

WMAQ says so long

Pioneering Chicago station is gone; sports format WSCR grabs its frequency

By Elizabeth A. Rathbun

WMAQ(AM) is dead! Long live WMAQ! Chicago's oldest radio station retired its call letters last Monday after more than 78 years, but its archives will live on at the Museum of Broadcast Communications in Chicago.

WMAQ owner Infinity Broadcasting Corp. had to sell an AM in Chicago to win federal approval of parent CBS Corp.'s recent merger into Viacom Inc. The natural target was WSCR(AM) at 1160 kHz, with its weak nighttime signal. But rather than sell off WSCR completely, Infinity decided to move WSCR's call letters and potentially popular sports talk format to its WMAQ, which at 670 kHz has the strongest AM signal available. (Infinity is looking for a buyer for the 1160 frequency.)

Ratings also came into play in Infini-

ty's decision: WMAQ tied for 21st place in the spring Arbitron book. Although WSCR was tied for 26th, Infinity is hoping to duplicate the success of its sports/talk WFAN(AM) New York. WFAN has been the top-billing radio station not just in New York but in the entire country since 1995, according to BIA Research.

While WMAQ billed some \$20 million in 1999, it "was not functioning as a successful station," CBS spokesman Gil Schwartz says. Meanwhile, the sports format is a "successful franchise," he continues, although WSCR reportedly billed just \$10 million last year.

WMAQ employees had a rough couple of weeks before the change, says Mike Krauser, formerly news director of WMAQ and now news director of Infini-

ty's all-news WBBM Chicago. About a dozen WMAQ employees have moved to WBBM, the No. 6 station in the market; the other 40 or so are looking for jobs.

WMAQ, which went on the air on April 12, 1922, was the birthplace of radio's first serial, *Amos 'n' Andy*, in 1928, and originated "more soap operas than you can begin to name." Chicago broadcast historian Rich Samuels says. The station also hosted *Fibber McGee & Molly* and personalities including Red Skelton and Don Ameche. WMAQ also lays claim to the first play-by-play sports broadcast, in 1925, and the first transoceanic news broadcast, in 1928.

The station was started by the *Chicago Daily News* and a local department store, the Fair Store. NBC bought WMAQ in 1931 and owned it until 1988, when the station was sold to Westinghouse Electric Co. Westinghouse bought Infinity in 1996, the year after it bought CBS.

W
M
A
Q

99.987% Mechanically Perfect

¶ You'll never "Get to Town" in a breakdown vehicle.
 ¶ Listeners will not be held by a station which fluctuates in frequency nor a station which suddenly goes dead in the middle of a broadcast.
 ¶ That is why mechanical perfection is an essential to successful broadcasting.
 ¶ WMAQ, listed for years by the Department of Commerce as a "Standard Frequency Station," has an unsurpassed engineering record.

THE 1932 RECORD
 PROFILES OF STATIONS
 PROFILES OF CHANNELS
 (Detailed statistics table)

A NATIONAL BROADCASTING COMPANY NETWORK STATION
 STANLEY COHEN, PRESIDENT
 GEORGE W. BROWN, VICE PRESIDENT
 CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
 WMAQ-AM
 WMAQ-TV

By the time this ad appeared in a 1932 edition of 'Broadcasting,' WMAQ was a 10-year-old radio power.



GET WITH THE PROGRAM

By Joe Schlosser and Susanne Ault

Gifford goodbye is a ratings grabber

Kathie Lee Gifford's farewell episode scored a ratings coup for *Live With Regis and Kathie Lee*, grabbing a 10.4/33 household average in the metered markets, the best rating for any talk show this season, according to Nielsen Media Research. Buena Vista's talk series (now titled *Live With Regis*) shot up 149% on Friday (July 28) from its average May marks (4.1/16).

The teary farewell fared well in New York (where the show is taped), netting a 13/37. In Los Angeles, it

rang up a 12.7/37. To compare, during the most recent ratings period (week ended July 16), talk-show queen *Oprah* posted a 5.8 in national households. For that week, *Live* snagged a 3.6.

NBC takes 18-49

NBC eked out a victory in adults 18-49, while ABC narrowly took home the prize for most viewers for the week ended July 30.

Carried by strong ratings for reruns of *Friends* and *Will & Grace*, along with a good start by new series *Mysterious Ways*, NBC averaged a network-

best 3.5 rating for the week, according to Nielsen Media Research. With *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* and *Survivor* still pulling their weight, ABC and CBS tied for second place in the 18-49 race, averaging a 3.4 rating. In total viewers, ABC topped CBS with a 9.7 million-viewer average to CBS' 9.6 million. NBC finished third with 8.9 million viewers.

The top-rated show for the week was CBS' *Survivor*, which averaged an 11.9 rating/36 share in adults 18-49 and 27.2 million viewers.

Mysterious Ways, which is sharing a window with co-owned network Pax TV, brought in a surprising 12 million viewers on Monday night. Fox finished the week in fourth place in both adults 18-49 (2.7 rating) and in total viewers (5.9 million), but the network was No. 1 among all nets in adults 18-34 and men 18-34.

UPN topped The WB once again in both categories, averaging a 1.3 rating in adults 18-49 and 3.2 million viewers. The WB scored a 1.0 rating in adults 18-49 and 2.4 million viewers.

'Will & Grace' rerun earned strong ratings.

