

WB affils cheer end of WGN feed

End of competing broadcast this fall expected to give ratings boost

By Michael Stroud

Ending a stopgap measure that has helped The WB reach areas lacking an affiliate, the network plans to stop sending its signal over Tribune Co.'s WGN superstation.

WB's decision "is great for affiliates," said Larry Morton, president of WB-affiliate KKYK in Little Rock, Ark. "It means we have no competition" from WGN programming in KKYK's coverage area. Several other affiliates also cheered WB's deci-

sion, announced last week, to end the WGN telecasts. They said it's a move that should help boost ratings.

The network has used WGN broadcasts as a way to reach more households as it built viewership in so-called "white areas." But the growing success of the WeB network—a cable service that delivers WB network and syndicated programming—is helping to fill out



WB Chief Executive Jamie Kellner (r) predicts ratings will climb with exclusivity move. With him at NATPE last week was Entertainment President Susanne Daniels.

the approximately 9 million households that don't receive WB broadcast signals. WB Chief Executive Jamie Kellner said the move should become effective by fall.

WeB offers a package of WB programming and Warner Bros. syndicated products such as *Friends* in markets that aren't served by WB affiliates.

Kellner predicted that Nielsen rat-

ings will go up 5%-10% in WB markets that will now have exclusivity. At the same time, it will give a strong incentive for cable operators who carry the WGN signal to switch over to the WeB because they won't have another way to access WB programming.

WB had arranged the WGN broadcasts in a straight barter.

In other news, WB announced that it will begin airing the popular syndicated kids show *Pokemon* on its Kids' WB! network starting in February. The show will begin on Saturdays, and then expand to a Monday-through-Saturday schedule in fall 1999.

Kellner said the show will remain in syndication for the remainder of this season, and then be shown exclusively on The WB starting in the fall.

WB said the station with the strongest ratings for its annual "Froggies" award is its affiliate in Jacksonville, Fla.; followed by Orlando, Fla. and St. Louis. Kellner owns the St. Louis station.

Affiliates were also upbeat about WB's prospects, several days after its freshman show *Felicity* won the network's first Golden Globe.

"I think they're right on target," said Mac Douglas, vice president and general manager for KDBA in Amarillo. ■

NBC News saving on tape costs

Partners to launch news-on-demand system to O&Os and affils

By Michael Stroud

In an effort to dramatically slash the amount of videotape needed for affiliates to capture news feeds, NBC News Channel plans to launch high-speed news-on-demand delivery by year's end. The NOD service will be an available system to all owned and affiliated stations, as well as to MSNBC and CNBC.

Affiliates interviewed at NBC's affiliate meeting in New Orleans last week welcomed the move, saying they expect the new system to save them time and money compared to old satellite delivery systems.

"You sit at your PC, and click, and [the news] comes up."

—Robert J. Hamacher, chief operating officer for Northwest Broadcasting Inc.

The service means "no tape costs anymore" for news feeds, said Robert J. Hamacher, chief operating officer for Northwest Broadcasting Inc., which owns one NBC affiliate and five Fox affils in the Northwest. "You sit at your

PC and click, and [the news] comes up."

The new system is set to roll out in tests in March, and will be fully functional by the end of the year, Hamacher said.

The system loads stories into a video server at each station. Each server is attached to a computer equipped with software that enables producers to see video and text organized by news categories. Costs for the new system, which utilizes both the Internet and digital satellite transmission, will be absorbed by NBC. The network didn't say how much it will cost to deploy.

NBC News Channel is a service from NBC News providing NBC affil-