

Local TV Fights Back in Palm Beach

Four Florida stations find the best defense for station and cable 'spill-in' is a united offense.

by Mike Clary

You had only to look at the ratings to see the problem: Here was Palm Beach County, third-fastest-growing area in the country—its population expanding

Mike Clary last wrote for Channels about satellite news gathering.

by nearly 2,500 people a month—yet the audience for the market's five television stations showed scarcely any growth at all over the past few years.

The missing viewers were no mystery to Jay Oliver, sales and marketing manager of WTVX, the CBS affiliate in West Palm Beach, or to any of the other local broadcasters unable to cash in on the Sun Belt migration. Their market was plagued by "spill-in," the intrusion

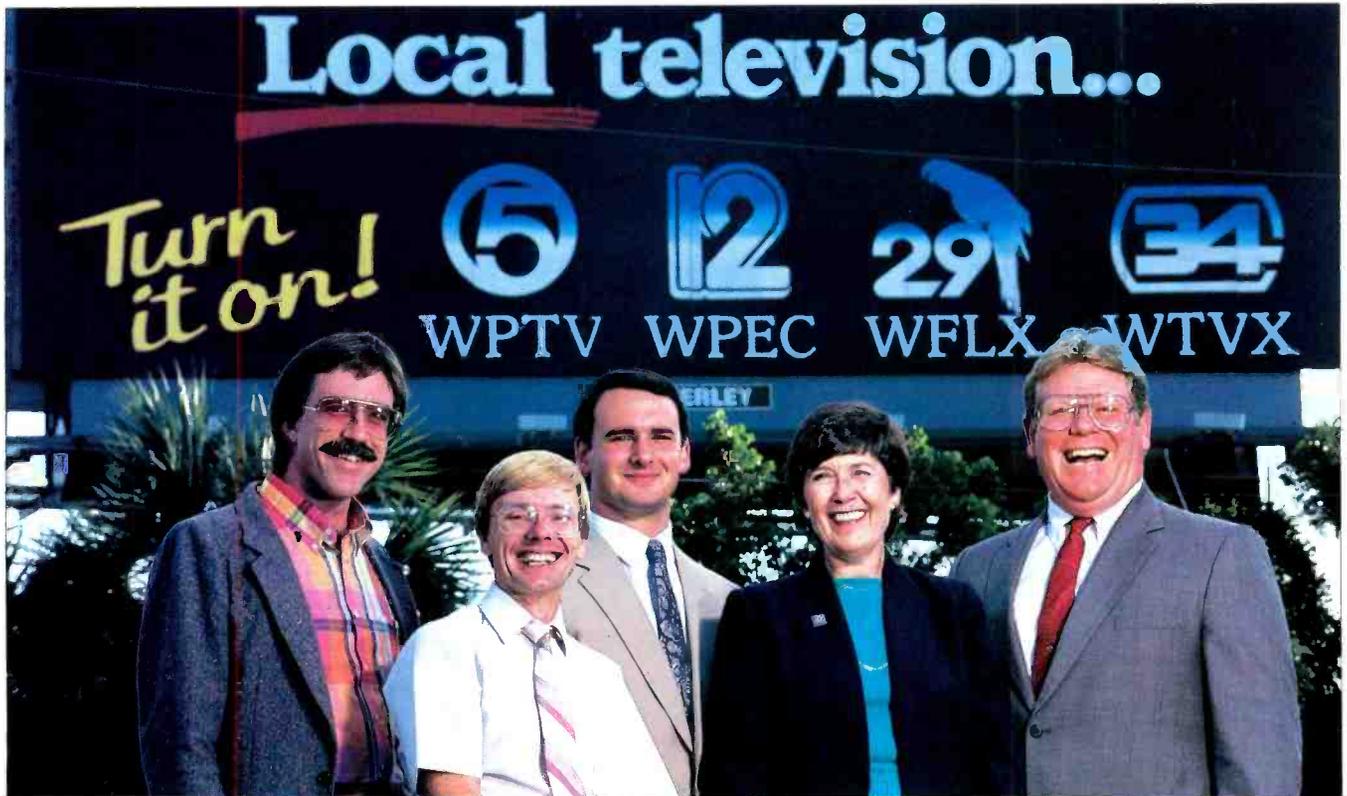
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of signals from larger neighboring cities, beaming in both over the air and on cable, which already had claimed almost a third of their audience. Many of the new arrivals in Palm Beach County had come up from Miami and Ft. Lauderdale, and since the stations they used to watch were available in their new locale, they simply punched the same channel numbers as before.

So Oliver decided to tackle the problem in a big way. A large, determined man of 43, he is not one to be intimidated by difficult tasks. He once brought the roller derby to Mexico, track and all, and a few years ago tried promoting NFL football there.

A special Arbitron study Oliver ordered in 1984 confirmed his suspicion that the three Palm Beach network affiliates were losing audience, especially in prime time, to their counterparts from Miami, 90 miles away. "What we found," says Oliver, "was that the viewers didn't know what station they were



West Palm gang: Adman Jim Dustin of Dean Oliver Dustin, WPTV's Wayne Cunningham, WPEC's Edward Staak, Lois Kwasman of WFLX and Jay Oliver of WTVX.

JOSE FERNANDEZ