

CLOSED CIRCUIT

LOS ANGELES

Century 16 strategy

Fox has scheduled sales meeting in next couple of weeks to decide on strategy for latest movie package for Century 16, perhaps indication that studio is not holding titles for planned basic cable network as some have thought. If package is sold, consortium of superstations WGN-TV Chicago and WTBS Atlanta, and Gaylord Broadcasting may be first in line to buy. Fox had pulled away from deal for Century 16 with them in spring, according to Dennis Fitz-Simons, vice president and general manager, WGN-TV. "They indicated they wanted to sell us the package, and we were interested in buying," he said. Calls from Fox stopped when rumors started of management change, which led to appointment of Lucie Salhany. Fitz-Simons commented he was surprised Fox wanted to sell to him at all: "We hadn't gotten a call from them in three years, since the syndication unit started selling mostly to Fox affiliates."

Eight station limit

Fox Broadcasting Corp.'s stringent conditions on sale of its affiliates may have kept some potential suitors from

Act III Broadcasting, whose eight Fox affiliates have been sold, subject to FCC approval, to ABRY Communications (see page 68). Fox's decision to limit any station group to no more than eight affiliates may have partially deterred at least one potential Act III buyer, Clear Channel Communications, which already owned five Fox affiliates.

BALTIMORE

Ripple effect

Effective today (Sept. 9) WMAR-TV Baltimore will switch reps from TeleRep to Katz Television. Change has set off domino effect in market, with TeleRep becoming new rep for WBFF(TV) Baltimore. WBFF was repped by Seltel. Switches may not end there, as Seltel could end up repping ABRY Communications-owned WNUV-TV Baltimore. WNUV-TV is currently repped by Petry Inc. ABRY may consider switch to Seltel because Seltel reps Act III stations that ABRY is acquiring controlling interest in as well as two other ABRY stations. According to market sources, WMAR-TV, NBC affiliate owned by Scripps Howard, has national billings of \$25 million, while Fox affiliate WBFF has estimated national billings of \$9 million.

CHICAGO

Burnham restructures debt

Noteworthy example of television industry's general financial difficulties surfaced last week. Chairman of ABC television affiliates board of governors, Peter Desnoes, who is managing partner of Burnham Broadcasting, said that five-station group owner is now renegotiating senior debt, including schedule of principal repayment. Recent default on debt's covenants allowed banks to force Burnham to stop paying interest to holders of \$32 million in 13 7/8 subordinated notes. Desnoes said problems are troublesome, but understandable, surfacing at worst point in long industry-wide revenue slowdown.

Minority ad drive

Stations having trouble selling local ad time during syndicated programming featuring and targeted to African Americans may soon have help. Don Jackson, president of Tribune/Central City Productions, expected to launch Black Television Network to sell local barter time to national spot advertisers. Money from sale goes to local station in exchange for small commission and better positioning of syndicated program. *Soul Train* is often cited as example of show that pulls relatively high ratings while being difficult to sale locally for often predominantly white sales staffs. In tougher economic times, lack of local sales may mean show like *Soul Train* will be moved to different time, which could undermine national barter deals, or outright cancellation. Although venture is unlikely to help Jackson's existing shows—most are annuals and specials—word has it that Central City is readying weekly, comedy-talk format syndicated program for early 1992 that might benefit directly.

NEW YORK

TV on radio

ABC Television Network is turning to local radio to promote its three new fall programs: *Home Improvement*, *Sibs* and *Good and Evil*. Campaign will roll out in eight of top-10 markets today, (Sept. 9), with in-store promotions



Senator Albert Gore (D-Tenn.), left, was among the guests of the Arts & Entertainment Network and the National Cable Television Association for a premiere screening of A&E's 'Dinosaur!' last Wednesday evening (Sept. 4) at the National Museum of Natural History in Washington. The new four-part documentary series shows how paleontologist "dinosaur detectives" use fossilized remains to piece together the story of how the dinosaurs evolved and suddenly died out 65 million years ago. Series narrator Walter Cronkite "was a critical element of the series," approaching the project with "a childlike wonder," said A&E President Nicholas Davatzes (right). 'Dinosaur!' premiered last night (Sept. 8) and is running nightly at 8 p.m. through Wednesday. Pictured in the center is Frank H. Talbot, director of the Museum of Natural History.