

No access crunch on New York CATV's

Public-channels action on two cable systems gets off to slow start

The public-access channels on the Manhattan cable systems of Teleprompter Corp. and Sterling Manhattan Cable Television lapsed into relative quiet after much-heralded openings on July 1 (BROADCASTING, July 5).

Although there have been many inquiries, according to spokesmen for both Teleprompter and Sterling Manhattan, no extensive programming has been scheduled. Next Wednesday (July 14), however, Teleprompter's public channel plans to give the Inwood Committee for Irish-American Action a half-hour of time. But a Teleprompter spokesman said last Wednesday (July 7) that the committee had not delivered a video tape of the show, so that he could not say what the group planned to discuss in its half hour.

Henry D. Pearson Jr., recently named coordinator of Teleprompter's public-access channels, said 15 to 18 groups had asked for either time or information on how to get time. John MacPherson, general manager of Sterling's Manhattan system, said his organization had received 12 applications for information and one official request for time.

The slowness with which the access channels appeared to be getting into use was attributed to the long holiday weekend immediately following their open-

ing, the fact it is summer and a delay by the city's Bureau of Franchises in relaying an interim set of regulations covering the use of the channels. These guidelines were not received until the access channels' July 1 opening date, spokesmen said.

On opening day, Sterling had nine-and-a-half hours of programming; Teleprompter, which opened its channel with a block party, started to televise the activities at 10 a.m. The party ended at 5 p.m. and featured a mid-street argument between Irving B. Kahn, Teleprompter's chairman, and Theodora Sklovar, executive director of Open Channel, a nonprofit organization aiding community groups in planning for the use of public channels.

The belatedly received guidelines are to be in effect until Dec. 31, but can be amended by Morris Tarshis, director of the Franchise bureau, at any time without notice. Mr. MacPherson said Sterling was in the process of sending copies to persons and groups who had requested time or who might seek time in the future.

Both Mr. MacPherson and Mr. Pearson agreed that the four public-access channels would be utilized soon and certainly before Labor Day.

The city regulations stipulate that the cable-TV firms will provide free time to all nonprofit and noncommercial groups on the public channels. Teleprompter does not charge for use of its studios and equipment but has set limitations on the amount of equipment to be used. Sterling charges for any equipment used, starting at \$25 for one black-and-white camera.



Among those attending the day-long ceremonies opening Teleprompter's two public-access channels in its Upper Manhattan CATV system were (l to r) Hazel Bryant, director of the Afro American Theatre, Bill Haddad, host of Interesting People, a Teleprompter program, and Charles C. Woodard, vice president and assistant general manager of Teleprompter's CATV division. Visible at the microphone in the background is Hubert C. Schlafly, Teleprompter president.

Pay cablecasting slated for N.Y.

But cautious Time-Life wants clear-cut FCC ruling to avoid legal snags

Time-Life Broadcast, 48% owner of Sterling Manhattan Cable Television Inc., one of three companies franchised to operate in New York, last week told the FCC the cable firm plans to initiate transmissions on a subscription basis. It asked the commission to issue a ruling that would erase any legal barriers to that service.

In a letter to the commission, T-L asked the agency to issue "affirmative authorization" for subscription cable programming in New York. It noted that the commission has already indicated it will permit pay-CATV under certain conditions (the commission took up the issue when it disposed of various petitions for reconsideration of its order requiring local origination for CATV systems with more than 3,500 subscribers) but said a clause in its franchise agreement with the city of New York brings question to whether systems operating there may practice subscription cablecasting without such authorization.

Specifically, T-L said, the franchise agreement stated that "the failure of the FCC to prohibit pay television . . . shall not constitute an affirmative authorization." It said there has been some speculation that this clause connotes that there can be no pay-CATV operation in New York until the commission specifically gives approval for it. While indicating it feels these speculations are "unwarranted," T-L said such a ruling by the commission "should eliminate all doubts."

The company also indicated that operation on a subscription basis will be necessary if Sterling Manhattan is to continue local origination on its system. Sterling, Time said, "has consistently lost money on its program origination." The system has experienced recent losses of \$250,000 annually, it said, and now has "accountable losses" approaching \$1 million.

"A continuation of these program origination efforts and vigorous exploration of new efforts at diversity, Time continued, are largely dependent upon "the economic base afforded by pay cablecasting."

Sterling, on July 1, initiated programming on its system's new public access channel, designed to provide exposure for local citizens' viewpoints (see this page).