

hit by the affiliation war, has 100-150 job openings, estimates Phil Alvidrez, news director at KTVK, which is going from ABC to independent and is looking to add an extra three and a half or four hours of news each day.

"Last year at this time, you were lucky to have three jobs available in Phoenix," Fitzpatrick says. "For the 21st market to need people is totally unheard of."

Other factors are at work in the hiring boom. "The overall health of the economy and the profitability of the industry is indisputably a large part [of the increase in hiring]," says Marci Burdick, chairwoman of the board of the Radio-Television News Directors Association.

That more time is being set aside for news is part of the "news on demand" trend, says KSAZ News Director Tom Dolan. If stations did not have to clear network programming, he says, they would provide more news: "People prefer local news."

But some still say many stations are continuing to hold back on news budgets. "The broadcast industry doesn't feel safe enough after the flat advertising revenue" of the late 1980s and

early '90s, says Bowen. "They are not in a free-spending mode yet."

Fox is one of the primary drivers. It's trying to introduce an hour-long 10 o'clock newscast, not only at its growing list of new affiliates, but at all of its 180-plus affiliates, according to Joe Siatti, Fox's VP, affiliate news.

"Fox is hungry," says Heidi Foglesong, a newly hired anchor at KSAZ and former KTVK anchor. "You try a lot harder when you operate at the bottom rung of the ladder."

While Big Three affiliates—turning-Fox have the benefit of an existing news infrastructure, most Fox-affiliates—turning-Big Three have little or no news in place on which to expand. Bob Rowe, Scripps Howard's vice president of news, is facing the prospect of having to build a news operation from the ground up at three stations.

"For people involved in the expansion of these stations, it's like we're pioneers," he says. "It's like going out and building a town out in the Old West. This is a massive undertaking."

Rowe declines to mention the number of available positions in Phoenix,

Tampa and Kansas City, saying they are "backing into" the hiring process by first deciding what kind of news operations to build.

"It's probably the most exciting thing going on for people looking for work or looking to make a change," Rowe says.

Simple economics would dictate that the demand for news staffs would drive up salaries. "Stations used to have the upper hand," Frye says. "Now it's the talent who has the upper hand."

But KSAZ's Dolan says he has not seen an increase in salary expectations. Though it is obviously an "employee-leveraged market" right now, people are shopping around more for "a situation and role," he says.

Alvidrez agrees, noting that stations that are looking to fill their staffs quickly are more willing to overpay. "We will still reject many more applicants than we will ever have jobs for," he says.

A second, smaller wave of hiring will follow as stations try to work out the kinks in programming, Fitzpatrick says. "Stations have to hire bodies now," he says. "There won't be superstar talent right out of the chute." ■

Fox et al. to buy three stations

Affiliation shuffle continues; NBC said to have inside track for CBS's WCAU-TV Philadelphia

By Geoffrey Foisie and Julie A. Zier

Industry executives expect CBS to announce, possibly as early as this week, the stations it would take in trade for WCAU-TV Philadelphia. Although New World Communications Group owns the stations that CBS wants most, a deal between the two companies was not seen as likely last week.

Instead, it was NBC—which soon will lack an affiliate in the number-four market—that observers thought most likely to make a deal for WCAU-TV. Speculation was that NBC would trade WRC-TV Washington and WTVJ(TV) Miami for WCAU-TV. A Miami deal would most likely involve WCIX(TV), CBS's station there, which has a weaker signal than WTVJ's. Other combinations of NBC properties and/or cash also were said to be possibilities.

Fox was the most active network last week—it proposed buying WHBQ-

TV Memphis. It also was revealed that Fox—or a "designee"—would buy two stations from New World Communications Group. The two stations, WBRC-TV Birmingham, Ala., and WGHP-TV Greensboro-High Point, N.C., are among the four that New World is buying from Citicasters. One source speculated that the two stations most likely would not be sold directly to Fox, but rather to its joint venture operated by Savoy.

In Memphis, where Fox has been looking around for several months, the TV group paid \$75 million-\$80 million for WHBQ-TV. The station was bought by Tom Galloway's ComCorp in April for \$43 million, according to FCC filings, but industry sources say the final purchase price was closer to \$56 million-\$60 million. After two backers fell through, Fox stepped up to provide financing for ComCorp's purchase. The closing took place

simultaneously with Fox's announcement of WHBQ-TV's purchase from ComCorp.

In July, Burt Ellis ended rumors of a Fox alliance with his WMC-TV Memphis when he re-upped with NBC. Clear Channel's Lowry Mays, owner of current Fox affiliate WPTY-TV, was assured then—and again two weeks ago—that his stations would not be affected by Fox's stated goal of upgrading to VHF stations.

Elsewhere, Fox was said to still be talking with Hubbard Broadcasting about an affiliation deal involving Hubbard's KSTP-TV Minneapolis, currently an ABC affiliate. Hubbard Chairman Stanley S. Hubbard said it was a "reasonable expectation" that the company would sign a new long-term affiliation deal within the next month. However, he declined to comment on the networks with which he was negotiating. ■