

PBS's Duggan proposes program icons for kids TV

Educational shows could be flagged to invite viewing; system would be used along with ratings system

By Elizabeth A. Rathbun

When the TV industry's V-chip implementation group reconvenes on June 13, PBS President Ervin Duggan will offer an additional way for parents to help their children avoid violent shows: an icon flagging programs that educate children.

The as-yet-undesigned icon could be used during shows and in ads and program schedules. Duggan said last Thursday during an address at UCLA's Center for Communication Policy.

Ratings are "so negative [in] telling people what not to watch," Duggan said after the speech. An education icon would "make the whole enterprise more positive" by inviting viewers to watch particular shows.

An icon would not supplant a ratings system, but would be an addition to it, Duggan said. Its use would be voluntary. But if enough producers use an icon, competition to provide educational excellence in kids TV would be encouraged, he said.

The proposal "is a sound idea and one that should be considered as we contin-

ue to develop the ratings system," said Richard Taylor, spokesman for Jack Valenti, chairman of the industry's V-chip implementation group and president of the Motion Picture Association of America.

Duggan said he wrote to Valenti about his plan in anticipation of the group's June 13 meeting. The group is working to come up with a ratings system by January.

"One could view that it complicates an already complicated process," Duggan admitted.

But, he maintained in his speech, "the current approach to ratings...doesn't go far enough." Without "affirmative symbols of quality...we may [create] a world of bland, indiscriminating labels in which *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood* is



'Q' for quality: PBS's Duggan thinks an icon such as this one would draw viewers to quality kids shows.



described as essentially just like an episode of *Superman*."

"It would be very helpful," Kathryn Montgomery, president, Center for Media Education, said of an icon. "It would cause the industry to be more honest and forthcoming [with] parents." Also, the networks "couldn't put it on *The Jerrisons* or *The Flintstones*," she said.

Duggan outlined suggested criteria for deciding what is educational programming. For children under six, a show would have to be uninterrupted by commercials. Other criteria would require that each series have "defined educational goals and objectives," with research conducted in producing the series and to "ascertain educational effectiveness."

Programs also would have to address a subject deemed important for school readiness,

such as language skills, cultural appreciation or development of motor skills.

"Lest anyone think that programs worthy of this icon can be found only on PBS, let me point out that a good many offerings" on cable and broadcast TV would qualify, Duggan said. Those include *CBS Schoolbreak Specials* and *CNN Newsroom*, he added. ■

Ellis buys Federal for \$170 million

Less than two weeks after the formation of TV group owner Ellis Acquisitions Inc., the company is buying Federal Enterprises Inc. and its eight network affiliates for \$170 million (subject to FCC approval).

The purchaser of the stations is named in a Media Ventures Partners (MVP) news release as Raycom Media Inc. But broker Brian E. Cobb says the name "Raycom" has been "borrowed" by Ellis Acquisitions, which last month bought Ellis Communications Inc.'s 12 TV stations for \$732 million. As part of that deal, Ellis Acquisitions acquired sports producer/syndicator Raycom Inc. (BROADCASTING & CABLE, May 20).

As Cobb characterizes it, Ellis Communications provides the platform for Ellis Acquisitions, and the purchase of Federal expands the new company's markets.

Federal had been looking for a buyer since December 1995, when it hired MVP to explore a sale. The largest station in the group is NBC affiliate WSTM-TV Syracuse, N.Y.

The other stations are WDM-TV Laurel/Hattiesburg, Miss. (NBC); WPBN-TV Traverse City/Cadillac, Mich. (NBC), and its satellite WTOM-TV Cheboygan/Cadillac; WLUC-TV Marquette, Mich. (ABC-NBC-Fox); KTVO-TV Ottumwa, Iowa/Kirksville, Mo. (ABC), and KNDO-TV Yakima, Wash. (NBC), and its satellite KNDU-TV Richland, Wash. (both NBC). Federal President Dale G. Rands was not available for comment last Friday.

The deal provides Ellis with more geographic diversity, Cobb says, noting that "a lot of these are dominant stations, although in small markets."

Ellis already owns KOLD-TV Tucson, Ariz.; WZVN-TV Naples, Fla.; WSAV-TV Savannah, Ga.; KSLA-TV Shreveport, La.; WJTV-TV Jackson, Miss. (and satellite WHLT-TV Hattiesburg); KAME-TV Reno; WECT-TV Wilmington, N.C.; WUPW-TV Toledo, Ohio; WACH-TV Columbia, S.C.; KSFY-TV Sioux Falls, S.D. (and satellites KABY-TV Aberdeen and KPRY-TV Pierre); WTNZ-TV Knoxville, and WMC-TV-AM-FM Memphis.

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