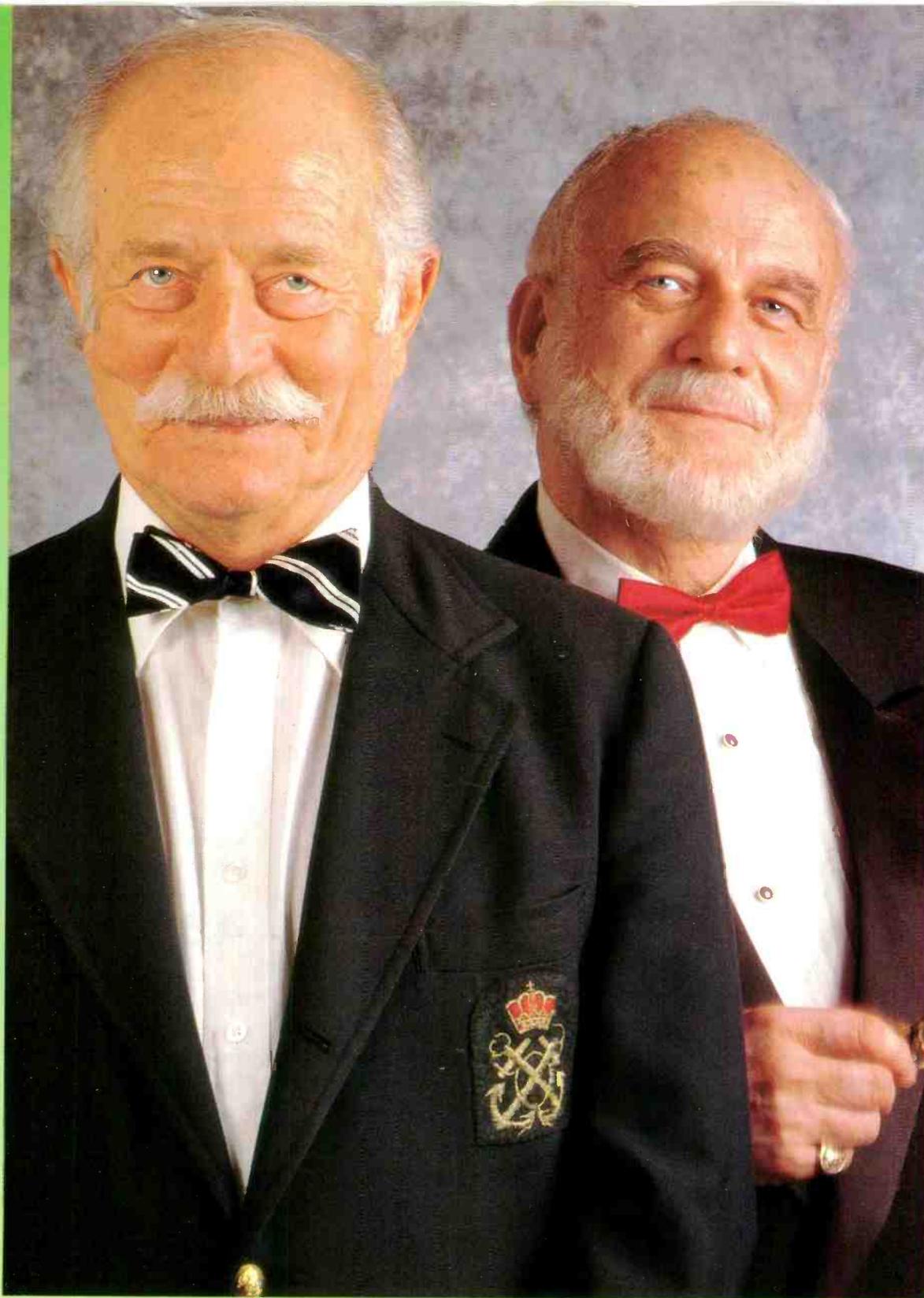
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THE BUSINESS OF COMMUNICATIONS

VOLUME 10, NUMBER 13

SEPTEMBER 24, 1990

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STORY

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# TWO LITTLE WORDS THAT DOUBLED ACQUISITION IN DAYTON:



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## News Addictions

**A** drug dealer opens fire, a bystander takes a stray bullet or two, and the bloody crime scene leads the evening news.

Too often, that's the whole story on TV. Life on "the killing beat," as we've termed it, is a numbing ritual of flashing red lights, body bags and grieving relatives. In the crush of daily deadlines, TV reporters find themselves careening from one random killing to the next, rarely finding time to pull back and put the acts of violence into their broader social context. *Channels* senior editor Steven Beschloss takes a critical look at the message television newscasts are sending viewers in our cover story, "TV's Life of Crime." His story will surprise anyone who still thinks discussions about how to cover violent crime only take place in big-city newsrooms. For while we found concern in the expected places—Washington, Detroit, New York—reporters in cities such as Waco, Texas, and Shreveport, La., are also grappling with community cries of exploitation, even racism, and questions about how to get to the heart of the crime story.

Our special section on the news business continues with a timely look at the status of women in TV news by senior editor Janet Stilson, who covers TV journalism on a regular basis for *Channels*. Despite readily identifiable gains—a number of high-visibility women anchors and correspondents, a handful of women in news-director slots in major markets—most women in the news business remain frustrated by a lack of opportunity and recognition, Stilson finds. The contest for on-air positions still seems too much like a beauty pageant, they say, and the mostly male executive suites bode ill for change. All this nearly 20 years after changes in the Equal Employment Opportunity regulations were supposed to remove the discriminatory barriers that held women back.

Our special report on news is timed to coincide with the gathering this week of the Radio-Television News Directors Association in San Jose. You won't find a conference schedule inside or stories about the RTNDA sessions. That's not what we're here for. What you will find is analysis of the issues and attitudes that shape the news business today. And stories that go out into the field and find examples of the way TV journalists and news executives are reacting to the changing TV landscape. That's how *Channels* approaches the myriad industry gatherings that take place throughout the year, and that's part of what sets us apart from the other television magazines.

Finally, cable readers especially should take note of our "In Focus" section this issue: three stories that pick apart the MSO business, including a tale of two systems that just can't seem to get the hang of customer service, and a look at both sides of the pay-per-view debate over discounting. Studios are loathe to sell their wares so cheaply, but some MSOs' results with lower prices are just too good to ignore.



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## Going Gets Easier, Byrne Gets Going

KCAL g.m. weathers storm, then leaves.

Few eyebrows would have been raised had Blake Byrne resigned as general manager of KCAL, L.A.'s Disney-owned indie, in July, when the station was under fire. But he resigned August 20, apparently for his own reasons, when KCAL's ratings were up and it had recovered from a series of PR snafus.

The station's problems had begun with a much-reported series of production snags and technical glitches that followed KCAL's March 5 launch of its \$30 million, three-hour nightly prime-time news experiment *Prime 9 News*, which most critics panned.

Byrne was also forced to suffer through "The Week from Hell" in July. On July 5, a pair of stories broke in the *Los Angeles Times* reprimanding KCAL. First, it was rapped on

the knuckles for airing old *Dick Tracy* cartoons with negative ethnic stereotyping in the characters Joe Jitsu and Go-Go Gomez. Second, it drew heat for using June's destructive fires in Santa Barbara as a marketing tool. KCAL had taken out an ad in a Santa Barbara newspaper touting its fire coverage in an appeal to viewers to pressure Cox Cable to add the station.

Then came a July 11 column from *Times* TV critic Howard Rosenberg that chastised KCAL entertainment reporter John Corcoran for using the feed from a CNN story about the death of the drive-in theater. It had been written and voiced by CNN reporter Gloria Hillard, but Corcoran took it as his own, re-voicing Hillard's words nearly verbatim without giving credit. (KCAL pays a

hefty fee to receive the CNN feeds, however, and KCAL said what Corcoran did was within the letter of the law.)

In any case, KCAL had largely put its growing pains and judgmental errors behind it when Byrne announced that he'd had enough. KCAL was suddenly enjoying huge ratings increases for its prime-time news block, thanks in no small part to interest in the escalating Persian Gulf crisis. And the media hunters had buried the hatchet for the time being.

Yet all was apparently not well for Byrne. Much of his displeasure was said to be tied to



Byrne: finished with Disney.

Randy Reiss, executive vice president of Walt Disney Studios, who in early August assumed a larger role within the studio that included more active participation overseeing KCAL's day-to-day operations.

The local trade press quoted unnamed sources in reporting that Byrne could no longer tolerate the meddling of Reiss and, to a lesser extent, Walt Disney Studios president Richard Frank in the running of *Prime 9 News*.

Byrne hints that there's a larger story waiting to be told. For now, though, he insists that he merely decided it was time to move on, saying, "I'm very proud of what we've accomplished and what we've achieved."

For his part, Reiss says, "I never in fact had any disputes with Blake. I don't think I've made more than three or four meetings directly with the news people since the thing went on. I'm much less involved than everyone thinks."

Reiss says Byrne, who came out of retirement to run the station, simply felt the job was done. RAY RICHMOND

## The Ad Tax Returns With Sharp Teeth

A troubling proposal in Pennsylvania.

Plans to tax advertising are surfacing in state and federal legislatures, but the most threatening, both in impact and immediacy, could be introduced this fall in Pennsylvania. There, state Rep. Robert Reber (R-Pottstown) wants to raise funds for mass transit through a 6-percent tax on gross ad receipts.

Reber's bill would tax businesses that sell time and space. In a letter to colleagues, Reber states that his measure, set for a fall introduction, would raise \$148 million its first year.

Similar schemes are cropping up all over. Cash-poor states need revenues, and leg-

islators turn to advertising not only for the money involved, but because the taxes can be sold to voters as socially beneficial. In California a recent plan to tax tobacco ads was pitched as a way to make cigarette companies pay for tobacco-related disease. The measure died in committee, but the sponsor plans to reintroduce it and might include alcohol ads. A state tobacco ad tax could raise \$10 million yearly; with alcohol and its broadcast spending, the total is \$90 million.

The Pennsylvania tax is similar to levies imposed in Arizona and Iowa. Both were repealed (Arizona's during the

early '80s, Iowa's back in the '70s) after the states' ad industries declined. In July 1987, Florida passed a tax that hit all state ads regardless of origination. The tax was repealed six months later after ad groups canceled Florida conventions, "and, responding to the market, advertisers started pulling dollars out of the state," says Dennis Brown, executive director of the State Advertising Coalition, a national group that tracks legislation. The SAC and the American Advertising Federation are campaigning vigorously against ad taxes; the AAF takes the threats so seriously that it raised dues 20 percent to fund the opposition effort.

In Pennsylvania, broadcasters, cable operators, publishers, retailers and ad executives met after the Reber proposal was drafted in June, at a gathering hosted by the Pennsylv-

nia Cable Television Association. They decided to wait until October, when the legislature reconvenes, to take action.

Brown says the bill would exempt national retailers and hit smaller, mostly local, businesses. Thus stations would be raising rates for local ads just when many are trying to attract local clients to TV.

Such a tax would have more tangible impact than federal proposals to make ad costs only partially deductible, or to require that they be amortized over periods longer than one year. Any such laws are far off, and subject to many changes before implementation. Measures that promise forceful regional impact—such as Pennsylvania's—cause greater concern. The trouble now is that "We're facing more of these every year," says Wally Snyder, executive vice president of the AAF.

CHERYL HEUTON

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# It Wasn't All Goodwill

**Life can be tough for systems that resist Turner's cross-promotional steamroller.**

**BY ANDREW GROSSMAN**

**I**t's hard to say who had a rougher Goodwill Games, sprinter Carl Lewis or Michael Callaghan, vice president/cable for E.W. Scripps Co. While Lewis was losing the 100-meter dash, Callaghan was explaining to irate subscribers why Scripps-Howard Cable had elected not to bring the TBS Super-Station event to S-H's 580,000 subs.

Some S-H subs were shocked to find their local system didn't carry Goodwill even though spots promoting the Games had run on all four Turner networks. Making matters worse, in Sacramento a cable guide mistakenly listed the area's Scripps system as carrying the event.

As cable networks increasingly snap up high-profile sporting events, they pass on the costs to their affiliates. In some cases—as with the Goodwill Games and ESPN's NFL schedule—systems can decline the package and avoid the accompanying surcharge. But they then must weather the wrath of fans who've been deluged with promotions for the event. When it's a Turner event, operators have to contend with a four-network cross-promotional steamroller promising sports to expectant viewers. The next likely victims of viewer backlash courtesy of Turner are those systems not carrying TNT and its new nine-game NFL package.

"[Ted Turner's] got a product he's trying to sell," says Wayne Vowell, S-H's v.p. of marketing and promotion. "If you're going to make a tough decision like not carrying punch-through programming—if that's in fact what it is—you've got to be able to deal with it."

Vowell admits a few S-H systems were in fact ill-prepared to deal with angry subs who saw Goodwill ads but no

Games: "Much of our problem was self-inflicted. We were not aggressive enough in terms of communicating to consumers the real facts about . . . why we elected not to carry it."

Other operators agree that Turner's ability to cross-promote makes it nearly impossible to reject discretionary programming despite its expense. "Usually,



While ESPN's games were optional, affiliates had to air TNT's costly NFL package.

it directly impacts our decision as to whether we will carry incremental product, primarily because we're very concerned about consumer perception, especially in the current environment," says Patrick Mellon, vice president of programming at Telecable Corp. "Because of the threat and reality of

cross-promotion, we tend to be fairly bullish about carrying any additional programming that will enhance value."

TBS pleads innocent, saying cross-promotion is used to drive viewership, not as a weapon against wayward operators. "Naturally, it's a consequence, but we've got the mission on the front end to drive that viewership," explains Robert Thalman, vice president of Turner Network Sales. "We happen to have the tools to do it. [Secondarily], it may very well cause irritation for those that don't have the product."

Unlike ESPN, TNT does not give operators a choice in carrying NFL games: Either pay more than 35 cents a sub—a ten-cent fee hike—or do without the network. But ESPN, though it doesn't have four networks, can also wield some promotional clout.

"We purchased a company back when ESPN was putting on the NFL. It had not signed up for NFL games and the night of the first exhibition game we heard it very loud and clear that our subs expected the games to be on. We put it on the next day," says Robert Russman, senior vice president of marketing and programming at Simmons Communications.

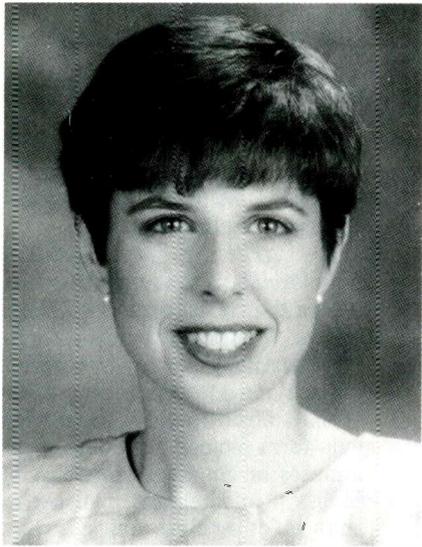
So, what's an operator to do? "You have to learn to say no. You can't be intimidated by what the Turners or the ESPNs of the world might do," Vowell says. In warning operators they had better be prepared for the fallout, he advises preemptive, proactive solutions.

S-H set up a toll-free hot line—manned by the MSO's top executives, including Callaghan—for disgruntled subs who didn't get satisfaction from their local system. Vowell told callers that the \$580,000 cost for Goodwill would be better spent on improved customer service or adding a new channel.

At S-H's Chattanooga (Tenn.) Cable TV, general manager Paul Maynard took the offensive. First, he told customers about the MSO's decision in July bill stuffers. Amid concern about rising rates in the midst of a refranchising, the system pointed out that it was saving subs money. At the same time, S-H deeply discounted new pay-service subscriptions through December.

Still, the 70,000-sub system received 500 calls, of which about 50 were irate. "It was something we had to deal with," shrugs Maynard. "I congratulate Turner."

In the end, Vowell says operators realize TBS is just doing its job, and that operators better get busy doing theirs: "Some of these operators don't make the right decisions and they're not the most consumer-sensitive group right now. We will be. We're evolving." ●



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# Show And Sell

**Stations of every stripe are giving in to the lure of program-length commercials.**

**BY AL JAFFE**

Cynics call it "Trash for Cash," and stations dub it "The Money We Hate to Take." They're talking about infomercials, a.k.a. long-form TV marketing, direct-response program advertising, paid programming, you name it. But despite the pejorative appellation, infomercials are now gaining clearances on more quality stations, in more time periods, than ever before.

Infomercials have long found a home on shaky stations desperately in need of revenue. But now old-line network affiliates who would never allow them in the house are opening their doors, if not their arms, to paid programming—or at least to some of the better-behaved versions. The converts include the NBC O&Os in New York and Chicago, who are accepting infomercials with the smile of a man biting a bullet.

Chickie Bucco, vice president and director of direct-response ad sales for Katz TV affiliates (the rep's American and Continental divisions), reports that 85 percent of her stations will accept infomercials, up from about 50 percent two years ago. That's 85 percent of 170 stations, a good cross-section of the U.S. TV community.

Some examples of the way the wind is blowing: Times Mirror's KDFW Dallas-Ft. Worth started running its first half-hour infomercials in early summer. Rick Thompson, national sales manager, says he had been getting more requests to clear infomercials "as the field mushroomed. But after I ran them up the flagpole, management turned them down. Then we got new management."

When Jeff Rosser became general manager at the beginning of the year,

Thompson got the okay. The first entry to be aired was *Will Your Kids Make the Grade?*, which hawks an \$87.85 set of videotapes that aid children's study habits and is placed by American Telecast in Philadelphia. At press time, the half-hour commercial was still running Saturdays at midnight.

It was picked out of a pile of tapes because "it fit the bill," says Thompson. "It's in good taste, has good-quality production and is for a good cause."



Synchronal is placing *Now You're Cooking*, with pitchman Christopher Hewett, for fall.

KDFW also started running a half-hour pitch on Sunday mornings for Soloflex exercise equipment, a show placed by a number of agencies. The ad was pulled quickly, apparently because it wasn't selling Soloflexes.

Another affiliate, WHO Des Moines, Iowa, began running weekly infomercials regularly last June, though it had aired special-case, one-time-only pitches previously. Tom Heston, general sales manager of the NBC affil, reports that the station rotates a number of different programs (mostly featuring

kitchen equipment) Sunday mornings at 11. The programs are placed by Synchronal, which bills itself as "the nation's largest buyer of half-hour time." Heston says bluntly that the station accepts infomercials because, "We need the revenue." But he acknowledges that the program director "has a lot to say" about which programs go on the air.

The growing respectability of infomercials is also evidenced by their use on the Chicago and New York NBC O&Os, though both outlets approach the situation gingerly. Nevertheless, on at least one summer weekend this year, WNBC aired four-and-a-half hours of long-form pitches, including 90 straight minutes on Sunday afternoon. William Moll, v.p. and general manager, explains that infomercials are currently an experiment at the station. The network's loss of the *Baseball Game of the Week*, he says, left a big hole to fill, and the paid programming suddenly made more sense. Except for real estate shows, however, Moll doubts infomercials have a great future on WNBC.

At WMAQ in Chicago, which also has been carrying real estate shows, sales director Lisa Churchville says the station began testing other infomercials last spring, but is "not really seeking" long-form commercial programs.

If growth estimates are accurate, stations won't have to seek out infomercial revenue—it'll come banging on the door. While predictions vary, Jerry Baldwin, media director of Synchronal, says his company's market share, "40 percent of the business," provides a good base for total estimates. These put long-form media revenue at \$240 million this year, almost 80 percent higher than 1989—which was, in turn, up 80 percent from 1988. Station consultant Richard Block, who's putting together a panel on infomercials for January's NATPE conference, estimates that long-form marketing will account for about

\$250 million in TV station and cable revenue this year.

Synchronal also estimates consumer sales from infomercials at \$250 million in '88, \$450 million in '89 and \$800 million this year. What explains the growth? Katz's Bucco says it's because the genre is projecting a glossier sheen, production-wise, and stations are feeling more comfortable about running program-length pitches. ●

Al Jaffe is a New York-based freelancer who writes frequently about TV sales.



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# TV'S LIFE

**Local television news risks becoming a scorecard of death and destruction. As violent crime mounts, stations large and small are asking how much more they—and viewers—can take.**

**BY STEVEN BESCHLOSS**

**I**t was Easter Sunday when the scanner squawked, relaying news of a shooting at Shreveport's Bill Berry Park. KSLA reporter Murv Seymour, working a weekend schedule, went out to cover the story.

Another shooting, Seymour thought as he left the newsroom. It's just another shooting.

It had been a tough year for Shreveport, La., population 217,000. The number of homicides was up from 29 in 1988 to 51 last year—reaching a level three times the national murder rate. The L.A.-based Bloods and Crips had moved in and set up local operations. Drive-by shootings had become almost commonplace. Even the South Park mall and a local McDonald's were not immune from gang attacks. Anytime there was a murder, the local TV stations would cover it, but crime—including violent crime—had become almost routine.

Seymour, who came to Shreveport last year after working as a photographer in Baton Rouge, La., had covered his share of shootings. The 25-year-old black reporter from Madison, Wis., had even reported on the local activities of the Ku Klux Klan. To keep himself sane, he helped coach varsity basketball at Fair Park High.

But Seymour was ill-prepared for what he found on Easter Sunday. "It was pandemonium," he recalls. More than a dozen police cars were parked near the community center. Teenagers were running and screaming. One of his Fair Park players was crying, another was clutching his girlfriend.

"What's going on?" he asked, approaching the students.

"That's Doug on the ground," they told him.

Beyond the roped-off police perimeter was Doug Williams, an all-city, all-district basketball player at Fair Park, a popular senior with several college scholarships locked up. He was moaning—and struggling for his life. "I freaked out," Seymour remembers.

Williams had come to Bill Berry Park for the first time that day to shoot hoops. Two young men had gotten into a fight and one decided to settle their differences with a gun. Seven or eight shots were fired. Williams was hit in the back of the head by an errant bullet.

Seymour, now at his side, urged his player to hold on. He was still breathing, still moaning, as the paramedics lifted him onto a stretcher and into an ambulance. But not for long.

Seymour returned to the station, unsure if he could write the story. Better me than anyone else, he figured, beginning the first of four stories in as many days. "I cried after every story I did."

"Months later when I watch these stories," Seymour wrote in a recent note, "it's still very hard."

Covering crime has never been easy. Any day a reporter might awaken to face a brutal killing, an angry crowd, grieving families, hostile cops, body bags, blood and guts. This was never a job for the weak of heart; those working the hardened streets of urban America could always be assured of a daily diet of violence.

"The truth is, this is a jungle," says Mike Taibbi, an investigative reporter for WCBS in New York, coauthor of a book about the infamous Tawana Brawley case and one of the city's smartest street reporters. "I'm as cynical as they get about New York City. I think it's a pretty unlivable place. Not only did we have over 1,900 homicides last year, we had over 40 accidental innocent victim



homicides—innocent bystanders, babies in carriages. The way the criminal element tends to multiply and diversify is astounding."

Yet while New York and L.A., Washington, D.C., and Detroit remain familiar flash points for fear and loathing—crime-ridden places that many people in suburban and rural areas avoid with pride—drugs and gangs have increasingly changed all that. Today smaller cities and towns nationwide, once seemingly quiet islands removed from the harshest forms of social disorder, are struggling to find ways to regain the peace; places like Shreveport, Waco, Texas, and Little Rock, Ark., are finding

# E OF CRIME



Multi-story coverage of the shooting and death of basketball star Bob Williams ensured he would not be just another statistic in Shreveport, La.

themselves dealing with Bloods, Crips or other gangs, and the inevitable violence that attends their business operations.

Despite the current crime wave, 1980 was actually the most murderous year per capita for the nation in the last decade, according to the FBI Uniform Crime Reports. Yet violent crime—murder, rape, robbery and aggravated assault—has grown more frequent throughout this period, and homicide has reached its highest levels in many urban areas large and small, often concentrating in the poorest, most despairing parts of town.

Television stations, armed with polls that place drugs and crime at the top of people's fears, are feeding the per-

ceived public appetite for these stories. And as the federal government has pushed its war on drugs, news organizations—hungry for ratings and determined to cover the news for less—often provide a willing outlet and heighten the fevered pitch. "There's not a station in the United States today that's number one in its market, be it in New York City or Biloxi, Miss., that's not number one in its coverage of crime," Bob Warfield, former news director of WDIV in Detroit, told the *Detroit Free Press* last year.

People in Shreveport used to think that Baton Rouge and New Orleans were the danger spots in Louisiana. But 40 people

have already been killed in Shreveport this year, up 43 percent over 1989, with no obvious end in sight. This despite Operation Thor earlier this year, a major police effort covered by local stations that led to more than 200 arrests. "My husband is terrified of Shreveport," says Yvonne Pittenger, assistant news director at KSLA for the past 15 months, "and this is a man from New Orleans. I think it's because of the daily pounding here."

Sensitive to a community's pathologies, local news is bound to reflect the growing deterioration in the streets. But the day-in, day-out reality of crime has pushed TV newsrooms to grapple with the shape and the limits of that coverage. Much like their larger urban counterparts, TV stations in smaller cities are demonstrating that crime may not pay, but it is a ticket onto the evening news.

What were once typically Big City questions—How many homicides do we cover? How many shootings? Do we show pictures of bodies? Are we glamorizing subjects? How much crime do viewers want to see?—are being asked in most newsrooms these days. And in the hunger for live pictures and breaking news, and the intensified economic pressure to do it on the cheap, reporters and news executives are asking themselves how they can avoid the wrath of disgruntled viewers and the cynical fatigue caused by a mounting crush of crime.

"How many times can you show police kicking in the door and people getting arrested?" asks Mike Wendland, an investigative reporter for WDIV in Detroit. "I've done enough of that." Says Shreveport's Pittenger, "It got to the point where if it was a drive-by [shooting], it was just a drive-by. You get that numbness. I think the viewer gets that numbness too."

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In sheer volume of violent crime, no city compares with New York. With 1,905 homicides last year, projections of more than 2,300 this year, a rash of infant killings from stray bullets and an ever-present litany of bizarre and gruesome deaths—one Nebraska couple recently moved to New York, and two weeks later the husband was arrested after feeding their dead infant to a German shepherd—the city represents an extreme case of how tough it can be to find sense and order amidst the chaos.

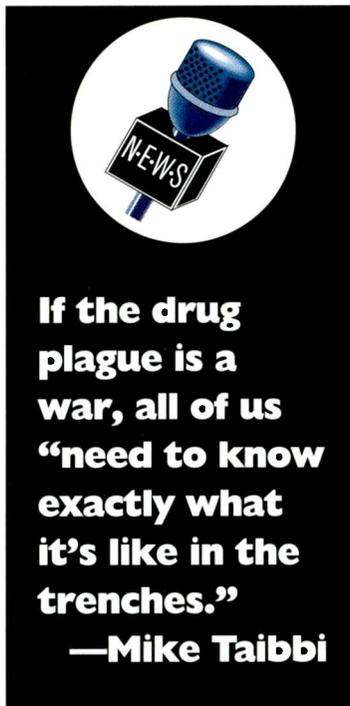
The local television stations rarely provide the broader perspective that might ease the undercurrent of fear that exists in the city. ("It's unbelievable," peppy WCBS anchor Ernie Anastos tells viewers after pictures of a baby's blood-stained walker, "that Rayvon Jamieson's death came just hours after the burying of another young girl . . . who was killed by an errant bullet.") More often—and WABC is by all accounts the worst offender—they exacerbate it by loading up the nightly news with story after story of death and destruction.

Note the eight top stories in the first nine minutes of an 11 P.M. WABC newscast in July: the Zodiac serial killer, after four murders, is still on the loose; a 4-year-old Brooklyn boy is killed by a runaway stolen car; another car spins out of control and kills two people; a bus accident; pictures of the Central Park jogger's bloodied and torn clothes, from the trial in progress; a look back on a woman beaten to death—"The Bat Murder"; crying words from friends of a dead Brooklyn man; an impending judge's decision about the fate of a Vietnam vet who killed two people—"A Soldier's Story." All of this on the same day that the U.S. Senate voted for a new crime bill that would ban assault weapons. Titillation over education. "They never look at the broader issues," one veteran TV reporter complains about WABC. "You look at the ratings and you wonder why they are number one with that garbage."

But crime coverage, notes Taibbi, "is disproportionate because it's an easy hit. Crime jumps out at you. It's got body bags and police cars and crying survivors and all that easy stuff. . . . Is it oversimplified? Yes, certainly. But that throws down the gauntlet for all those people carrying press passes to find another way to do it."

Taibbi is in the unusual and enviable position of working outside the daily straitjacket of New York TV news. Hired by WCBS to pursue in-depth pieces, he will sometimes spend months developing a project. He understands that his liberty requires him to bring perspective rarely found on the evening news.

For an extraordinary six-part series last fall, Taibbi and producer Anna Sims-Phillips spent three-and-a-half weeks in the drug-raddled Bushwick section of Brooklyn, where anti-drug advocate Maria Hernandez had recently been assassinated. They talked to drug dealers, heroin addicts, prostitutes and local residents, and gathered harrowing footage of crack dens and users getting their next fix. As graphic as the pictures were, it was the perspective itself that may be most instructive—the acknowledgement that the hard work was still to be done *after* the reactive stories about the shooting and funeral.



**If the drug plague is a war, all of us "need to know exactly what it's like in the trenches."**

**—Mike Taibbi**



"What struck us most about the aftermath of anti-drug fighter Maria Hernandez was how clear it was that nothing seemed likely to change," Taibbi intoned in the opening segment in his brooding, sometimes self-conscious style. "Even with the predictable saturation presence of the police and the media, the drug dealers and the consumers who define Bushwick pursue their lethal commerce without a second's pause."

After a brutally explicit segment in which a heroin addict struggled unsuccessfully 11 times to find a free vein and went into convulsions before stumbling away, Taibbi broke down the typical boundaries between viewers and TV news by describing the station's internal decision-making. "There was a lot of discussion in our newsroom about whether to broadcast that sequence as it happened, as you just saw it," he explained, sitting at the Channel 2 newsdesk. Seasoned journalists found it painful to watch, he said, and not everyone agreed the sequence should be shown. "But if the drug plague has now escalated to the status of war, then all of us who pay for the war with dollars, if not our children and our lives, need to know exactly what it's like in the trenches."

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Crime and courts reporter Marcus Cooper of KWTX in Waco, Texas, knew it was time to rethink his coverage when young black and Hispanic residents in north Waco angrily pelted his car with rocks. The message, repeated on several occasions, was clear: Why don't you go do drug stories in another, whiter, middle-class part of town?

Cooper, himself black, had begun

covering drug stories last year after noticing dope-dealing on the streets near where he lives. The shooting of a 17-year-old boy at the Sherman Manor apartment complex in east Waco, reportedly caught by gunfire between a drug dealer and a drug user, begat greater police interest and spurred more stories. Soon drug busts were coming down twice a week or more, and Cooper would often join the police. "As it kept snowballing, we kept doing more stories," Cooper says. By the summer, the 25-year-old reporter estimates he had aired at least two dozen neighborhood drug stories. He had reached a limit.

"People would say, 'Why are you coming here and not to the other side of town?' We got a lot of resentment. . . . When residents start throwing rocks at you and telling you to get out, you start thinking, 'I don't need this.'"

Both Cooper and KWTX news director Rick Bradfield understood the criticism. "The pictures we tend to show are white officers arresting black people," says Bradfield. "It creates the impression that it's all black people who are using drugs." In response, Bradfield says his CBS station would occasionally air stories with white buyers or the arrest of a white supplier. But showing the white link after airing 20 arrests of black street dealers and users could not compensate. "The problem," says Bradfield, "is that the police don't tend to raid white middle-class people and pull them out of their homes. Is that because it's not there—or the police are afraid of losing their jobs?"

There lies the oft-voiced catch-22. We'd like to air more stories that show the range of drug use and dealing, stations



sizing—"You know the old saying, 'Tough times don't last, tough people do'"—but he knows that KARK and Little Rock are paying a price for the limitations. His frustration is clear: "We're just giving [crime] very cursory coverage. We're just scratching the obvious. . . . I don't have three people I can spare [for longer pieces]. We ought to be doing more."

One KARK reporter given room to pursue enterprise stories is Mel Hanks, a 16-year veteran of Little Rock TV. ("I have a master's degree," he says. "They know I'm not going to get sued for libel.") He has clearly proven himself through persistence. By his own account, he's aired 239 stories since 1987 on the death of two teenage boys run over by a train—"and I still haven't gotten to the bottom of this." His reporting questioned the state medical examiner, who maintained the boys were so stoned on marijuana that they didn't hear the train whistle or see the beams of light shining on them. He found that there were stab wounds on the victims, but neither an additional coroner's report nor an eight-month grand jury trial resolved the apparent homicide.

"I can't stand to let something stand by," says Hanks. "I'm a lot like a pit bull. I can't stand to let it go. If it doesn't lead to something, it's a failure."

Hanks is granted days, sometimes a week, between stories, a fact that he acknowledges with gratitude. But he is unsatisfied when neither his station nor the competition takes the time to explore underlying causes. "Just covering a murder for murder's sake is so easy," he says. "The public needs to know there's a reason why our society is exploding. People expect more from us." But, unfortunately, much of the time viewers have had to settle for less.

Hanks himself did a two-part series on a crack house in a mostly black area last November, yet the report relied heavily on comments from a white resident living several houses away and was shot with Hanks at a distance down the block.

"Most black communities get a raw deal when it comes to 'drugs,'" complains the Rev. Hezekiah Stewart, founder of Watershed, a Little Rock rehab group concerned with drugs, alcohol and crime, and a November candidate for the city board of directors. "Although some neighborhoods get branded as drug areas, very few have the resources to manage the business. The community itself is not responsible for the drugs getting there. I wish there were more contextual reporting."

The criticism cuts to the heart of the conflict facing local TV news organizations. With violent crime at its highest levels in more than a decade, it's the responsibility of news organizations to keep track of the trend. But with an unending flood of murder and mayhem,

Our medium is pictures," says Bob Steel, news director at NBC affiliate KARK in Little Rock, Ark. Steel has also had to defend himself against charges of unfair coverage. "If you can show me a crack house in Pleasant Valley—one of our nicer neighborhoods—yes, I'll go there," he says.

But Steel's photographers and reporters are rarely going to Pleasant Valley, where mean streets are hard to find. "We are sort of concentrating our coverage on crime," Steel says. "You can't ignore it. We had steered away from that in the latter part of the '80s, but we are seeing more violent crime and I personally think a lot of it is drug-related."

When a viewer called in earlier this year about crack-dealing in his neighborhood, Steel sent out a crew to capture the scene. The result was a "flood of calls," Steel says, from viewers wanting KARK to come to their neighborhoods. But there were other calls and letters of complaint, too, expressing resentment that the station's attention was triggered by crime.

"It's troubling that people think we're being discriminatory," Steel says. "I can tell you, I really didn't believe that the racism issue was there." The decision to drop a black anchor from the KARK newscast and a subsequent speaking engagement before the Arkansas chapter of the National Association of Black Journalists—"I was eaten alive"—underscored to Steel how wrong he had been. "I am seeing that this is really building in this country," he says.

But Steel echoes other news executives with his response to criticism of crime stories that focus on black arrests. Even as they grapple with the issue, their words are typically reflexive. "We're not making this stuff up," Steel says. "We're just doing our job." Don't kill the messenger. They're just telling what's going on. But are they?

KARK operates with a newsroom staff of 37, down from 47 when Steel came to KARK from the competing ABC affiliate, KATV, five-and-a-half years ago. The budget is lower and the beat system has been modified. There used to be a full-time crime reporter. "Today that guy might be at the opening of a new business," Steel acknowledges. Steel tries to be philosophical about the down-

say, but the problem is most evident in poor, typically black neighborhoods where the activity concentrates outdoors. The police make their sweeps there, reporters follow and get pictures, then the black community complains that stations are unfairly focusing on it. "A large-scale drug bust? Sure we'd cover that," says Cooper. "But a house in a middle-class neighborhood? That's more difficult [to find]."

In some sense, the reaction begs the more basic issue. It's not that crime is covered—indeed some urban residents complain bitterly that the crime problems in their neighborhoods are ignored by the media—but that little else gets much attention. And that can leave the skewed perception that crime is the central activity taking place in the black community. "The only time we as journalists go into the inner city," William Kovach, curator of the Nieman Foundation, told a panel in Boston after the Stuart murder hoax, "is on the backs of the emergency crews—the firemen, the cops, the ambulances—and what we report is essentially chaos and disorder."

In the last few months, KWTX has begun to see gang activity about 40 miles southwest of Waco in Killeen. The police won't confirm it, but several drive-by shootings there strongly suggest such a connection to Bradfield. He worries about widening the rift with the local community. "If we're not careful how we handle that, we might fuel more rivalry [between gangs]," he says. "We have a need not to glamorize the gangs—and be real aware of pointing fingers at any group." But he's not about to stop showing interesting video.

The shadow of WCBS photographer Don Janney's camera is seen here on the back of reporter Mike Tappan as they climb into a crowd to capture the arrest of two violent female drug addicts.

particularly in places like Detroit and New York, the daily coverage quickly becomes repetitious, often leaving the viewer feeling helpless and none the wiser. "How many more touching scripts can I write and how many more dissolves into the crying wife can I do and make it different than the last 11 times?" asks John Miller, a crime reporter for 15 years in New York, currently at WNBC. "Covering the murder of the day in a city like New York . . . doesn't do people much of a service."

The pressure for reporters to file daily reports ensures that even the best ones will lean on boilerplate: a shot of the flashing lights, pictures of grieving family and friends, a shot of the crime scene and back to the station. It's a cynical business. Miller describes the conundrum: "The producer says, 'Context is wonderful, but I have a two-and-a-half hour bag to fill. What have you got today?' I say, 'But I'm working on the big picture.' [The producer responds,] 'The big picture can wait for another day.'"

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sweeps and boosted ratings.

Detroit has not suffered from a dearth of stories to tell. The homicide rate is surpassed only by that of Washington, D.C.—more than 600 murders in both '88 and '89 and unabated this year—and gang shootings have become practically ubiquitous.

News director Carol Rueppel came to WDIV a year ago from WTKR in Norfolk, Va., with an eye to strengthening the station's beat coverage, including education and the environment. She expresses reticence toward pumping up crime, even while acknowledging that many days all the station's resources

investigative reporter Mike Wendland and Chris Hanson, a plugged-in police reporter who grew up in Detroit and likes the downtown street work, to bring some perspective to the station's crime coverage. But when Wendland came to WDIV from the *Detroit News* ten years ago and started his I-team investigative unit, he relied on two researchers and a producer. "Now," he says, "the I-team is the me-team."

The economic constraints haven't dulled Wendland's desire to pursue in-depth pieces and take the time to make the difficult connections. In one intriguing series, he followed a viewer tip about brick-stealing and displayed on-camera the trail of bricks from old buildings and homes in downtown Detroit to new houses under construction in suburban Bloomfield Hills. The report also showed the brick robbers using their illegal earnings to buy crack.

Since last fall, Wendland has been filing "crime-fighter" reports, generally a weekly package responding to calls from about ten viewers a day. It's a curious mix of reporting and vigilantism, a response to anger over how crime devastates neighborhoods. "I don't make a lot of claims of objectivity here," he says. The aim is to "expose it, show how bad it is and that the system doesn't have a grip on it."

Like many of the best reporters, Wendland is fueled by anger and the desire to get beyond the obvious: "If you just go in and spray the scene—talk to the cops and the victim's relatives and you're outta there—you haven't got it." In one three-part report, responding to a viewer call, he set up shop in an apartment complex to gather footage of crack-dealing. Shooting out a ground-floor apartment window to where dealers sold their wares outside, and through a peephole into a dealer's stairwell "office," Wendland and photographer Paul Binkerhoff aimed to show how residents there experience the problem. "We became outraged, just outraged, at how blatant it was," he says, "and at how inept the police were."

After several days, he left the building and confronted the dealers face-to-face. The ambush interview worked—several were willing to talk on-camera and explain why they make their living this way—but in hindsight he wonders about his street savvy. "I really don't think I'd try it again," he says.

What distinguishes the best crime reporting is an ability to skillfully maneuver on the streets, then step outside the immediacy of the experience to consider crime as a phenomenon. Some reporters can crack cases, but never really tackle the sociological underpinnings. At a time when homicide and drug-related crime appears to be getting worse, neighborhood-grounded reporting that makes links beyond the



**A Detroit Pistons victory celebration turned into a street melee. WDIV reporter Anne Thompson (inset) got caught in the middle.**

The daunting volume of disaster in the major urban centers necessitates that news organizations pick and choose which murders to cover. The more bizarre and gruesome ones are a sure bet. People in Detroit are still talking about the story last November of a 15-year-old runaway girl whose head was chopped off and placed in a freezer by two suburban boys, one a teenager and the other in his early 20s. In May of this year, viewers were riveted for weeks by the terrible tale of a missing nurse who was later discovered cut up into little pieces and deposited in plastic garbage bags. Her misfortune was the stations' gain: The story broke during May

could go there. "We get caught up because we listen to the police scanner," she says. "It's in our environment. But we have to remember that it's not in everyone's environment. . . . We have said, deliberately, that crime is not the only factor in people's lives."

Yet the breaking-news quotient has been upped by every station in town, including WDIV, the NBC affiliate owned by Post-Newsweek, long considered the most thoughtful in town. Local observers say strong beat reporting and ambitious multi-part series have faltered while quick-hit flash-and-trash coverage has increased.

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act itself has never been so critical. Without it, television news risks hastening the social disorder—fueling viewer fear, glamorizing criminals and polarizing racial groups.

WDIV night-side reporter Anne Thompson had no idea her street smarts would be so sorely tested after the Detroit Pistons won the NBA championship in June. Downtown with photographer Joel Boykin for a story on the street celebration, they found instead a chaotic, violent disturbance with all the makings of a riot (a term that city leaders were loathe to use). By the time the night was over, at least ten people had been killed (the exact count remains unclear), many businesses were trashed and looted, dozens of people were arrested and Thompson had a three-inch gash on her forehead after a mob of “revelers” attacked her news car and smashed the windshield.

Boykin got much of the attack on tape, and the dazed Thompson was called in to comment on the next night’s newscast. She talked of her surprise and fear and her gratitude at being alive. She also described how angry she was at her attackers. Her performance was later commended by her colleagues in interviews, but what Thompson never did was try to explain why the scene turned ugly. Viewers were left with pictures of a wild black mob—and their own prejudices about what really happened. “There was not a lot of follow-up either,” notes Mike Wendland. “That disturbance shows why you’ve got to cover crime. There’s a siege mentality that anything goes. . . . We have a lot of crazed people out there. Who are these people who got caught rioting? The good guys won. Why are they shooting?”

**R**onald Jones was quarterback and captain of the Norfolk State football team in Virginia and an intern for Virginia Sen. Chuck Robb. Late one night in July, at the corner of Fourth and Massachusetts Ave. in Washington, D.C., he was shot and killed during a traffic altercation. The following night, seated in her living room near a color photograph of her 22-year-old son, Jones’ mother explained on TV why she wanted to be interviewed. “When people look at the news and see that there’s been a shooting and black youths are involved,” she said with extraordinary cool, “it’s automatically assumed he or she is involved in drugs. My son was not involved in drugs.”

For a year and a half, Fox-owned WTTG in Washington aired *City Under Siege*, a street-level, blood-and-guts program dedicated to crime and drug-related stories. The locally produced nightly program drew material from other Fox affiliates around the nation. “We showed people how bad it was,” says



**For every one  
Washington  
murder that  
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dozens that go  
unexamined.**

WTTG news director Kim Montour.

By the end of 1989, however, Fox management pulled the plug. “The show had gone to where it was going,” says Montour. Adds WTTG managing editor Ron Sarro, “Drug dealers used to tell each other, ‘You haven’t made it if you haven’t been on *City Under Siege*.’ . . . It had become a clearinghouse for drug dealers and law enforcement people. We weren’t taking it any further educationally. We weren’t breaking any new ground.”

In January WTTG was expanding its news coverage two hours a day and, like every other local news organization, began focusing on the biggest drug story that many believe the city has ever seen, the arrest and trial of Washington mayor Marion Barry. “Most of our resources since January have gone into one man’s drug problem,” Sarro notes. “We are finding out more about drug use of white-collar people through the testimony in this trial than we did in a year-and-a-half in *Siege*.”

But the trial of Washington’s black mayor, ending in a mistrial except for one guilty verdict on a misdemeanor count, has deepened the city’s racial gulf. And after the summer of 1989 when local TV reported a daily tally of homicides—434 by year’s end, amounting to the country’s highest murder rate and twice the level in Washington of any of the preceding 15 years save for 1988—the crime plague has not softened. There is a feeling that the city is on the edge of a precipice, momentarily distracted by Barry, the city’s biggest single story since Watergate.

The death of Ronald Jones is only one of hundreds of murders that the local stations could explore. After a recent

weekend with six killings, every news manager in town was thinking about running a broad piece examining the scale of the problem. But the night CBS affiliate WUSA aired the interview with Jones’ mother, *Eyewitness News* executive editor Pat Casey had pushed to pursue this one.

This was not a stereotypical tale of a troubled black youth. Jones came from a warm and loving family. He was a talented athlete on his way up, and was gunned down for no clear reason. At this writing, his killer remains at large. By conveying the senseless tragedy of his loss, the dramatic story can galvanize public sentiment in a way that few broad stories ever do.

But the elements that make this story so compelling can easily overshadow the daily reality of the city streets. For every one Jones story there are dozens that go unreported. That’s where the hardest work of TV journalism remains to be done.

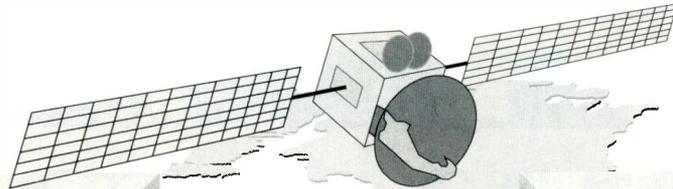
Last year WUSA photographer Mike Fox arrived in Alexandria, Va., where a man was in the midst of a robbery attempt, seeking money for cocaine. Armed with a sawed-off shotgun, the man’s gambit escalated into a small-scale battle as he held a family hostage. By evening, both the man and a police officer were dead.

Fox got the grisly shooting on tape, one of those rare occurrences when a cameraman arrives before the police are cleaning up. (“The video was heavily, heavily edited,” notes WUSA news director Dave Pearce. “We had photos of this guy with his head blown off.”) But as startling as the pictures were, the most revealing moment in the series of reports that night was a sad and sober assessment from Alexandria mayor James Moran. “The violence appears to be spreading,” he said. “We thought we could be immune to the homicidal killings that have plagued the District.”

No one is asking that TV news organizations carry the burden of solving the nation’s crime problems, but the rising level of public discontent about spot news coverage deserves some reflection. That may mean spending more money to add beat reporters with greater expertise, or rethinking the structure of the newscasts themselves. Faced with declining viewership, network news organizations are considering how to explode the nightly form; the same kind of questioning needs to happen at the local level.

There is a risk in not doing this: a public outcry to kill the messenger could begin to sound more reasonable. “If we don’t show some understanding,” says Andrew Pontz, news director of KTBS in Shreveport, “if we can’t do more than chronicling the events, more and more people will turn us off.” ●

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# STUCK ON THE GROUND FLOOR

**Men and women climb different, unequal ladders in TV news. It's likely to stay that way.**

**By Janet Stilson**

**M**iss America wants to be a TV anchor. An ambition voiced by contestants at every year's pageant, it's a rankling thought to Marlene Sanders. There are already so many beauty queens delivering television's daily accounts of drug busts, murder and drought. And after 35 years in the TV news business at ABC, CBS and now New York's WNET, Sanders probably couldn't get a job at the networks if she tried.

Sanders has accumulated so many accolades she recently threw away a whole shopping bag full of them. Moving through her Upper West Side Manhattan apartment, she points out a yellowing publicity poster of herself on the set of ABC's *News With a Woman's Touch*—testimony to how the networks viewed women's news appetites when she became one of the first female anchors in the mid-'60s.

It's flanked by mementos from her worldwide assignments, including her work in Vietnam as one of the first female TV correspondents to report from a war zone, and as one of the first women vice presidents at ABC News, heading its documentary unit in the mid-'70s.

Now she's involved in developing a public-affairs series at WNET and teaching at Columbia University, but she feels frustrated, she says, "because for all my years of experience, the networks wouldn't be interested in me even if I wanted to go back . . . because of my age and my style. It's ridiculous."

For all the advances women have made in the TV-news business, glamour and sex-appeal still play a primary role in the way female journalists are chosen and utilized at both the national and local level—a surface indication of less visible disparities that continue to frustrate TV's newswomen.

With rare exceptions, women still don't make the A-list of correspondents at the networks, salary differences between men and women remain high,

and women are rare birds in executive dining rooms.

The status quo is perpetuated by the men who make the decisions. "Management hasn't changed," notes one TV-news headhunter. "The bodies may be different, but the mentality overall is the same. They still pigeonhole women into certain jobs." Until management changes, a white-male club will decide who merits network airtime and who gets recruited from local stations.

That's not to say women have been treading water. Long gone is the day in the late 1960s when Mary Tillotson, presently a CNN Capitol Hill correspondent, was told by a black news director in Atlanta: "We don't hire women."

"I was right up the street from Martin Luther King's church, and I started laughing at him," Tillotson says in a quiet drawl, feet on the desk in her Senate radio-TV gallery cubbyhole. "He said, 'That's not discrimination,' and I laughed harder and said, 'Why of course it is.' And he said, 'Well I guess y'all are going to have to start going to court too.' And I said, 'I guess we will.'"

In 1991, 20 years will have passed since the FCC responded to the women's movement by altering Equal Employment Opportunity rules to include females. That sent stations and networks alike scurrying to hire women and spawned the now-famous Class of '72, which includes a sizable list of such household names as ABC News anchor Carole Simpson and Lesley Stahl, CBS's chief White House correspondent and moderator of *Face the Nation*.

Women now inhabit important behind-the-scenes positions. Female news directors are no longer uncommon, with several, including WCVB Boston's Emily Rooney and WTTG Washington's Kimerly Montour, moving into the top news slots at major-market stations within the last year alone.

On the national front, women have occupied important seats of power. Three of the most notable are Joanna Bistany, vice president and assistant to



the president at ABC News; Cheryl Gould, senior producer of *NBC Nightly News With Tom Brokaw*; and Barbara Cohen, a CBS News vice president and Washington bureau chief.

And let us now praise particularly famous women: 1989 saw the highly publicized migration of major female talent. Diane Sawyer packed her *60 Minutes* bags for ABC; Connie Chung filled the CBS void by leaving NBC; and CNN anchor and vice president Mary Alice Williams returned to NBC. Chung, Sawyer, Jane Pauley and Maria Shriver all have commitments to churn out prime-time fare.

"Women have obviously made great strides in the last ten years. They're in prime time now, and the quality of their work is an important ingredient in the decision-making process at all the networks," says Mary Alice Williams, NBC's *Sunday Today* host and occasional anchor.

If female TV journalists have come such a long way, why the frustration of female news talent?

Call it the *Cosmo-girl* factor. "Women expect to be treated like journalists, and to some extent we are," says Barbara Nevins, who just ended a six-year reporter stint at WCBS-TV to become a host at cable's CNBC. "I think the nature of the television business is changing. The emphasis is less on what kind of reporter a man or woman is, rather on how they appear on camera."

The roots of the problem go back as far as journalism school. Talent scouts complain that even though females have outnumbered males in J-schools for the last 12 years, the schools are populated with men and women who want to become journalists much as teenagers want to become movie stars. It's not an innate interest in social dilemmas that draws them—and that is reflected in their knowledge. And those journalists who've built a solid educational base

CBS D.C. team members (l. to r.) Rita Braver, Mary Martin, Barbara Cohen and Darcy Antonellis.

for their reporting may feel their knowledge is going to waste. Victoria Fung, a reporter at KATU Portland, Ore., laments: "I'm probably overeducated for what I do. I have a master's degree and had a Gannett fellowship as well, and sometimes that doesn't seem to matter that much."

Managers reinforce that trend by hiring women for their on-camera appeal. In so doing they confirm their own perceptions that women fall short when it comes to delivering top-flight news reports. When local stations are in the market for female anchors or reporters, they're after "very pretty women," says Carole Cooper, an agent at N.S. Bienstock, which represents news talent. "It used to be blondes. Now brunettes are a little more in."

While Cooper says males need to be attractive too, those doing the hiring are generally heterosexual men, and are a lot more forgiving when it comes to the attractiveness of their own kind.

When it's time for news talent to make the jump to the national level, glamour again rears its head. Male and female correspondents are groomed for top positions differently, according to Dr. Joe Foote, chairman of Southern Illinois University at Carbondale's radio-television department. He contends that with some exceptions, most women are

## SALARY SHORTFALL

### NEWS DIRECTORS

MALE			FEMALE		
Age	No.	Salary	Age	No.	Salary
21-29	24	\$28,260	21-29	20	\$23,400
30-39	114	43,135	30-39	26	37,130
40-67	127	48,380	40-67	5	74,985*
Staff	No.	Salary	Staff	No.	Salary
1-10	33	\$27,040	1-10	21	\$20,800
11-20	69	35,050	11-20	13	29,015
21-35	81	46,020	21-35	8	39,625
36 & up	82	65,000	36 & up	9	79,975*

\*These numbers reflect the small number of women who have moved into major-market stations news director slots in the last year. Source: Vernon Stowe, from his summer 1989 survey.

### NETWORKS

	MALE	FEMALE
Producers	\$ 99,084	\$ 86,481
Correspondents	181,395	148,688
Anchor	812,500	625,000
Exec. Producers	189,286	104,333
Vice Presidents	295,000	218,300

Source: Victoria Fung, Gannett Center for Media Studies 1988.



pulled from local television anchor positions or from the lower end of the visibility ranking when first given network anchor roles. In contrast, their male counterparts are generally on the top-ten correspondent list, and have decades more experience with key overseas or top Washington assignments before taking on anchor duties. "There's too much pressure put on younger women. They aren't seasoned through the correspondent corps. If they aren't picked quickly, they end up on a pedestrian career path," Foote says.

Those women who do make the network draft must contend with a pattern of low visibility. When correspondents are ranked according to the amount

ABC News women had met with officials to discuss disparities, although the first with Friedman. In 1986, the women won some \$250,000 in back pay for the division's female producers, who earned 30 percent less on average than their male counterparts, according to the group's findings.

But their main ammunition this time around was a yearly study on correspondent airtime compiled by Joe Foote. Foote has organized data on Big Three correspondents over the past five years, annually tracking their stories on the weekday evening newscasts—the prime showcase for TV news talent—and ranking them according to exposure.

ABC News is consistently ranked third in the study. And last year, not one female ABC correspondent made Foote's top 50 list, 85 percent of them were ranked below 100.

By all accounts the latest meeting between ABC management and representatives of its female staff was "enjoyable," devoid of any raised voices. But Friedman—never one to mince words—delivered a bottom-line message that sparked a debate.

## FEMALE BASTIONS

**N**owhere are the possibilities for women in TV news more manifest than in CBS's Washington bureau, known in the news business as the Land of the Amazons.

The Washington bureau, one of the network's most powerful outposts, is presided over by not only a female bureau chief, Barbara Cohen, but a female deputy bureau chief, Mary Martin. Other women of influence include chief White House correspondent Lesley Stahl, correspondents Rita Braver and Susan Spencer, *CBS This Morning* senior producer Lucy Spiegel, *NightWatch* executive producer Deborah Johnson and—most unusual of all—a female technical operations chief, Darcy Antonellis.

There's no ready explanation for the preponderance of females there, though everyone has a theory. Lots of female hirings in the bureau during the early 1970s is one line of thinking. (Back then, Braver says, there were so many fledgling female journalists assigned stakeout duty that they formed a singing group called The Stake-ettes.)

Cohen suggests that because people tend to stay in Washington longer than in other bureaus around the globe, the nation's capital is particularly conducive to raising families. But if that's true, "Why aren't there more women in other

Washington bureaus?" asks Braver.

The CBS bureau isn't the only news operation laden with ladies. WCVB has women in key positions, most notably news director Emily Rooney, and CNN has a solid reputation for hiring women.

The women at CBS, CNN and WCVB agree that there's an atmospheric difference when the balance of power tips in their favor. "I find there's not as much politics between women," says Laura Newborn, one of two female executive news producers at WCVB. At other stations, "it wasn't always acceptable to speak my mind."

For CNN's executive White House producer, Wendy Walker, female camaraderie has included swapping her conservative garb for an intern's skimpy skirt so that the student was properly attired for a job interview—then praying she didn't get called into an important meeting.

Walker dismisses the industry perception that CNN hires a lot of women because they work cheaper than men. "I came here from ABC because I knew that if I stayed I wouldn't have the hands-on experience that I would get here.

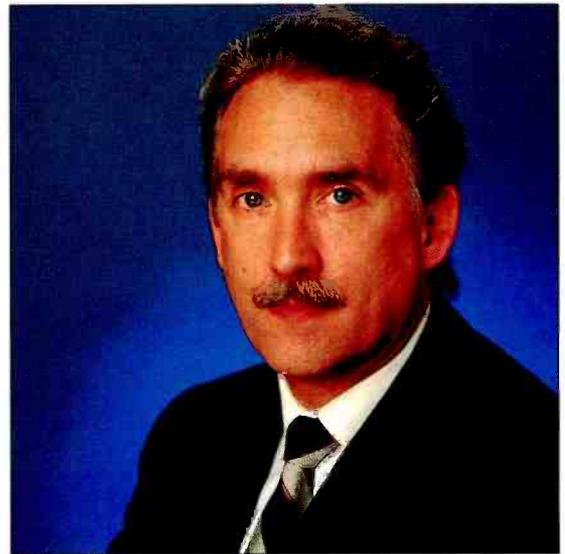
"We have to work harder because there are fewer of us," she adds. "It's as if you're a little more naked. People are able to see how much more you're capable of doing." J.S.

of airtime they receive on nightly newscasts, most women fall toward the bottom of a long list.

The consistently shoddy record of *World News Tonight With Peter Jennings* when it comes to visibility for women correspondents instigated a meeting between the show's executive producer, Paul Friedman, and two female delegates from the news division in June.

Weekend anchor Carole Simpson and White House correspondent Sheila Kast flew to New York from Washington to do lunch with Friedman at ABC News' West 66th Street digs.

The meeting dragged well into the afternoon as Kast and Simpson brought Friedman up to speed on women's issues in the division. It was the third time



Female and minority hiring is a mission for NBC's Don Browne.

"He thinks that as a group, [ABC's female correspondents] aren't gifted writers," Kast says. Although she disagrees,

"it's his show, and if he has a certain writing style he wants to emphasize, it's up to us to pick up on it."

Friedman now denies having ascribed poor writing skills to any group, let alone an entire sex. "I've always said that the basic failing of all correspondents is that writing is not treasured as the most important skill that it is," he says testily. "I want to make perfectly clear that the way I make decisions around here is to pick the best person for the job. If it's a male, so be it. If it's a female, so be it."

"I remember Paul saying, 'I'd like to get more women on the air,'" Kast continues. "He said he thought women brought different insights and perspectives. Then he said, 'Roone [Arledge, ABC News president] is always pushing me to put more women on the air, but then again he always wants his favorites on the air too.'"

Those conflicting signals are indicative of the frustrations females face in trying to crack the so-called A-list of correspondents—those given the choicest assignments by news department heads. "I'm sure Paul Friedman would say there is no such list. But that's not the way it seems in the



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trenches," Kast says.

The bench-strength dilemma for women is not restricted to ABC News. Foote shows 70 percent of NBC's female correspondents, and 67 percent of CBS News' female correspondents, foundering in the 100 to 150 category as well.

"I think there's a lot of work that needs to be done to change the balance," says Don Browne, NBC News executive vice president, when made aware of Foote's survey. "Don't put a disproportionate amount of attention on who's on the air. It's important to look at how an organization is developing." He and NBC News' director of talent development and recruitment, Elena Nachmanoff, are quick to point out that since 1989, 72 percent of the 64 people who joined NBC News have fit into the female or minority category.

But the proportion of women who have made Foote's list has stayed almost rock steady, at about 16 to 17 percent over the last five years. Particularly disturbing was Foote's finding that while 50 percent of all female correspondents (a mere 15 people) made the Top 100 list in '88, only 23 percent (8) did last year. "There's a whole group of women just hanging there [in the lower ranks] every year I've done this," he says. "From the beginning, you can almost predict that they're not going to get anywhere."

One possible reason for the decline could be the large number of major stories abroad recently. The number of female foreign correspondents covering international zones of conflict is nearly nil. Networks do not routinely dispatch women to war zones, and some contend that other cultures may not be comfortable with women in the aggressive, authoritative role of a television reporter.

The disparity in gender roles in the field is reflected at home. Even at the top of their profession, women journalists are used differently. The glitzy nature of prime-time news fare means that for the most part, TV's most highly exposed

news women are sticking to stories that don't pack much of a hard-news punch. As Marlene Sanders notes, the credentials of such journalists as Diane Sawyer and Connie Chung can't be denied, but "the networks exploit their glamour." In "woman's-touch" fashion, Sawyer mixes Marla Maples interviews with Kremlin tours; Jane Pauley asks if civility is dead, and Maria Shriver quizzes Sinead O'Connor on her shaved head.

Yet consignment to the Lite Side of TV news may be the least of their problems. Chung, Sawyer and Pauley are all in their forties—will the system that nudges them toward softer stories push them out of the business altogether when they hit 50? Several Class of '72 members, now in their forties, are questioning whether news management—and society—will allow them to age as gracefully on screen as such valued members of network

news teams as Mike Wallace or Harry Reasoner.

ABC's Friedman contends aging is as fraught with peril for a man's career as it is for a woman's. And veteran news woman Sylvia Chase's recently announced return to ABC News from KRON-TV to become a *PrimeTime Live* correspondent offers some encouragement. But because so few women ventured into on-screen journalism prior to the EEO rule changes, no trend has been set at the networks when it comes to hiring and assigning women over 50. Barbara Walters' star-spangled career is generally considered to be a phenomenon.

There are at least two network news vets who, like Sanders, figure they would have a tough time getting hired today. One of them, Hilary Brown, got fed up with three years of lackluster assignments at ABC News in New York after an exciting career overseas, and now anchors the CBC's Toronto 6 P.M. local newscasts. She may consider the anchor role "death by hairspray," but she's proved that in at least one metropolis, women closing in on age 50 are not a viewer turnoff: The newscast's ratings have



A black news director doubled since she joined six years ago.

once told Mary Tillotson, "We don't hire women." Another former network foreign correspondent, Liz Trotta, who's just completed an autobiography, shows her battle-scars when talking about women at the networks and her chances of being rehired: "They wouldn't touch me. I'm not a glamour-puss. My skills are not in demand. I know how to go out in the field and strangle people for a story."

Aging on the local front is no prettier a picture. In the mid-'80s, when Sanders coauthored her book on women in television news, *Waiting for Prime Time*, she found four female local TV anchors over the age of 50. Today, that number has dwindled to two.

According to Foote, "Producers don't want female anchors past the age of 35." A 1988 study conducted by KATU's Fung at the Gannett Media Center shows that on average, male anchors are 20 years older than female anchors.

.....

Changes in the way women are utilized on screen aren't likely to take place until there's a critical mass of females calling the shots. According to

### NETWORK RANKINGS Number of Women:

#### ABC

vice presidents: 2 out of 10 (20%)  
anchors: 5 out of 12 (42%)  
correspondents: 15 out of 92 (16%)  
bureau chiefs: 1 out of 7 (14%)

#### CBS

vice presidents: 1 out of 8 (13%)  
anchors: 3 out of 7 (43%)  
correspondents: (25%)  
bureau chiefs: 2 out of 15 (13%)

#### CNN

vice presidents: 5 out of 14 (36%)  
anchors: 21 out of 58 (36%)  
correspondents: 47 out of 148 (32%)  
bureau chiefs: 5 out of 26 (19%)

#### NBC

vice presidents: 2 out of 7 (29%)  
anchors: 4 out of 8 (50%)  
correspondents: 18 out of 75 (24%)  
bureau chiefs: 12 out of 32 (38%)

Sources: Network officials. Total correspondent count at CBS not available.

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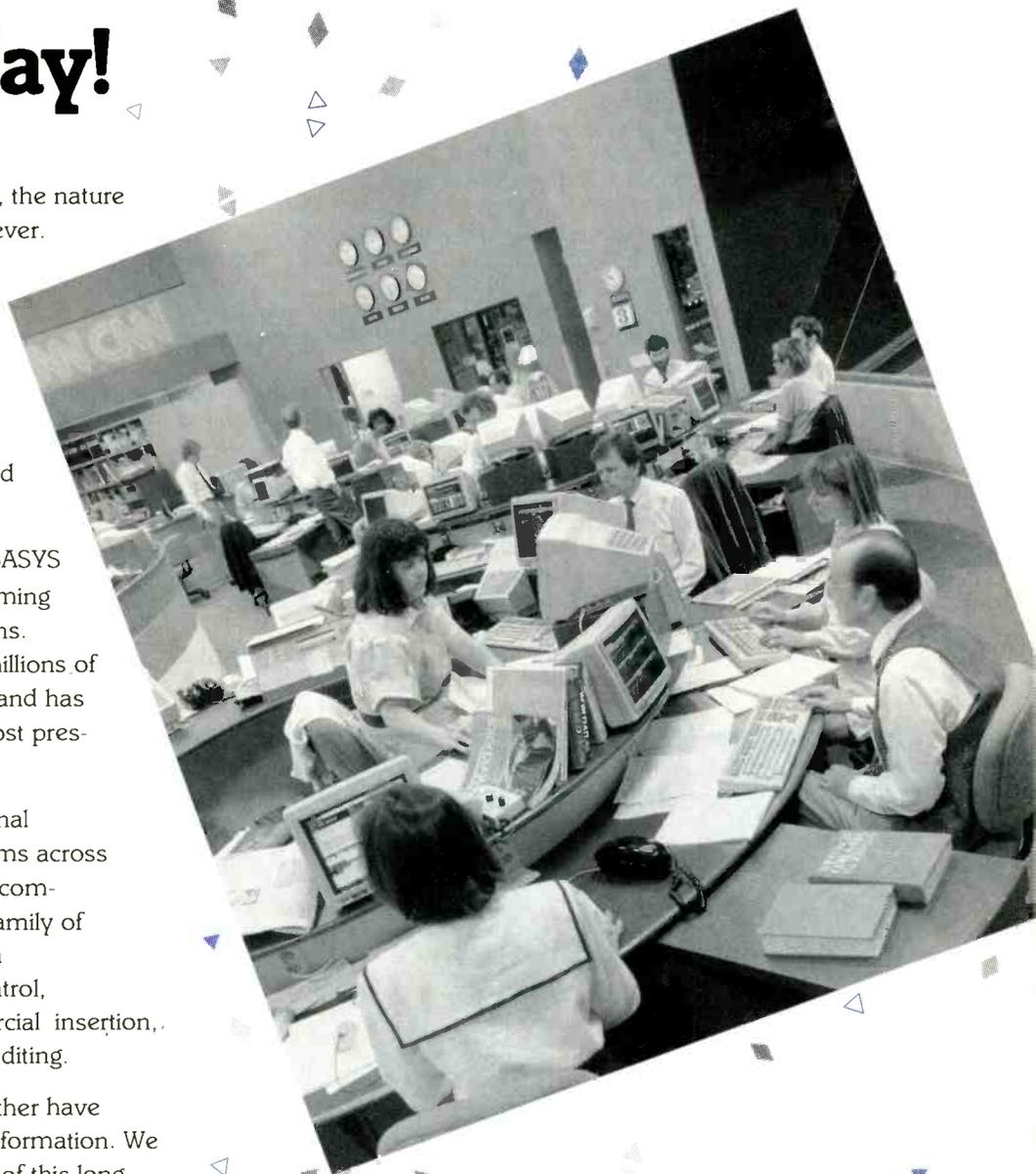
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Kathy Bonk, co-director of the public-interest media organization Communications Consortium, the potential for a shift is likely to come when women make up 30 to 40 percent of the behind-the-scenes ranks. At the network level, it's hard to tell how much headway has been made toward that goal.

"I believe that eventually having more women in the councils of power will show up on the air. But boy, it's slow," comments ABC's Kast. Signs of progress at ABC News can be seen in the form of such key women as Bistany; Amy Entelis, who is vice president of talent recruitment and development; and two of *World News*' senior producers, Kathryn Christensen and Deborah Leff.

But among network vice presidents, the number of women has actually declined. In the mid-'70s, CBS News had four female vice presidents, Sanders reports. Today, largely because of the massive layoffs in the mid-'80s and political fallout from changes at the top, that number is down to one: Barbara Cohen.

"If you go into the executive dining room," Cohen says, "and it's just behind-the-scenes people, out of the top 17 people in the news division, three of us are women. There are still breakthroughs that need to occur." The day when the networks' star evening anchors, executive producers and division presidents are female, she adds, could be generations away.

Access to power is hardly better for women at other national news operations. NBC News has no female vice presidents in decision-making roles, and only two of ABC's ten news vice presidents are female.

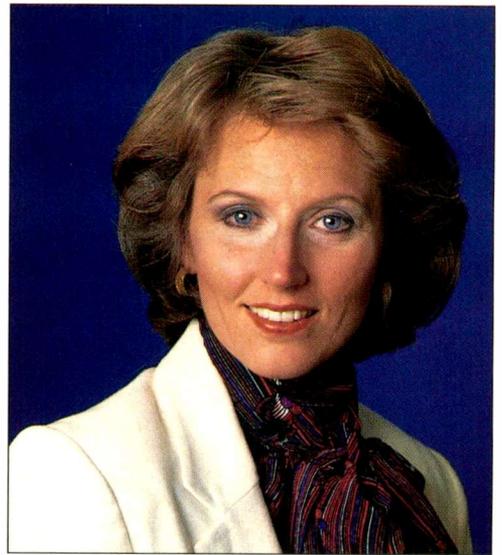
**Marlene Sanders delivers ABC's *News With a Woman's Touch* circa '65.**



CNN offers the most encouragement, with five women in v.p. slots out of 14.

Among stations, news-director statistics remain static. According to University of Missouri journalism professor Vernon Stone, the total percentage of women news directors in 1989 was unchanged from 1988: 18 percent of about 750 positions. Prior growth had been creeping along at one or two percentage points a year.

For those who are both female and members of an ethnic minority, the glass ceiling appears even more shatterproof. Paula Walker, assistant news director at WNBC, says that there was a three-month period



**Sheilah Kast leads the women of ABC News in the fight for greater visibility.**

in 1986 when she was one of three black female news directors in the U.S. The trio joked about starting their own association. Today, the membership would include only one person: Connie Howard, news director at WRAL in Raleigh, N.C.

Headhunters say that finding qualified minority talent for top station news positions is difficult. But "my phone isn't ringing off the hook," says Howard.

Even when the phone rings for TV news women of any color, and they find themselves in challenging positions, they are likely to earn less money than males in similar roles. On average, female news directors made 25 percent less than males last year, according to Stone—the same level of disparity that existed in 1988.

And according to Fung's study, male executive producers at the Big Three networks earn on average 81 percent more. The lowest level of disparity she found, in a handful of key job categories, was with producers: 15 percent.

Some women expect the differences in the way men and women are treated will change as younger generations of management take over for the old guard. But the distance traveled so far isn't that encouraging.

"We thought we could get to the point where we would move on to other forms of discrimination in society," laments Bonk. "What's discouraging for me is, that's not the case. I didn't sign up for life."

She expects pressure groups and tighter enforcement of existing laws by federal agencies to be key to any gains. However, Glen Wolfe, who oversees the FCC's EEO policy as chief of the license renewal branch, says he sees no change in enforcement since Al Sikes became chairman.

For Leslie Hollingsworth, managing director, Los Angeles at talent agency Brad Marks International, it just takes a little patience. "It's going to happen, women getting to the top rung. They're poised to make that move, but they've got to bide their time."

CNN's Tillotson puts her hopes for the future this way: "I have a child, and I would like her to see on television a more representative sampling of what women think like and sound like and talk like. It's going to take individuals doing a very good job and changing the minds of individual managers and coworkers. And God knows that takes time." ●



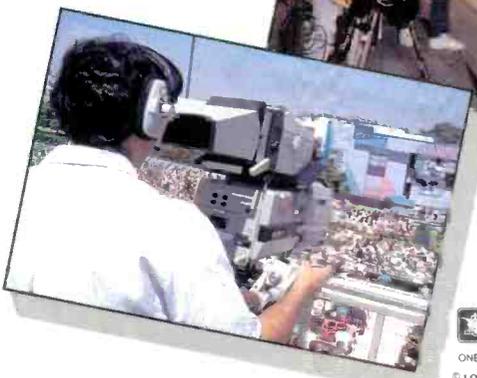
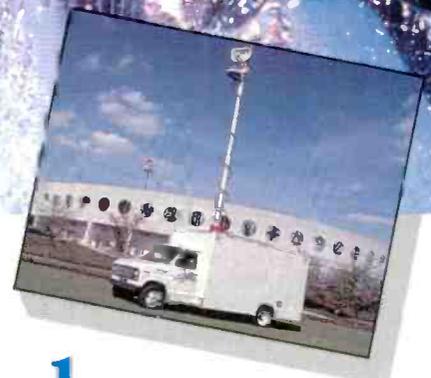
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### Inside IN FOCUS

Cable penetration continues to rise, but operators can't depend on it indefinitely for revenue increases. Systems will have to increase revenue from existing customers while maintaining a



PAGE 34

good relationship with the community. As Adam Snyder relates in our first story, KBLCOM bought its systems when prices had peaked at \$2,400 a sub. To pay its debt, the company has upped its per-sub

revenue, marketing pay-per-view and raising rates, usually without alienating subscribers. Andrew Grossman follows with a tale of two systems that have alienated their customers and must now find a way to mend their community relations. Finally, Richard Katz explores the issue of PPV pricing and whether discounting will really increase the number of PPV faithful.

PAGE 37

# KBLCOM'S HEAVY LOAD

Debt means the MSO must grow revenues quickly.

By Adam Snyder

Five years ago Don Jordan, chief executive of Houston Industries (HI), the nation's eighth-largest electric utility, laid down a mandate to his corporate officers. Diversify, he told them—find a business with operating characteristics similar to those of a utility, but one counterbalancing the maturity of HI's current operations.

The following year HI acquired 50 percent of a cable-television joint venture with American Television & Communications (ATC) called Paragon Communications. After spending a few years as a silent partner watching ATC manage Paragon's 790,000 cable customers, in August of 1988 HI's cable subsidiary, KBLCOM, went into the cable business for itself, paying close to \$1.3 billion for Rogers Communications' five systems serving 500,000 subscribers. President and COO Gary Weik, a former Cox Cable vice president, came over from Paragon, along with other seasoned executives, including Dean Gilbert, v.p. of marketing and programming, and Len Allsup, v.p. of advertising.

Since the Rogers purchase, KBLCOM has become one of the most aggressive companies in the cable industry. Weik *et al* know the MSO must produce some dramatic improvements in revenue if it hopes to cover the monumental \$825 million debt it took on when it bought the Rogers systems. At \$2,442 per subscriber, the acquisition was made when

cable prices were at their peak. (Paragon weighed buying the Rogers systems, but ATC balked at the high price.) Now KBLCOM is faced with losses during the fiscal year ending June 30 of \$75.2 million on revenues of \$187 million. Estimates for this year are only marginally better.

KBLCOM's initial approach to increasing revenue was to raise rates, which produced an immediate backlash in its service areas. In San Antonio, two rate increases in the past two years contributed to a loss of 23,000 subscribers, and at one point the city considered establishing a competing cable company of its own. "Rate increases have been a big problem," agrees Carol Wold Sindt, director of telecommunications for the city of Minneapolis. She reports that in March 1989, when KBLCOM officially took over, the basic-cable rate jumped from \$14.95 to \$16.95, and then a year later was raised again to \$18.20.

In recent months KBLCOM has reversed any loss of customers, and in the past 16 months has actually added 22,000 subscribers in San Antonio. Although it will undoubtedly continue to increase rates, KBLCOM has turned to other ways of growing revenue. Utilities are accustomed to spending major sums on capital improvements, and KBLCOM has already dispensed a total of \$3 million for a new telemarketing center in San Antonio, for insertion equipment in three of its four systems,

and in an equity investment in cable radio technology. "Plain-vanilla cable may be fine for some," says Dean Gilbert, KBLCOM's senior v.p. of marketing and programming, who held a similar post with Paragon Communications. "But they'll always be vulnerable to competition and to the marketplace. Those who are going to make it over the long term are going to be aggressive."

The company has been particularly ambitious in promoting local ad sales, creating KBL-TV as an advertising subsidiary to compete for local ad dollars. The division's president, KBLCOM v.p. of advertising Len Allsup, is a Paragon vet who tried in the mid-'80s to organize pressure on cable nets to standardize their commercial break times. Last year KBLCOM launched NuCable Resources Corporation's The Information Channel, which airs a continuous assortment of local photo-advertisements. A few months later it installed LaKart Corp.'s \$350,000 state-of-the-art random access, multiple-channel insertion equipment in its largest system in San Antonio. It can now roadblock advertisements on 16 cable channels within a ten to 15-minute window, guaranteeing

of the [network affiliates]."

KBL-TV has also contracted A.C. Nielsen to provide their San Antonio ad salesmen with sophisticated ratings and demographics. "If you're selling Encyclopedia Britannica," says Gilbert, "we can fine tune when and where your ad is aired so it's watched primarily by young couples with kids."

The San Antonio system is particularly amenable to this kind of strategy, since it's the only one in the area, serving almost half the ADI's 571,000 homes. But similar insertion equipment has also been acquired in Minneapolis, Portland, Ore., and Orange County, Calif., where KBL-TV uses its own polling data to woo advertisers and boost subscriptions. Gilbert says the San Antonio system's annual ad revenues will reach \$4.87 million this year, or almost \$17 per subscriber, and that revenues in all four systems will top \$10 million, with profit margins of more than 50 percent.

KBLCOM is also making strong moves in the programming area, particularly with new digital radio technology and pay-per-view. Earlier this year it invested \$41 million in International Cablecasting Technologies' Digital

library of 60,000 titles on 30 channels with no disk jockeys or advertisements. For a monthly fee of about \$8.95, subscribers will get a special stereo tuner with a digital readout of each song as it plays. In January, once full service is offered in two KBLCOM systems, Gilbert expects at least 5 percent of passed homes to subscribe, perhaps as many as 10 to 15 percent. That may be optimistic, since neither of the three companies involved in cable radio has conducted extensive test marketing yet, but according to Paul Kagan Associates, "initial consumer interest appears high."

Indicative of its commitment to PPV, each KBLCOM system has its own PPV manager. Marketing efforts include heavy advertising of regionally targeted programming, discount nights, ten-minute barker reels customized daily to run continuously on each system's 24-hour preview channel, and a full-color PPV guide mailed to homes that have used PPV recently and to a rotating segment of "nevers."

Gilbert says that by cutting its own deals with the major studios, KBLCOM keeps its PPV margins unusually high. Corporate director of PPV Ellen Notbohm also points out that KBLCOM is one of only a few MSOs in the country to offer local sports on PPV. In both San Antonio and Portland, subscribers pay \$12 to \$15 a game to watch their local pro basketball teams play. "We're driving the PPV business as hard as we can drive it," boasts Gilbert. "It's an extremely immature business. I don't know what the ceiling is, so we're not about to place any limits on ourselves. The rest of the industry is so far behind us we're pretty much on our own."

The MSO's efforts seem to be paying off. Despite a lack of special events programming, Notbohm says that PPV revenues increased 43 percent during the past year, mainly due to a \$3 average per addressable subscriber, about 72 percent higher than the industry average. Rogers always did a brisk adult PPV business, and that too is up about 10 percent during the past year.

KBLCOM is trying to cross-fertilize its various marketing efforts so that the total will become greater than the sum of its parts. It now uses its roadblocking capabilities to air a PPV promo on 16 channels at between, say, 7:45 and 7:58 P.M. for an 8 P.M. movie. The company is also using its new 70-station telemarketing center (soon to be expanded to 300) in San Antonio to identify and sign new subscribers in all

## THE BALANCE SHEET

KBLCOM INC. (in thousands of dollars)	Quarter ended June 30		Six months ended June 30		Twelve months ended June 30	
	1990	1989	1990	1989	1990	1989
<b>Revenues:</b>						
Basic services	\$32,306	\$29,027	\$62,662	\$38,211	\$122,356	\$38,211
Pay (premium) services	11,711	12,705	23,101	17,073	46,649	17,073
Pay-per-view	2,251	2,054	4,192	2,620	7,545	2,620
Advertising	2,342	973	3,808	1,246	6,547	1,246
Other	1,431	37	2,177	232	3,893	232
<b>Total</b>	<b>50,041</b>	<b>44,796</b>	<b>95,940</b>	<b>59,382</b>	<b>186,990</b>	<b>59,382</b>
<b>Cost of services and system operating expenses</b>	<b>31,871</b>	<b>30,823</b>	<b>61,295</b>	<b>40,132</b>	<b>119,168</b>	<b>40,445</b>
<b>Gross profit</b>	<b>18,170</b>	<b>13,973</b>	<b>34,645</b>	<b>19,250</b>	<b>67,822</b>	<b>18,937</b>
Depreciation and amortization	16,558	18,123	32,765	23,112	63,260	23,112
Interest expense	24,293	33,787	48,508	41,091	95,379	41,091
Other expense	920	955	2,191	3,328	5,252	5,012
Income tax benefit	(4,797)	(10,380)	(10,125)	(12,149)	(20,867)	(11,029)
<b>Net loss before preferred dividends to parent</b>	<b>(18,804)</b>	<b>(28,512)</b>	<b>(38,694)</b>	<b>(36,132)</b>	<b>(75,202)</b>	<b>(39,249)</b>

Source: company.

local advertisers about 30 percent of the total cable audience. Roadblocking also makes it difficult for grazers to use their remote controls to avoid watching commercials altogether. "We approach advertisers as if we were just another television station," says Gilbert. "In San Antonio the combined viewership of our cable channels is more than any

Music Express, one of three companies developing an audio-only cable service. Due to be test-marketed this fall, ICT's system will carry CD-quality sound via cable wires to all passed homes, whether cable subscribers or not. Gilbert may even keep the billing separate from the cable operation.

Digital Music Express will have a

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feel capable of doing,  
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**—Longfellow**

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We're leading the way into a whole new era. Stay tuned.

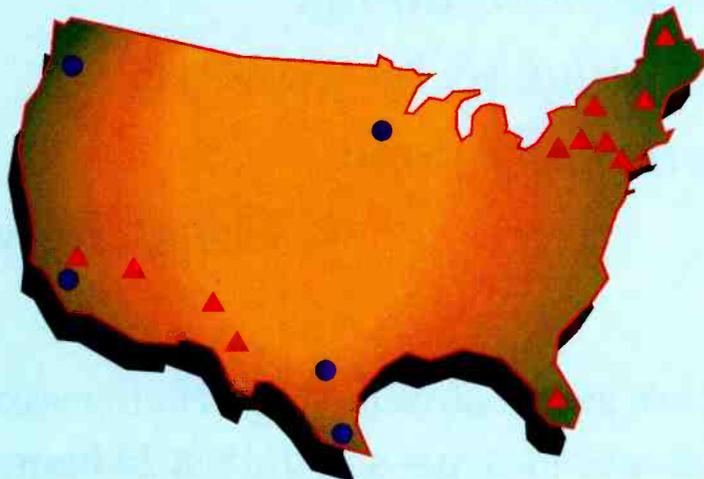
The country's first and  
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**NEWS 12**  
**LONG ISLAND**

**24 HOURS. EVERYDAY.**

\*Source: Nielsen Media Research, June 1990.

### WHERE THE SYSTEMS ARE



● KBLCOM directly serves about 526,000 subscribers in four states.

▲ Paragon, of which KBLCOM owns 50 percent, serves approximately 790,000 subscribers in eight states.

five markets, as well as to handle after-hours and overflow calls. The system is linked through telephone lines to computers at its data supplier in Omaha, Neb., giving telephone operators in San Antonio instant access to all subscriber records. Other features include power dialing, automatic purging of wrong numbers, the ability to upgrade subscribers to premium channels on the spot, and scripting for any number of contingencies. "It's as if the agent in San Antonio were sitting in the Minneapolis office," says Opal Popham, director of the center.

Popham says that by contacting more than 1.2 million people this year, she expects 25,000 new subscribers and more than 150,000 service upgrades. The center also acts as an independent profit center, taking on outside clients for market research, fundraising activities, opinion surveys and 1-800 overflow catalogue orders. Popham claims the system is already paying its own way, with 50 percent of its business coming from non-cable contracts.

All this new activity has not come without growth pains. Increased reliance on the telemarketing center in San Antonio, for example, set off a furor in Minneapolis when the system laid off local workers, most of whom were under a minority quota. Other snafus included the dropping of SportsChannel the night before an important Minnesota Gopher playoff game, the elimination of a Spanish language station in areas with large His-

panic populations, and the implementation of a small charge for a minimum service that Rogers had implied would always be free. These problems have since been rectified, however, and local cable authorities report that, rate increases notwithstanding, KBLCOM has made substantial improvements in both service and programming since taking over from Rogers.

Yet despite these improvements and its aggressive campaign to increase revenue, even KBLCOM itself doesn't expect to turn a profit before 1993, perhaps not until '94. Interest expenses alone are running more than revenues, and the company's 36-percent margins are lower than industry norms. All this worries the financial community. "The jury is still out whether the cable subsidiary will be able to generate enough cash flow to service its huge debt," notes Nathan Par-tain, utility analyst and group v.p. at Duff & Phelps.

Some analysts remain skeptical about the wisdom of diversification itself. Top management at Houston Industries likes to talk about what a perfect "synergistic" fit cable is to the utility industry since both involve constructing, operating and maintaining a distribution network into people's homes through hard wires

and working with local franchising departments. But Prudential Bache utility analyst Barry Abramson isn't so sure: "On a scale of one to ten, I'd say the synergies are not much more than a two. Regulators aren't about to tolerate cross-subsidies in the same area, and the two businesses are very different. One is a necessity, the other a luxury I'm concerned Houston Industries paid more for the Rogers systems than they're worth today, and that KBLCOM continues to put a serious strain on earnings."

KBLCOM is actually in the curious position of falling through the cracks of most investment houses. Since 96 percent of HI's revenues are as an energy producer, cable analysts tend not to cover it, and most utility analysts admit they are not well-versed in the intricacies of the cable business. One of the few analysts who does closely follow both HI's utility and cable businesses is Doris Kelley-Alston, a vice president of Merrill Lynch, and she is enthusiastic, writing in her latest investment report that "prospects for added cash flow from KBLCOM [are] the most attractive feature of the business." KBLCOM rightly points to its current penetration of only 47 percent as further evidence that it has considerable room to grow. Income may also be boosted by acquiring small systems and folding them into KBLCOM's existing marketing and programming umbrella. A natural fit would be to take over some of the systems it jointly owns with ATC, with ATC taking those in the Northeast and Central Florida and KBLCOM those in

areas adjacent to their other systems in Texas and California. "There's little question that over time we'll take half and they'll take half," says president and COO Weik.

If that happens, the process will be eased by the fact that the five systems KBLCOM owns outright and those that are part of the joint venture are known to subs as Paragon Cable. KBLCOM's 550,000 subscribers make it the 23rd



President and COO Weik came over from the ATC joint venture.

largest MSO in the United States. If it took over even half the subscribers it serves jointly with ATC, it would jump to 17th.

Adam Snyder is a Channels contributing editor.

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# PUBLIC ENEMY NUMBER ONE

In some cities, operators are as popular as the tax auditor. Here's why.

By Andrew Grossman

It was a cable subscriber's worst nightmare. The May 23 season finale of ABC's *Twin Peaks* had 15 minutes to run when, quicker than you can say "piping hot coffee," screens went black in Clarksville, Texas. As happens often there, an electrical storm, power outage or some other act of God had knocked out the River Cablevision microwave connection that is the rural community's lifeline to Dallas and network television.

Last December, a subscriber tried to order the Leonard-Duran pay-per-view fight from central New Jersey's TKR TriSystems Cable Co., but despite constant dialing couldn't get through to TKR's automatic response unit (ARU). In frustration, he sent TKR a mailgram asking the system to call him so he could order the fight.

"Members of the public are discouraged with rates [that are] too high, outages, [and] the quality of transmission. [Also] I can't get through to talk to anybody," says Sam Sherman, chairman of the cable committee in Old Bridge, N.J., a TKR franchise area.

At a time when operators are trying to improve customer relations, these two systems seem to be losing that battle, though both say

public perceptions are either unjustified or outdated. Circumstances are beyond their control, they maintain, or improvements have gone unnoticed. More difficult to fix than poor service is the attitude of a once-burned subscriber.

TKR Trisystems and River Cablevision aren't the worst cable systems in the nation. But they are among scores that have been barraged with com-

plaints about service problems that continue to fuel subscriber hostility.

The letters piled up by the score across Ben Black's desk, each one as vituperative as the next:

"Service? Is that what they call service? If so, it is poor service."

"Our cable system is like rain—you never know when you're gonna get it or for how long it's gonna last!"

Angered by what he saw as inferior service and insensitivity to subscribers, Black, the owner of the *Clarksville Times*, the local biweekly, asked readers in April to write him if they agreed with his assessment of River Cablevision. Two hundred thirty-six letters poured in, most with complaints of constant outages and poor pictures.

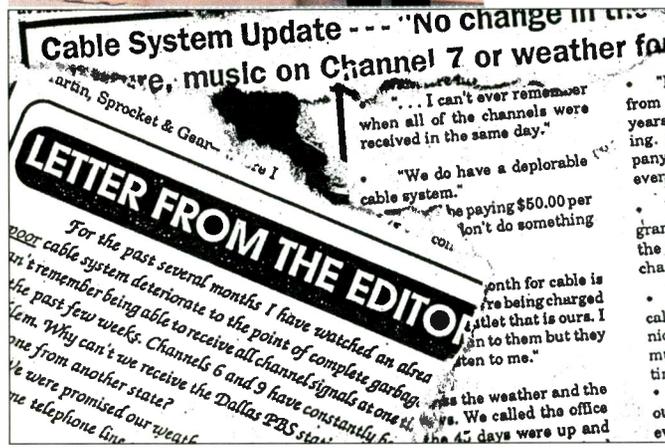
Situated 130 miles northeast of Dallas, Clarksville is a farming and light industrial city of 5,000. Residents depend on cable to get over-the-air television signals. TV is Clarksville's major form of entertainment—the closest thing to a big city is 30 miles away in Paris, population 30,000.

Recently, people say the fuzzy pictures have improved, but a new problem has emerged: Periodically, the screen goes blank.

The company says it's



Ben Black stirred up a hornet's nest with vituperative columns soliciting letters from *Clarksville Times* readers about River Cablevision's poor service. Letters continue to arrive at Black's office.



sympathetic, but powerless to correct problems it claims are endemic to isolated rural systems. "The problem with that whole area is it exists in a no-man's-land," says Charles Grimlich, president of River's owner, River Communications, an Austin-based MSO with about 17,000 subscribers.

The picture is just part of the problem, residents say. They accuse the system of ignoring their complaints, adding that local manager Jim Short is inaccessible and that grievances are sometimes met with rudeness. "Their PR has been atrocious," states Clarksville mayor Gavin Watson.

Short declined to speak for this story, but Grimlich paints a portrait of a classic rural system that relies on distant microwave hops to receive Dallas stations. Clarksville is at the mercy of both volatile Texas weather and an electric distribution system subject to frequent outages, he says, adding that the situation with subscribers has been exacerbated by Black's desire to sell newspapers.

Built in 1963 by a Clarksville man who sold out in 1983, the 24-channel system gets four Dallas stations via a microwave chain. Grimlich says the first transmitter is too far from Dallas to pick up a strong signal, adding that the common carrier is working on moving the initial link closer to Dallas. Also, lightning, wind and other weather-related problems can knock out the link.

Part of River's problem is that residents still remember Cab Wolf, the local man who built the system and took complaints on his own phone around the clock. Unlike Wolf, Short oversees nearby systems that are up to 45 minutes away.

Grimlich insists River is not the stereotypical "greedy" MSO painted by cable-bashers, saying River built small systems of 600 subscribers in hamlets that "have been begging for cable for decades . . . some of those small towns have been economically unfeasible. We have gone out into small towns around Clarksville and when there's a problem of lack of good off-air signal to deliver, we just haven't gotten the message out quite well enough."

*New York Post* columnist Phil Mushnick's readers know TKR Cable well: Anecdotes about the 130,000-sub TriSystems franchise have filled many of his columns. Mushnick, a TKR sub, is no less expressive in an interview:

"I once had an outage and . . . found out it was a neighborhood problem. I called [TKR]. The CSR [customer ser-

**"So often when  
you examine the  
facts, it's a prob-  
lem someone  
had a while  
back, and it just  
exploded in  
their minds"**

vice representative] said, 'We've got to come to your house.' Someone had complained first and they fixed the problem. I called back to tell them not to come. I couldn't get through, so the guy shows up."

Local officials say Mushnick is not just exaggerating to sell papers.

In a public hearing in Warren, N.J., on July 18, residents related stories of being kept on hold for up to 25 minutes. "You get a lot of horror stories about hold times of 15 minutes to an hour," says township administrator Mark Krane.

**I** have personally waited for 23 minutes on hold," says Edward Gautier, who chairs Warren's Cable TV Advisory Committee. Gautier is a bad person to keep waiting. His committee will recommend whether TriSystems' franchise should be renewed in 1992.

Warren, a township of 11,000, is one of 28 semi-rural and bedroom communities in TKR's TriSystems area, which has a total of about 130,000 subs. TKR, a 300,000-sub MSO, is managed independently of its owners, Tele-Communications Inc. and Knight-Ridder.

TKR executives concede that busy signals and hold times were problems in the past, but insist a new ARU system and more CSRs have virtually eliminated the problem. They claim isolated incidents were blown out of proportion.

"A person may have had cable TV for eight years," says TKR president Paul Freas, "and five years ago they had a repair call and perhaps the [service] person was late or stood the customer up. So often when you get down and examine the facts, it's a perception, a problem someone had a while back and it just exploded in their minds, and they just get the perception that it's so bad."

Why was service so bad all those

years? "It's been a quantitative issue of adequate staffing," Bartolotta says, adding that outages were caused by frequent lightning storms. Also, he says Mushnick's area is subject to "microwave fade" in rainy weather, a common problem for cable systems.

Residents also cite a revolving door of system managers. TriSystems has had three in four years. "We've had them come before the town committee," says Frank Salvato, a township councilman and former mayor. "We thought they would do something about [service]. Pretty soon, we had more complaints. We asked them to come again and they had a new manager."

In July, TKR went to a tiering system. Confused subs called in droves, tying up lines, but Bartolotta says new telephone equipment and beefed-up staff have meant "over the last couple of months, the phones have improved tremendously." For the most part, he insists, hold times are under a minute.

Residents are unconvinced. When Bartolotta made his phone boast at the public hearing, "They laughed him out of the room," Gautier reports. Relations remain strained. "There's no liaison between the town and the cable company," says Old Bridge's Sherman.

Despite poor local relations, neither system is in danger of losing its franchise. River Cablevision's contract, which lacks a performance clause, extends through 2000.

In Warren, Gautier says a franchise fight would be long, costly and fruitless. "There's nobody to buck them," he says. TKR's service continues to be questionable. The National Cable Television Association says wait time should not exceed 30 seconds. In two dozen calls to its offices over a week's period in August, TKR met this standard less than half the time. On one backed-up day, a CSR explained that "some people are on vacation. Some called in sick."

In its defense, industry leaders say they know service problems are a political nightmare, but insist that, compared to utilities—like the telcos—cable is held to unreasonably high standards.

"We run over rose bushes. We make the same mistakes others make," says Steve Effros, executive director of the Community Antenna Television Association. "The difference is we have an increased spotlight on us. The telcos get over \$52 per line per customer. If you give [cable] an average over \$52 per customer, we'll have new CSRs, new trucks and faster repairs." ●

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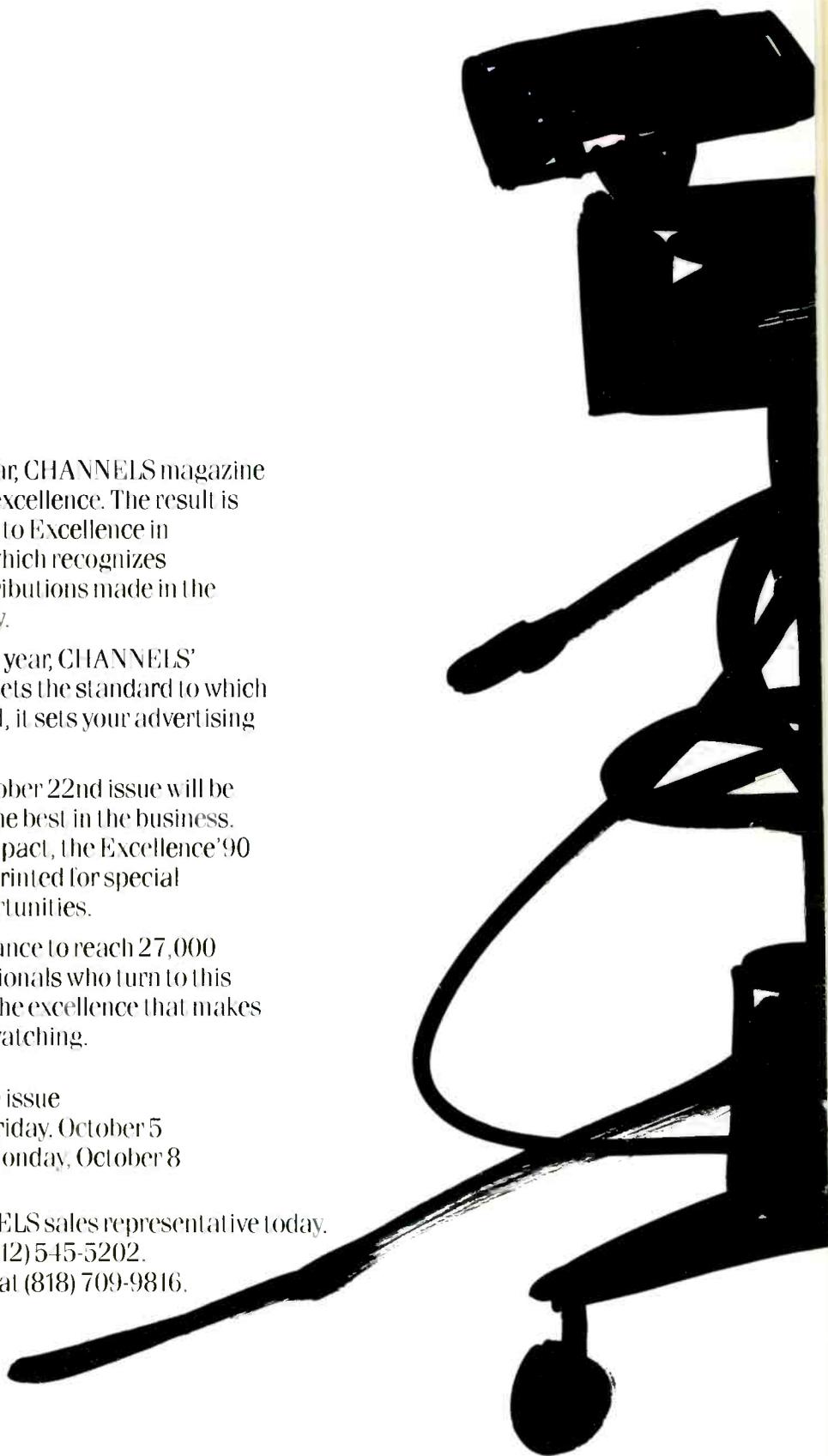
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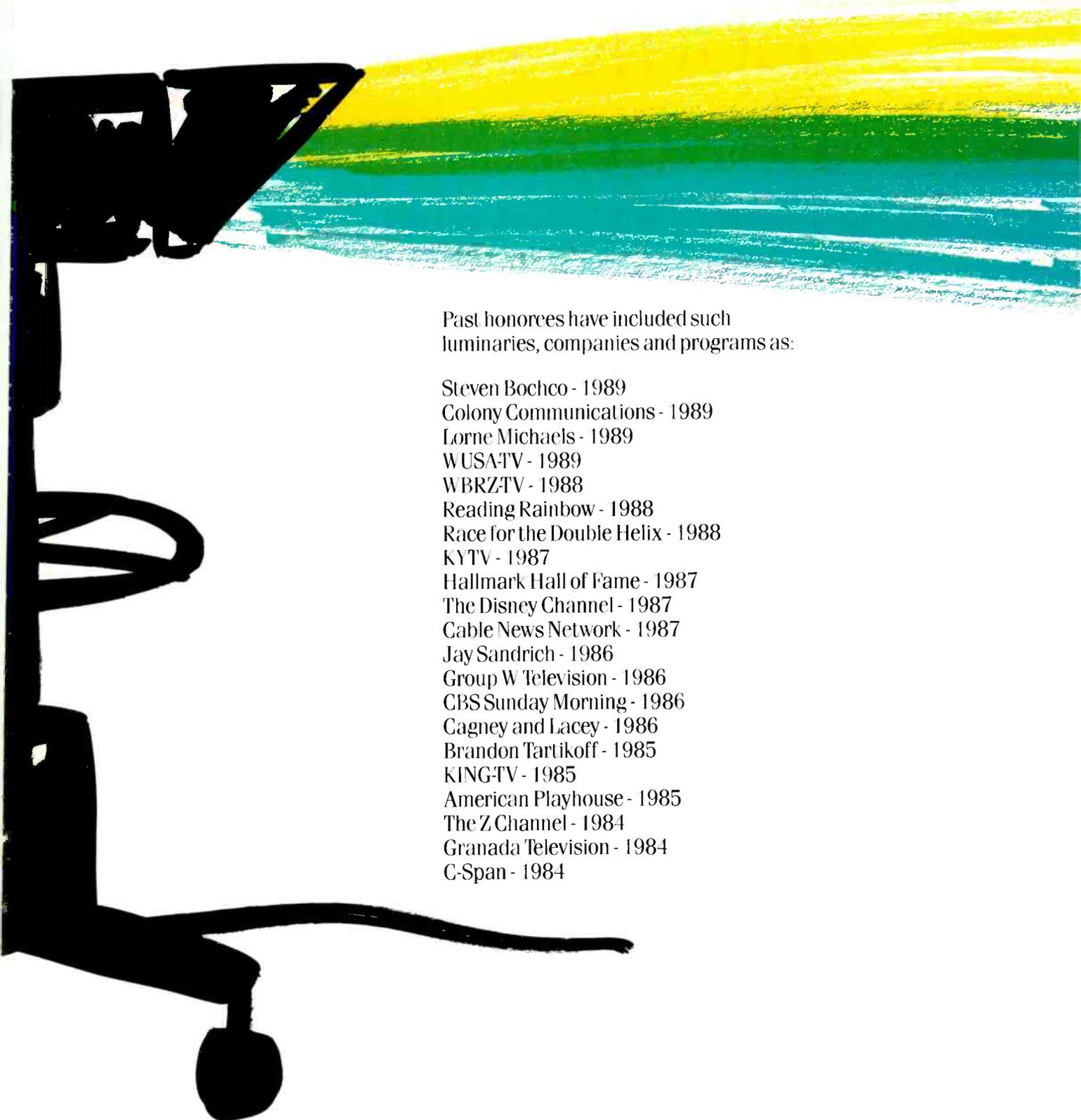
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# LOOK WHO'S DISCOUNTING

Cable ops say discounting sells PPV movies, but studios aren't eager to cut fees.

By Richard Katz

By slashing the license fee to 29 cable operators for the June pay-per-view release of *Look Who's Talking*, Columbia Pictures whetted the appetite of an industry still struggling to market itself to most of its subscribers. Participating systems did brisk business selling the title at \$1.99 instead of the usual \$3.95 or \$4.95. But as systems clamor for more discounted titles, the studios are hesitant to comply, fearing a permanently lower margin.

"It works as a once-in-a-while promotion," says Dennis Wood, vice president, worldwide pay TV of Columbia and the creator of the *Look Who's Talking* discount, "but if it was every month it would lose its uniqueness, its pizzazz. Consequently, it would drive the price down across the board."

Operators disagree. "I'm ready for the studios to give us a break on the minimums," says Karen West, manager of PPV of UA Cable in Kennewick, Wash., referring to the \$1.97 minimum wholesale price the studios usually offer systems for a 50/50 split on the retail. "I'd like to do this once a month or at least once a quarter," says West, whose system got a 13.5-percent buy rate on the \$1.99 *Look Who's Talking*. "We could really give the video stores a run for their money then." A comparable box-office hit, *Lethal Weapon II*, scored a 5.2-per-

cent buy rate at the regular \$3.99.

Preliminary results of the *Look Who's Talking* campaign indicate that the lower price does interest previous non-PPV users. West says 15 percent of *Look Who's Talking's* buyers were first-time PPV purchasers, and another 9 percent hadn't purchased a PPV

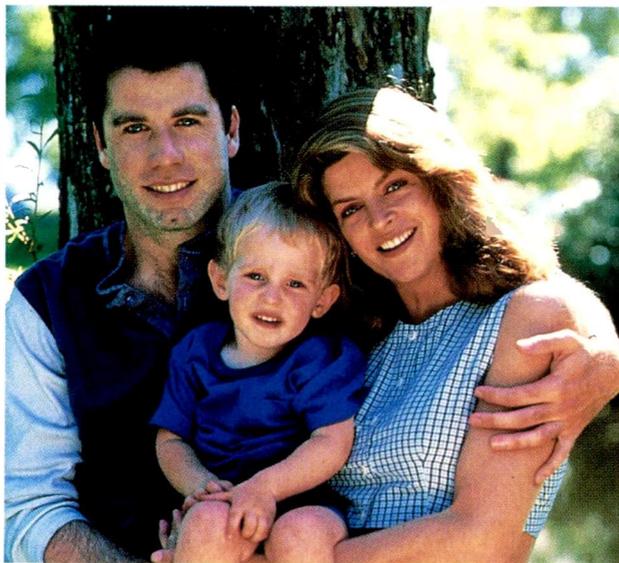
the phone is easier than driving to the video store to rent a movie and then driving back to return it the next day. A secondary reason is to see if a lower-priced title can generate enough extra business to reach what it would have grossed at the normal price. West's system did that and then some.

Columbia's Wood says the *Look Who's Talking* discount also served as a reward for the systems Columbia believes have the proper commitment to PPV. "The pay-per-view operator is not marketing the service correctly," he says. "As far as we're concerned, these [29] systems are the only ones doing it right."

"Ninety percent of the systems do not have excellent pay-per-view retailing mechanisms in place, and therefore discounting is fairly meaningless," agrees Eric Frankel, vice president, marketing of Warner Bros. Pay TV. "A lot of cable operators are finding it's easier to try the price discount than it is to have two channels of pay-per-

view, than to have a barker channel, than to have committed staff members, than to have a good sales catalogue, than to have good cross-promotion, etc. They're saying, 'When in doubt, give it away.' We believe, 'When in doubt, market harder.'"

Columbia's criteria for choosing *Look Who's Talking* systems were almost



At \$1.99, *Look Who's Talking* produced blowout PPV buy rates.

movie in at least six months.

Attracting cable subs who never buy PPV—Wood maintains that 10 percent of the subscriber base is doing 90 percent of the buying—is the primary goal of discounting. Marketers want to show the other 90 percent that buying PPV movies is extremely convenient, that pushing an impulse button or dialing

identical to Frankel's list of what most systems lack. One system that went beyond the call of duty was Suburban Cablevision, owned by King Videocable, in Brooklyn Park, Minn. When Wood approached PPV manager Don Deiley with the discount idea, Deiley insisted that the other three systems in the Twin Cities Cable Co-op also participate. To promote the PPV discount, the co-op bought five ads in each of the two local papers and space in their Sunday supplements, purchased radio time and used heavy cross-channel promos. The result for Suburban: a record 9-percent buy rate (Deiley says comparable titles get 2 to 2.5 percent), with 63 percent of the buyers not having purchased PPV in at least three months.

Deiley is now looking for a broad-based fall PPV movie like *Look Who's Talking* to repeat the discount for the co-op. He expects whatever studio he approaches will be receptive to the idea, but admits there is a chance for opposition. "They might say that the title had great legs and we're going to sell the heck out of it anyway," says Deiley. "It's a good argument, but on the other side of the coin, a really big movie is the ticket for going after non-users."

Drew Bouldin, PPV product manager of four UA systems in Southern California, used the *Look Who's Talking* discount to launch PPV in three of his systems. From June 8 to June 17, UA subscribers could order the movie for free. The freebie "buy" rates averaged about 20 percent. Bouldin was very happy with the response. "Having this loss leader drove the entire business," he says, noting that factoring the free orders out, the three systems netted a strong 72-percent cumulative buy rate for the other titles offered that month.

Cindy Weinberg, programming & promotions coordinator of Heritage Cablevision in San Jose, Calif., similarly used *Look Who's Talking* for a launch—the launch of ANI (automatic number identification) technology. Weinberg used newspaper ads, direct mail, bill inserts and a local-origination show to promote a June 1-3 window for the movie via ANI for \$1.99. The event scored a huge 4.9-percent buy rate for the three days, eclipsing what many titles get for an entire month. "We possibly will lose some revenue on this," says Weinberg, "but on the flip side, we had the opportunity to have many more people learn how to use the ANI system."

Since June, Weinberg says she's talked to every studio about trying to set up future discounts; Columbia and

Paramount sound interested but others have balked. "A few studios are nervous about discounting because of the possible risk of driving the price down and creating a white-sale mentality," says Weinberg. "We think the way we do it is so targeted that we're kind of a moving target; [subscribers] don't wait for what we're going to do because we're always doing something different."

To boost low daytime sales this month, Heritage is charging \$2.99—\$1 off the regular price and the system's

the movies aren't really worth what the customer would normally pay for a mass-appeal mainstream film," says Mark Cutten, vice president, programming of PPV supplier Request Television, who's been running corresponding pricing experiments with Request affiliates since April.

"It's appropriate to tell the customer that not all movie product has the same value," says Greg DePrez, vice president, PPV, at MSO United Artists. DePrez says that Paramount has pro-

## A THEATER NEARER YOU

**T**he multiplex is something more often associated with suburban malls than Brooklyn or Queens. Warner Bros. Pay TV, however, wants to put its emphasis on marketing rather than mere discounting into action by bringing the multiplex to New York City on PPV.

Warner will help New York's BQ Cable, also a Time-Warner property, launch three stand-alone PPV channels this January, each offering one recent theatrical hit on a continual basis.

"A lot of operators think that all you have to do is take out your hit movie at \$1.99 and you're going to create an industry," says Eric Frankel, Warner's vice president, marketing. "If I sell something in my store cheaper than everyone else," he says, alluding to discounting, "and you come into my store and can't find it, what does it matter how cheap it is?"

"We want every system to have a four-plex movie theater with one movie on each channel," continues

Frankel. "We want to say that *Batman* is on Channel 1 every two hours all week, *Steel Magnolias* is on Channel 2 every two hours all week and *Lethal Weapon II* is on Channel 3 every two hours all week. Very simple."

Hugh Penaro, BQ's vice president for customer operations and PPV, looks forward to the multiplex. "It's very hard to market a hodgepodge of multiple titles in a PPV environment," he says. "[The multiplex cinema] eliminates some of the confusion that exists in the marketplace." Penaro says BQ will probably drop Viewer's Choice II and Request to make room for the new services.

Warner's Frankel emphasizes the disorganization of current PPV schedules. "I was with 18 cable operators [three] months ago," says Frankel, "and I asked, 'Do any of you honestly feel that your subscribers know what's on PPV tonight?' and they said, 'No way.' Systems need an intelligent, logical schedule, and barely anyone has that." ●

profit margin—for all movies showing before 5 p.m. on weekends ordered through ANI. Other systems have adopted similar price-cutting incentives to draw buyers to slack days or days-parts. Every Monday UA Cable of Baton Rouge, La., offers all the movies on its three PPV channels for only \$1.01. The bargain is an ad-swap deal with local country-western station WYNK-FM. On Tuesdays, the system tries a different tack: All PPV purchasers receive a coupon for a local hamburger chain.

Another PPV discounting ploy in its infancy is pricing "B" titles lower than box-office smashes. "Frankly, some of

vided his strong PPV systems with a tiered price structure on the studio's titles. "It allows us to keep a reasonable margin on titles that were not strong box-office performers," he says.

Putting pricing issues into perspective, Bob Bedell, senior vice president of sales and marketing at PPV supplier Viewer's Choice, while not minimizing the positive effects of discounting, emphasizes that marketing—not pricing—should be the battle cry of cable operators. "Good marketing is far more important than price discounting," he says. "Cable operators can build a very successful pay-per-view business through excellent marketing alone." ●

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## Kingdom for Sale

by Cheryl Heuton

Is King Broadcasting too big and too healthy to sell during a slow market?

When King Broadcasting went on the block last month, it presented an attractive, puzzling opportunity. Most owners of healthy broadcast stations and cable systems would rather wait out a slowdown than sell during what is euphemistically described as a "buyers' market." King's owners, however, lack the financial pressures that motivate many sales. The result could be frustrating for many would-be investors—but a rare opening for the right one, or possibly the right few.

King's controlling shareholders, Priscilla "Patsy" Bullitt Collins and Harriet Stimson Bullitt, have given the broadcast industry a lot to think about with their decision to sell King and donate the proceeds to an environmental fund founded by their mother, the late Dorothy Stimson Bullitt. "The timing is atrocious," says Ray Stanfield of the brokerage firm Chapman Associates. "There are not that many buyers who can generate that kind of money in the current economic climate."

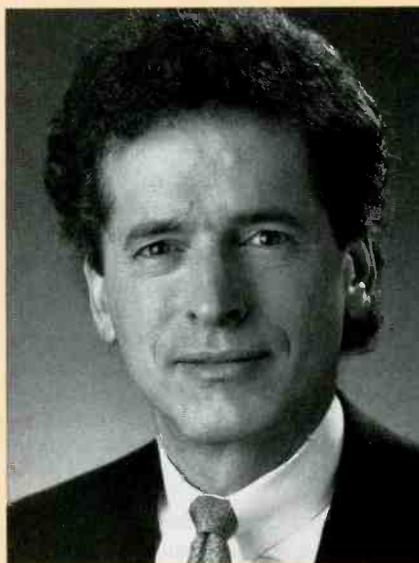
Exactly what kind of money that kind of money would be is another point of speculation. The private company releases little financial data, so brokers and analysts are stymied in their attempts to estimate values. Moreover, the Bullitt sisters and King's management insist that they want to sell the six television stations, six radio stations, 13 cable systems and one mobile television unit as a whole to a buyer willing to keep the group together.

Analysts bandy about values ranging from \$400 million to \$800 million. The closest to a verification came in August when Patsy Collins was told that Paul Kagan Associates senior analyst Bruce Bishop Cheen had placed the total at \$650 million. Collins replied, "That's about right."

Jay Dugan, senior v.p. of brokers Communications Equity Associates, says his firm is familiar with King, having talked with them over the years. "Still, the name of the game is cash flow," he says,



"and without having the figures in front of me, there's no way of telling what the holdings are each worth." Flagship TV station KING, a Seattle NBC affiliate, has been valued at between \$150 million and \$200 million. The other five stations are in much smaller markets: Portland, Ore. (NBC, ADI 26), Spokane, Wash. (CBS, 79), Boise, Idaho (NBC, 136), Twin Falls, Idaho (NBC, 202), and Honolulu (Fox, 71). The 13 cable systems serve 202,000 subscribers in three states, and are "quite successful," says Steven A. Clifford, King's president and CEO.



President and CEO Steven Clifford will try to sell King Broadcasting to a single buyer.

Clifford says that the owners are aware it will be hard to find a buyer for the whole company. "We know that can present some difficulties, perhaps some overlaps, but I don't think one overlap would knock an interested buyer out. But more, we want to sell to someone who would continue the traditions of service to the community." If King stays together, that means the buyer won't be a network, because cross-ownership rules prevent them from owning cable systems. Only a few companies own broadcast and cable, among them E.W. Scripps Co., Media General Inc., Multimedia Inc., Times Mirror Co. and Viacom International Inc. "It seems pretty large for Scripps and too big for Multimedia," says Susan Putnam, analyst for Moran and Assoc. The same goes for Media General. Viacom has been selling assets, not buying. As for Times Mirror, says Donald F. Wright, senior vice president for broadcast and cable: "I don't think I'll comment. We're aware of it, and we're looking at it." Asked whether it is logical for people to look to his company as a buyer, Wright says cagily, "I expect people would speculate."

Brokers and analysts agree that the parts would sell for more than the whole. "It is much more logical to split the [company] up," says analyst Ned Zachar of Duff & Phelps. The strange timing, combined with the resistance to breaking up the group, leads many to conclude that the Bullitts already have a buyer picked out. That theory is bolstered by the sisters' acknowledgement that they met with unspecified companies prior to making public their intention to sell, and by the fact that King will not release a prospectus. "The relevant figures are being shown to a few serious potential buyers," says a company spokesman. If there's not a ready buyer, then the explanation could be that the Bullitts will wait for the right one. "We're in no rush," Clifford says. "Financially, we're very healthy and there has been a lot of interest." ●



# Prime Time's Defending Champion

**Leslie Moonves, head of Hollywood's most successful network production operation, says life hasn't changed at Lorimar under Time Warner.**

**L**eslie Moonves arrived at Lorimar Television in 1986; within a year the studio was the networks' number one prime-time supplier, a title the studio, now part of the Time Warner megacorp, has kept ever since. Under his direction, Lorimar has added such series as *Midnight Caller*, *Full House* and *Paradise* to the long-running *Dallas*, *Knots Landing*, *Perfect Strangers* and *The Hogan Family*. This fall's new shows include *Gabriel's Fire*, *DEA*, *The Family Man* and *Going Places*. The executive v.p., a former actor, started in development at *Catalina Productions*, and was later v.p. for television and mini-series at *Twentieth Century Fox*. He recently spoke with Channels senior editor Neal Koch.

## World Enough & Time Warner

Well, for the moment, it appears like there will be six or seven companies running the entire television business—which I think everyone has been realizing for the last four or five years. It's all been happening that way, with Time Warner, with Sony, with Gulf+Western—the Paramount thing—with Rupert Murdoch's organization.

It is probably leading us, number one, to more concern for the bottom line per se, maybe slightly away from the best of all creative worlds, and yet at the same time having all these companies behind us allows us to take more chances. If we make a mistake, in terms of the overall position of Time-Warner, it's really a drop in the bucket. When we were Lorimar, just Lorimar, before we joined with Warner Bros. and before Warner merged with Time . . . a show that deficated a great deal of money that was

over and out in ten or 12 episodes had a sizable effect on our business. Now, as a piece of Time Warner, it's not that big a deal.

## It's About Clout

I would think the relationships also between the networks and the big corporations have to change somewhat. When there are a lesser amount of major players, it gives the players a little bit more clout. I think this is something that concerns the networks.

There's no question, the more shows you have on the air, the more clout you have in terms of negotiating and changing your outlook and your point of view about doing business. Frankly, right now I'm happy I'm with one of the largest, if not the largest media company in the world. The amount of programming that we have on the air at Lorimar is very satisfying to us.

I have not seen any significant difference in our operation [since the Time-Warner merger]. I haven't seen any more pressure being put on the producer. I mean, there's always been pressure to keep the deficits down. I think creatively everybody has felt that it's really been business as usual.

And it's remarkable that my day-to-day life has not altered that significantly from Lorimar to Lorimar Telepictures, to Warner Bros., to Time Warner—which is only within five years that this has all happened.

## Disappearing Independents

I think most independent producers are going to have to ally themselves a lot more with the majors. I think if you compare the amount of product that the

independents have with the majors, in the last five years the shift has been quite significant. When you look back seven, eight, nine, ten years ago, to where Aaron Spelling was, where MTM was, where Lorimar was at that point (which was really an independent until relatively recently), it's changing. And I think you're seeing more alliance.

## The International Hour

With the foreign market being what it is, in some ways the hour business is becoming a much, much better business. If you're dealing with a show that has a sufficient foreign appeal, like a *Midnight Caller*, it's a decent business to be in. We are making money on those shows. I think the domestic market is improving slightly, and basic cable has helped in that, as well as some of the hour shows that are now going out in regular syndication. But primarily, the foreign dollars are increasing daily, and a show like *Midnight Caller* or a new show like *Gabriel's Fire*, which has some action-adventure and some adult themes, can make some money. At least a large percentage of [revenues] has to come out of foreign. That's our main consideration.

## Sticking with Hours

The economics never scared us as much as some of the other companies in town. I know for a while Paramount, for instance, was not doing hour programming. Now they're very active in the hour business. I think those companies that got out of the business, frankly, were making a mistake. One of the reasons why we have been able to succeed so much is that we kept our momentum,

we kept an optimistic point of view. Now Columbia is trying to get back into it, Paramount is getting back into it.

### Black Writers, White Industry

Every studio that I know of is *actively* trying to change the situation. We are doing that. Specifically on, to start with, shows that deal with black subjects. This year, on *Family Matters*, for instance, there are four black writers on the show, which is quite a change from last year, when there were one or two.

Number one, it's going to take the social responsibility of the studios, which by and large I find to be a fairly responsible group of people. I think the lobbying efforts done by the NAACP and organizations like that are very important to make us aware of the problem. However, we *are* aware of the problem, and we are trying to do everything we can to change it.

It's a very difficult situation. I know there's a legitimate gripe. We are all looking for top people. It's catch-22, as it is with every young writer, be they minority or not. How do you get in the loop, and if you don't have the experience, you need the experience to get into the loop. I think people are realizing through a writers program like the one [Warner has], that that is a way into the loop.

### Charging Jews with Racism

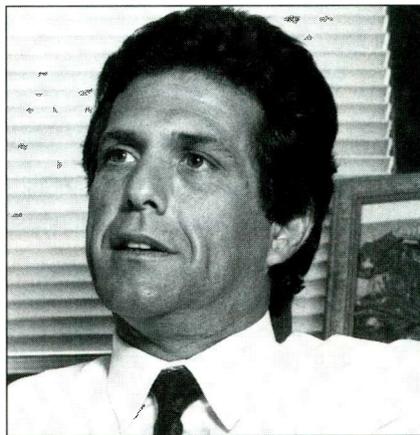
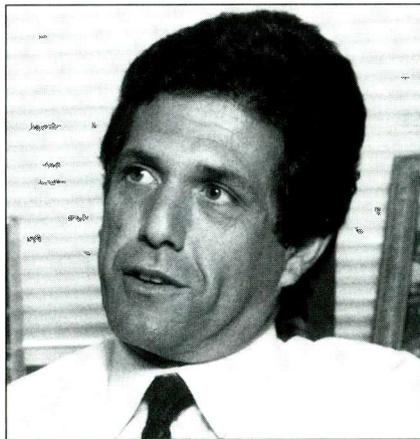
I resent it, number one. I don't listen to it, number two. It is unfortunate it has come to this. Yet a great part of our business is Jewish. I don't think there is any Jewish backlash against blacks or other minorities. Politically, the Jews have always been very open and liberal in their attitudes towards this. I am disturbed by the whole thing, starting from Jesse Jackson and to Nelson Mandela that the black community has placed an awful lot of . . . They've put a lot of anti-Semitic tones on everything that's gone on, and I think it's a major problem. And frankly, rather offputting and counterproductive to the eventual goals of what they're trying to do in our business.

### Grow Your Own Talent

The prices are being driven up and it's a constant problem we deal with. What do you pay for talent?

One of the things that we do pride ourselves on is doing a lot of home-grown talent. We have not been active going out and making a Bocheo deal or a Brooks deal or a Norman Lear deal—a major amount of money being put out. It is much more appealing to us to take two writers who were staff writers on *Perfect Strangers*, who created a new show called *Going Places*. It wasn't a

*'It's much better to go down with something like Max Headroom or Twin Peaks than some of the other things that are around.'*



multi-zillion dollar deal. And they got a new show on the air. I mean, some of the high-priced players, and I don't want to name names, who have talent who have been paid millions and millions of dollars, did not get shows on the air.

### The Power of the Press

I think the networks, number one, are more sensitive to the press—which is good. I think that has only helped elevate the quality of the television. And I think they realize the same old/same old is not working anymore. We have to get some audience back. We have to build up the shares. And I think what happened with a *Twin Peaks* is terrific. It made people pay attention again to the excitement of what television can do, whether you like the show or not. I felt the same thing with *Max Headroom* when we did that show. Win, lose or draw, it was exciting—it was an admirable failure. It's much better to go down with something like *Max Headroom* or *Twin Peaks* than some of the other things that are around. So I think everybody is aware of that.

I think that the change in some of the networks as well . . . [CBS] has said, "Okay, I want younger people. I want hipper, newer programming." In all our meetings recently, in the beginning of the season, which was done over the last month, we've met with various people at the networks, from the presidents to the v.p.s of development, and they've all said the same thing. "We're not going to do the same old stuff. Bring us new, unique material." And I think that's great.

### Actors' Inequity

It wasn't too long after becoming an actor that I realized that I wanted to be more in the center of what was going on. I was one of those actors who, whenever I was on a set, wanted to figure out what everybody else did. And I realized that the actor wasn't at the center of things until they became a star, and I like being in the middle of all the activity and the action. So this is far more satisfying.

### There's No Business

It's still show business. I mean, it's a lot of business and obviously, as I mentioned before, with Time Warner, with Sony, with News Corp., the major corporations that have come in, business is very important—maybe more important, but it's still about that piece of paper, that script that you pick up and read. It's still about getting that right actor who has magic on the television set. . . . It's still fun walking on a lot where they shot *Wizard of Oz*. It's still show business, absolutely. ●

**RUNNING THE NUMBERS**

# Indecency's Piques And Valleys

Under chairman Mark Fowler, the FCC announced and initiated an effort to enforce existing indecency statutes in late 1986. The increasing volume of complaints from second quarter to fourth quarter 1987 may be attributed in part to public awareness of the commission's crackdown on indecency and the resolution of three highly publicized cases involving FM radio stations in Pennsylvania and California. What one FCC staffer calls "a public misunderstanding" accounts for the surge of complaints in first quarter '88. In December '87, the FCC made public its decision to contract the number of hours during which indecency complaints would not be pursued legally. Though the commission had changed the witching hour from 10 P.M. to midnight, letters began to pour in accusing it of creating a "safe harbor" for indecency between midnight and 6 A.M. The fourth quarter '89 blip might have been inspired by the commission's published requests for public comment on the proposed extension of indecency liability to 24 hours.

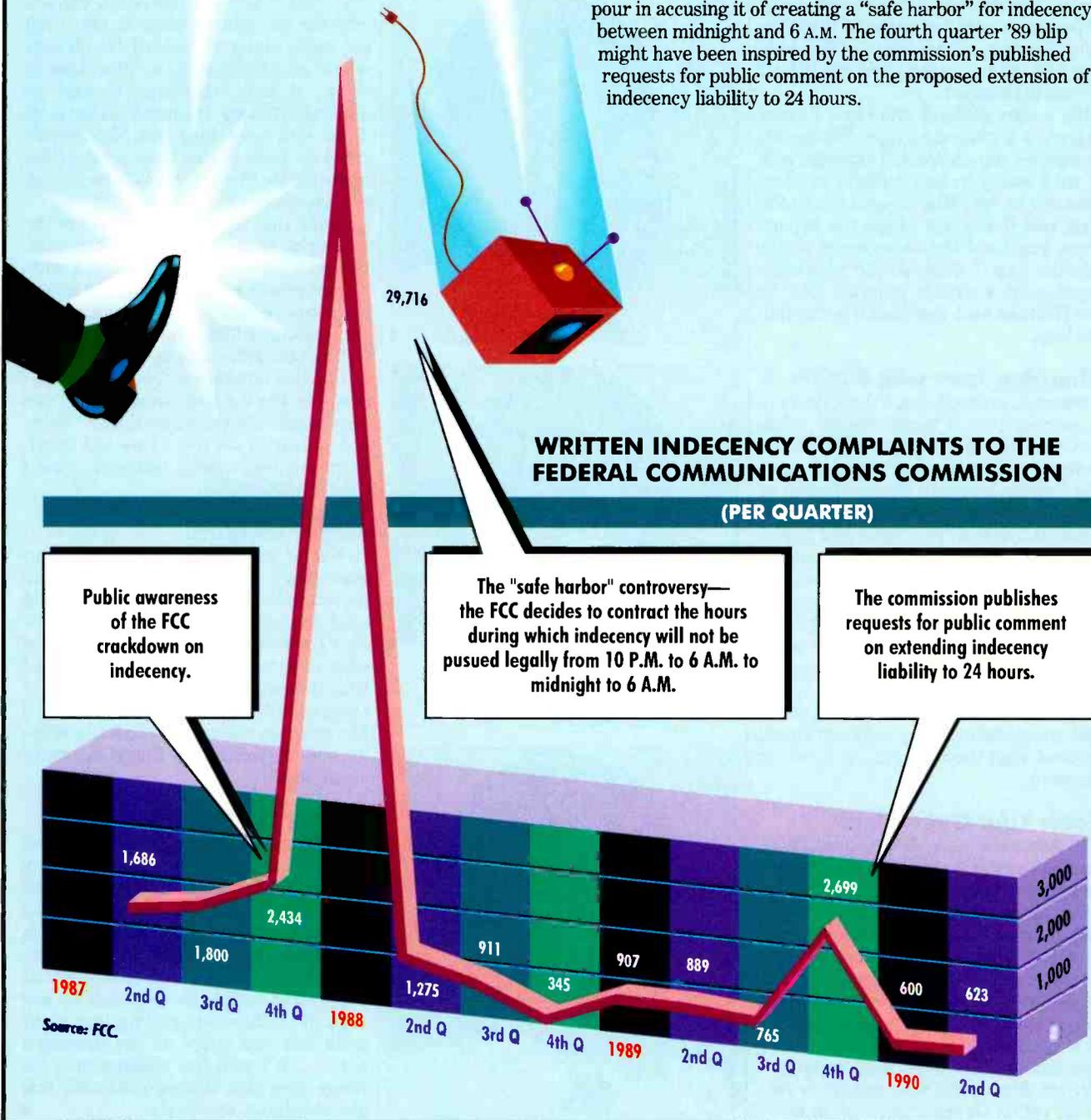


ILLUSTRATION BY JIM LUDTKE

**HOW MANY** times have you passed judgment on someone based strictly on first appearances? You don't bother striking up a conversation with the person sitting next to you on an airplane because they are unattractive. Or maybe you avoid people at social gatherings who are poorly dressed. We all need to look deeper than the surface. People come in all different shapes, sizes and colors. And what makes them special isn't their physical appearance or the clothes they wear. It's  their personal values, ideas, and the way they choose to conduct their lives. If you don't make an effort to reach out and find those qualities in people, someone who could have been a great friend or business relationship, will be gone and out of your life before they ever got a chance to enter it.

*Bill Daniels*

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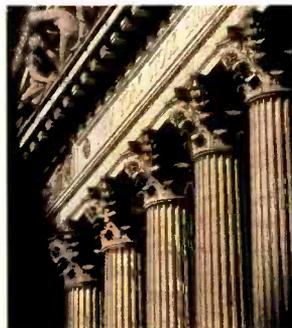
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