

to continue the show. Sources confirm that Turner has talked to her about a movie deal. "There are lots of ways they can entice her," says Reif.

KWP's three key programs, from a revenue standpoint, continue to be *Oprah*, *Wheel of Fortune* and *Jeopardy!* TV station programmers note that *Wheel of Fortune*, while still a top performer, has eroded significantly in recent years, particularly among women 25-54, the key demographic for advertisers. According to a Petry Television analysis, the show's rating in that demo has dropped 6 share points since 1987 and 9 share points among women 18-34 during that time.

KWP aside, analysts say Turner still has a long way to go to muster the \$6 billion to buy CBS, as well as another possible \$2 billion to buy out Time-Warner's 17% stake in TBS.

"A lot of things have to happen before they could buy CBS," says Reif. "[The KWP deal] is one of them. They have to get capital and get rid of Time Warner. But it's very possible."

Turner clearly needs major investors to help him buy the network. And the publicized talks between Microsoft and TBS have been overplayed, according to Microsoft sources. Both sides say the only talks between the companies concerned Turner's possible participation as a content provider for Microsoft's soon-to-be-introduced online network.

"It really doesn't make sense for Microsoft to be a part of the Turner-CBS thing," says one source. Another says TBS itself may have put out word of a major alliance in the works in an attempt to get Westinghouse to make a partnership offer.

Westinghouse has not ruled out partners, but also has not had formal talks with potential allies since making its bid for CBS three weeks ago, sources say. Those familiar with the company's presentation to bankers two weeks ago also say that Jordan said nothing about pursuing partners to make the deal fly. "If it were part of the strategy, you have to assume he would have said something then."

But if Turner or some other company mounts a competing bid, it will almost force Westinghouse to seek other partners. Indeed, Westinghouse talked to at least one company—Harcourt General, publisher and cinema owner—before making its solo bid for CBS. Those talks fell through, and Westinghouse made its own deal. ■

## Latest megamerger talk: GE-TW

CNBC's Dan Dorfman says his network's parent company, General Electric, is interested in buying Time Warner. Dorfman quoted a "senior GE official" as saying that GE Chairman Jack Welch has talked of his interest in acquiring TW. GE officials declined comment on the report.

NBC sources say they are unaware of any reopening of the talks that stalled last year concerning a possible NBC-Time Warner combination. As with the stalled NBC-Turner talks, the main hurdle then was the issue of control (both sides want it), sources say. Analysts didn't think there was anything to the rumor, noting that both the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times* didn't publish a word about it last week. "At this point, I don't think this is anything more than Jack Welch sort of wistfully contemplating the expansion of GE's media holdings beyond NBC," said one analyst last week. "Clearly, he has to do something to stay in the game. Time Warner? After Disney-ABC, anything can happen." —SM

# Tribune buys into Warner Bros. Network

By Steve Coe

**T**ribune Broadcasting Co., exercising the first of several options, has invested \$12 million in the WB Network for a 12.5% equity interest. Tribune has additional options to acquire up to 25% of the network. Tribune's involvement with WB until now mainly has been as an affiliate, providing coverage with its WGN-TV Chicago superstation and five other stations.

"This is the latest step in our evolving partnership," says Dennis FitzSimons, executive vice president, Tribune. "We are quite pleased with the WB [Network]'s growth and directions." WB, competing with the United Paramount Network to become the fifth established network, this fall will expand its programming from two hours to 13. To be added: Sunday prime time and a Saturday and weekday morning children's schedule. ■



Online options on Kids' WB!

## Kids' online

The WB Network's new Kids' WB! Online debuted on America Online last Wednesday (Aug. 16). The online service is geared to kids and teens and features the network's children's programming. Its premiere on the Internet's World Wide Web is slated for mid-September, at the same time the programming debuts on the network.

Users are able to download exclusive footage of the first *Sylvester & Tweety* episodes produced in more than 30 years. Users can enter the service by typing keyword: *kidswb*. New episodes of *The Sylvester & Tweety Mysteries* will debut when Kids' WB! premieres on Saturday, Sept. 9.

The online service is a partnership between the network and the newly-created Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment (WBIE). In addition to a package of entertainment programming, the new service will provide users with a newsletter about upcoming Kids' WB! programming, chat rooms and information about contests. —SC