Oprah reups with King World

Syndicated talk show host extends her agreement with syndicator

Oprah Winfrey, host of the leading syndicated talk show, last week ended speculation about long-term plans for The Oprah Winfrey Show by extending her deal with syndicator King World through 1993. Seven Cap-cities/ABC-owned television stations simultaneously announced a five-year renewal for the highly rated hour talk show.

Winfrey’s production company, Harpo Inc. (Oprah spelled backward), also said last week it is assuming ownership and total production control of the show from ABC-owned WLS-TV Chicago, where she began hosting the local program in 1984.

A spokesman for Winfrey said the program will continue to be produced at the station for at least nine months to a year, although Winfrey is considering acquiring her own production facility to produce the show.

Winfrey’s heavy schedule of projects, including movie roles, had raised concerns about whether she intended to continue the talk vehicle past 1991, when her previous contract with King World ended.

With the renewals by Capcities/ABC-owned stations in New York; Los Angeles; Chicago; Philadelphia; San Francisco; Raleigh-Durham, N.C., and Fresno, Calif.; the show’s clearances through 1993 already exceed 20%. ABC’s KTRK-TV Houston does not hold rights to the show, which airs in that market on CBS affiliate KHOU-TV.

According to King World’s chief operating officer, Steve Palley, the ABC stations’ agreement represents the first time a first-run syndicated program has been renewed for a five-year period.

First-run renewals are generally on a one-year basis. The other notable exceptions are the two leading syndicated programs, King World game shows Wheel of Fortune and Jeopardy!, which the syndicator has now renewed through the 1991-92 season in more than 80 markets.

Mike Leviton of station rep company Blair TV said he “applaud[ed]” Winfrey’s decision to renew the show past 1991 and said stations currently with the show should hold on to it and expect “a good, strong winner.”

But Leviton also said he is “bothered by the trend to long-term renewals,” arguing that, unlike more predictable off-network fare sold on a multiyear basis, first-run...