

have to change to reflect that. Increasing the cash component might increase the possibility of a third bidder.

One senior Capital Cities/ABC executive said that a primary reason his company has yet to seriously consider a Paramount bid, despite numerous invitations from investment bankers and others, is that both Viacom and QVC bids contained a substantial amount of stock, which he described as an "inflated currency." If the cash component were to increase, it would put bidders with less lofty stock on a more level playing field.

"We do think we can do more combining Paramount with our company than they can with QVC, which sells cheap jewelry on a shopping channel," Redstone said. "That may be harsh, but that is the truth." ■

\$1 billion for Starz

Encore, backed by TCI spin-off company Liberty Media, is planning to launch its upcoming Starz! cable movie network in a big way.

In what is being labeled the biggest movie-package deal ever to come out of Hollywood, Encore plans to shell out an estimated \$1 billion for rights to show up to 360 theatrical titles from Walt Disney Studios. The deal runs seven years for Disney's Touchstone and Hollywood Pictures, beginning in 1997, and 10 years for Miramax, beginning in 1994. Titles will appear on Starz!, a first-run pay TV multiplex service, when it launches in January 1994, and will later appear on the company's other planned movie channels.

The Encore-Disney deal fans flames lit last month in Viacom's antitrust suit against TCI. Viacom charges that representatives of TCI allegedly told executives at Viacom's Showtime Networks that the MSO was planning a "crucifixion" of Showtime's The Movie Channel to make room for Starz!. "The Encore-Disney deal is yet another manifestation of [TCI and Liberty chief executive] John Malone's monopolistic practices to reshape the industry to his benefit," says Showtime Networks Chairman-CEO Tony Cox. —RB

Spelling pitches prime time block

By Mike Freeman

In the grand style reminiscent of his *Dynasty* series, producer Aaron Spelling wined and dined top independent station group executives at his Bel Air mansion last Thursday. The purpose: Spelling Entertainment Group's push to launch a female-skewing block of prime time syndicated drama series, The Spelling Premiere Network, for June 1994.

Spelling, chairman and CEO of Spelling Entertainment, worked out the blueprint for an ad hoc network during the last two months with John Ryan, president of Spelling Entertainment's Worldvision Enterprises distribution division.

According to one of the executives at the meeting, Chris-Craft/United Television President Evan Thompson has taken a "lead role" in developing the block, and may have committed his top-ranked independent station group to carry it.

The two new series development projects Spelling presented were *Robin's Hoods* and *Heaven Help Us*. According to various station source descriptions, *Robin's Hoods* is an ensemble drama about four women and a man who live together and work at a country music club. One of the women, a former district attorney, convinces the others to help solve crimes and resolve disputes.

The second hour spoke, *Heaven*



Spelling's latest: prime time block

Help Us, is about a young married couple killed in an accident who come back to Earth as angels to perform divine deeds.

On the marketing side, sources said that Ryan presented stations with a single-year contract plan in which stations would take each weekly hour on a nine-minute national and five-minute local barter advertising basis. A group owner from the Midwest said that he thought the marketing terms were "acceptable" and, in general, found the proposed Spelling programming an "attractive mix" of female-skewing programming for his stations. Another major group head said that "independents recognize the success Fox stations have suddenly enjoyed with [Spelling's] *Beverly Hills, 90210* and

Melrose Place with the female demographics that previously went unserved" on Wednesday evenings.

In a statement, Worldvision senior vice president, domestic sales, Bob Raleigh, said: "The ratings tell us that the network delivering the highest female composition invariably wins five out of seven nights. As a result, the networks have skewed their programming toward attracting women, while the independents had no alternative but to counterprogram with sports, movies and action fare."

The timing of Spelling's prime time initiative could be an attempt to preempt an effort by Warner Bros., which is currently scouring independent station groups for commitments to a proposed fifth broadcast network. With the Spelling counterprogramming added to the mix, and up to 15 hours total of syndicated drama programming in the market by the 1994-95 season, industry watchers note that most non-Fox independents have enough programming to become affiliates of "pseudo" networks.

Station groups attending the Spelling presentation, which were thought to include "nonduplicative markets" representing 50% U.S. coverage, included Chris-Craft/United, Tribune Broadcasting, Paramount Stations Group, Gaylord Broadcasting, ABRY Communications, River City Broadcasting and ACT III Broadcasting. ■