Cablecastings

Motown movement

Detroit looks for a cable franchise award by next summer if all goes well with the process that got off the ground with the submission of three bids Friday, Dec. 10 (BROADCASTING, Dec. 13), to wire the city's 471,000 homes.After three-and-a half months of study by the city's cable commission and reports from its consultant, the Cable Television Information Center, hearings will be held in early April. The commission will give a recommendation to the mayor, who will recommend one applicant to the council.

Detroit Inner City-Unity Bell Cable Systems has contracted with Cox Cable to design, construct and run the system. Cox would get 5% of the gross revenues. Inner City (Percy Sutton) and its principals own 43 1/2% of the applicant; Unity Broadcasting (Eugene Jackson) and its principals own 43 1/2%; Bell Cable Corp. owns 10% (one of its principals, Dr. Wendell Cox, has an interest in Bell Broadcasting, licensee of WJZZ(FM) Detroit), and KL Ventures, a cable consulting company, owns the other 3%. It bid a 120-channel, 400 mhz system with a 50-channel institutional loop. It expects to give $40 million over the life of the franchise to Detroit's Cable Communications Public Benefit Corp., including $10 million in the first two years.

Barden Cablevision, which owns several systems in suburban Detroit, plans a 126-channel system, donating $8.5 million over 15 years for public access and local origination and a 61-channel institutional loop. The basic 42-channel tier costs $3.95, the 88-channel second tier costs $6.95 and a full 126 channels, $10.95.

City Communications, one of whose principals is David Chase, owner of Chase Enterprises, owner of WTIC(AM) Hartford, Conn., plans a 120-channel interactive system. First-tier 59-channel service will cost $3.95 and 120 channels will cost $8.95. It, like the other applicants, has to give 3% of its gross revenues to the CCPBC. It estimates it will cost $150 million to build Detroit.

Marquette exit

Cox Cable is pulling out of Marquette, Mich. The MSO announced last week that service to the city's 6,500 subscribers would be discontinued effective Jan. 13, 1983, because of the inability to reach a refranchise agreement with the city.

The city has already granted a nonexclusive franchise to a local company, Marquette Cablevision, and the city has refused to consider Cox's refranchise proposal. The stumbling block is rates. Marquette Cablevision has agreed to charge rates set by the city; Cox has refused.

Life of Riley. The cable industry is giving radio a run for the money with audience promotion contests. And that's just fine as far as Ida Ferrare and her husband, Rocco, are concerned. Ferrare, a Waterbury, Conn., grandmother of 13, won The Movie Channel's "Arthur Extravaganza" contest, beating out 150,000 entries. Shown above are the Ferrares at the conclusion of the "millionaire weekend" in New York that was the top prize. They are gathered around the plane that would jet them back home with their prizes, which included the services of an English butler. The total value of the prizes was $22,000.

Cox says there still is a chance an agreement can be reached by approving its proposal. If that doesn't happen, Cox could sell the existing plant to the new company, or begin dismantling the plant Jan. 14. Cox has 220 miles of plant in the area serving more than 15,000 subscribers, but only Marquette will be affected by the termination. Elimination of cable service could mean very poor TV service in Marquette because of the hilly terrain. Cable penetration in the area is 62%, and it goes even higher in Marquette, in the 90%-range, Cox says.

Sporting proposition

Cablevision's Sportschannel pay cable service will absorb New England Prime Cable Network (Prism-New England) in a merger slated for Jan. 1. Prism-New England will cease operations then. The resulting all-sports service is to be known as Sportschannel-New England, and will offer Boston Celtics, Hartford (Conn.) Whalers and Big East Conference basketball, along with New York area sports. Cablevision is the operator of the Boston franchise. Chuck Dolan, Cablevision chairman, said he expects to retain a "majority" of the 17,000 Prism-New England subscribers, and hopes to add 100,000 within a year. Twenty-eight systems, including Cablevision Boston, will affiliate with Sportschannel-New England.

Valley deal

Standard Broadcasting Corp. Ltd. of Canada has reached an agreement with Valley Cable TV Inc. to grant a 55% ownership interest in the latter firm in return for $20 million in new capital needed to complete Valley's franchise in Los Angeles' West San Fernando Valley.

Under the terms of a letter of intent signed by the two companies, SBC will become a "limited partner" in Valley Cable, which is 73% owned by Cable America Inc., a subsidiary of Cablecasting Ltd., another Canadian firm. SBC owns radio, television and cable properties in Canada and Great Britain. No changes in management are contemplated, although the share of profits (or losses) to local partners in the West Valley franchise will be reduced from 27% to about 12%, according to a company spokesman.

SBC capital will be used to reduce Valley Cable's indebtedness and speed completion of the system, scheduled for August 1983. The franchise was supposed to be built by last September, but Valley was granted an extension by the city council after a construction ban was temporarily imposed by the city-owned Department of