

# Matoian out, Roth in at Fox

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## HOLLYWOOD

**F**ox Entertainment Group President John Matoian abruptly ended his two-year tenure at the network last week and was replaced by Peter Roth, president of Fox's production arm, Twentieth Century Fox Television.

Rumors had circulated for months that Matoian would be replaced as Fox's head of programing, although insiders say it was his decision to leave. Sources say Matoian had another year on his contract, and that top brass wanted him to sign up for another three.

Matoian reportedly thought that his authority had been undercut by the July promotion of Fox Sports President David Hill to a new management post overseeing the network and other divisions within Fox Television. Sources close to the network say Hill began to take a more active role in marketing and promotion strategies for the new season and may even be reconsidering Matoian's decision to cancel *America's Most Wanted*.

Matoian put a positive face on his departure. "I have enjoyed my stay at Fox and am proud of my accomplishments and the team of people who helped me mature this 'weblet' into an aggressive, competitive network."

Fox insiders say still more staff changes could be in the works.

Roth will mark the third new programing head to come into Fox since Peter Chernin left the post in 1992. Since then, Fox Chairman Rupert Murdoch has shown little patience with his programing chiefs.

Roth has been president of Twentieth Century Fox Television since June 1994. Prior to joining Fox in 1992, he was president of Stephen J. Cannell Productions for six years.

Matoian was hired in July 1994 to broaden the network's demographic appeal, launching such comedies as *Ned and Stacey* and the drama *Party of Five*. He went to Fox after two years as head of movies and miniseries for CBS Entertainment. ■

# Twentieth rolls out slate

**HOLLYWOOD**—Twentieth Television unveiled last week a wide-ranging development slate for 1997 that includes two strips for syndication, 10 TV movies for Fox and 32 episodes of A&E's *Biography*.

Twentieth offered the sneak peek at the proposed projects as a signal to the industry that the company is emerging from a quiet period with ambitious production plans.

By early next year, Fox's syndication arm will be supplying programing to the largest station group in the country. When Fox parent News Corp.'s buyout of New World Communications Group is completed, Fox will have 22 major-market O&Os covering nearly 40% of the country. The latest round of station group mega-mergers has put control of the domestic syndication market in the hands of a few big broadcast players, led by Fox.

"There's a lot of production going on here," said Rick Jacobson, president of Twentieth, adding that the company is also pursuing first-look deals with outside producers.

In the works for syndication is the game show strip *Your American Pop Quiz*, described as a pop-culture quiz show. *The Collectibles Show* is a variation on FX's *Personal fX*, which invites viewers to bring in their collectibles and antiques for appraisal and auction. The show has interactive elements that involve the studio audience and viewers. Also planned are an action hour and a weekly sitcom set in a high school.

The Fox TV movie projects include two new installments of the *America's Most Wanted* franchise and two more *Alien Nation* sci-fi thrillers. In addition to the *Biography* order, Twentieth's cable projects include a history of 20th Century Fox for AMC and a two-hour special celebrating *Hollywood Aliens and Monsters* for A&E.

Last week's announcement marked Twentieth's first major production initiatives under the leadership of Jacobson and Peter Faiman, president of programing and production. Jacobson wiped most of Twentieth's production and development slate clean shortly after joining Twentieth late last year, canceling the long-running magazine *A Current Affair* and other first-run shows.

Twentieth also surprised the station community last month with the decision to pull the plug on late-night strip *Loveline* just a few weeks before its scheduled premiere. *Loveline* was one of three new first-run entries for the 1996-97 season that Twentieth will soon inherit from New World Entertainment.

Jacobson said the company has spent the past few months evaluating the programing needs of the Fox stations and opportunities in the overall marketplace. With off-network prices rising and fewer family-oriented sitcoms on the networks, Twentieth's weekly sitcom, for example, is designed to meet the demand for affordable afternoon/evening transitional programing.

"We're looking at a business and marketplace that [are] very different from just a year ago," said Jacobson. "What we're trying to do is build some assets."

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'Pretty Poison' is one of Twentieth's movies that will air on Fox.