

NETWORKS

## ABC-TV gets engaged to WDTN Dayton

**Network hopes to switch to VHF in 46th market next year**

ABC-TV claimed another coup last week with the announcement by WDTN(TV) Dayton, Ohio, that it would negotiate to become an ABC affiliate after its contract with NBC-TV expires Dec. 31.

The announcement was made by Ray W. Colie, executive vice president and general manager of WDTN, in a news release distributed by ABC-TV.

WDTN-TV is on channel 2. WKEF(TV), ABC's current affiliate in Dayton, is on channel 22. Dayton's third commercial station, WHIO-TV, on channel 7, is a CBS-TV affiliate. Dayton is the 46th U.S. TV market.

ABC officials said they would welcome the opportunity to negotiate with WDTN as soon as existing contractual relationships and FCC rules permit. This, they said, means that negotiations may not begin more than six months before the WDTN/NBC contract expires.

WDTN's Colie said that "we are very excited about our prospective association with ABC," not only because of "ABC's leadership in prime-time programming, but because ABC has demonstrated a total commitment to excellence in news and children's programming, two areas of particular interest to us."

Gardiner S. Dutton, chairman of Grinnell Communications Corp., WDTN's owner, said teaming WDTN management and staff with ABC's "can only make our Dayton viewers the real winners."

Grinnell Communications is an arm of Grinnell College of Grinnell, Iowa. WKEF is owned by Springfield TV Broadcasting Corp., based in Springfield, Mass.

Richard L. Beesemyer, ABC's affiliate relations vice president who has been responsible for most of the network's affiliate switches, said that conversations with WDTN-TV had been going on for some time and that two years ago ABC had come "reasonably close" to signing the station. Those negotiations eventually quieted down, and the other networks were reported to have upped their network compensations in the market as a result of the ABC attempt there (BROADCASTING, Dec. 4, 1978).

Still, there was a suggestion in Beesemyer's comments that ABC's decision to woo WDTN was prompted in large part by its dissatisfaction with WKEF, which had not cleared the network's *World News*

*Tonight* until last September and runs a magazine show, *Evening*, rather than a hard news broadcast.

According to Beesemyer, the network's evening news on WKEF reaches about 20,000 homes—versus 58,000 reached by WDTN. WKEF, however, runs "a little ahead" of its competition in prime time. It is also well behind WDTN in late night. As the network leader in prime time, ABC would stand to lose little by switching affiliates and it could gain much desired audience for its news and late-night shows.

The Dayton switch fits well with ABC's announced intentions to go after stations with stronger local news and public affairs shows, programming that tends to give stations stronger local identities. ABC, Beesemyer said, is coming to expect strong local program commitments from its affiliates.

"Some stations have not put back into the medium as much as they should have," Beesemyer said. "Some affiliates that are vulnerable haven't done that."

"We're interested in markets where we can improve the ABC situation," he said. "If you don't have a good local news then the network news is not going to do well."

In terms of circulation, ABC's network news appears to be profiting from Beesemyer's forays into the camps of NBC and CBS. According to figures quoted by James Duffy, ABC-TV president, in Los Angeles last week, the affiliate switches have resulted in the network news reaching 750,000 homes it did not reach before. (That is slightly over one rating point.) Other dayparts have also seen enhanced numbers—650,000 more homes in prime time, 200,000 in daytime, 175,000 in late night and 300,000 in early morning.

ABC currently has 201 affiliates, and Beesemyer expects that number to remain "fairly constant" even though ABC is "looking to improve its mix" of stations.

## The real world according to Rule

**ABC president says there's basic misperception of competitive circumstances in communications**

Elton Rule, president of the American Broadcasting Companies, last week accused government agencies of grossly distorting conditions of competition in broadcasting and between it and cable television. In a speech prepared for delivery last Friday night at the annual meeting of the Maryland-District of Columbia-Delaware Broadcasters Association, Rule listed a wide range of troubling developments.

He questioned the need for the many

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