

Cable

CHICAGOLAND JOINS REGIONAL NEWS RANKS

Combining resources with newspaper, Tribune hopes to break even in 3-5 years

By Rich Brown

In what could be the last major regional news network launch for some time to come, Tribune's ChicagoLand Television News is scheduled to begin operations this week as a 24-hour service for an estimated 600,000 households in the Chicago area.

Tribune is said to be investing about \$10 million in the project at a time when many industry executives—responding to a difficult economy and a tough regulatory environment—say they would hold off on regional cable news launches.

"When Tribune puts a project into motion, it's because they have a long-term commitment," said ChicagoLand Vice President and General Manager Bob Gremillion, who has been working on the project for three years. He said he expects the channel to break even within three to five years.

One way ChicagoLand hopes to keep costs down will be through combining the newsgathering resources of the Tribune-owned *Chicago Tribune* and its eight suburban bureaus with the regional network's 120-person staff. Both the newspaper and the net-



ChicagoLand Television News anchor Monica Schneider in a pre-debut run-through

work will work side by side in one newsroom that will also serve as a studio for the channel.

The newspaper connection is one of a number of synergies ChicagoLand will have with other Tribune-owned properties. The cable channel will provide simulcast and delayed telecasts of

noon news broadcasts by WGN-TV, Tribune's Chicago television station. The company's Chicago radio station, WGN-AM, will provide up-to-the-minute traffic reports and live coverage from neighborhood festivals and events. There are even plans for ChicagoLand to link with Tribune's Chicago Cubs baseball team by broadcasting live many of the games blacked out by Major League Baseball and providing late-night repeats of all weekday afternoon Cubs games.

The new service is launching with roughly half the 1 million-plus subscribers Gremillion said he hopes to have by second quarter 1993. ChicagoLand now has approximately 600,000 households through affiliations with Tele-Communications Inc. and Continental Cablevision, both of which have been given the service free for one year. Area holdouts—including Metrovision, Prime Cable, Post-

UNDERWRITERS NOT READY FOR 'READY'

The Learning Channel last Monday launched its six-hour daily block of commercial-free preschool programming, *Ready, Set, Learn*, without the corporate underwriters and foundation underwriters that parent company Discovery Networks had hoped to have in place for the debut. Yet, despite the difficulty in attracting underwriters, *Ready, Set, Learn* appears to be proving helpful in attracting operators to TLC: cable operator commitments representing roughly 1.5 million additional subscribers have signed on to carry TLC since the company announced its plans to add the preschool block last August, according to a company spokesman.

The Discovery spokesman also said TLC's sister service, the Discovery Channel, has put on "indefinite hold" its plans to launch a weekend morning kids block.

—RB