

say what direction the station would take.

KAUT launched its extended news format—which at its demise ran from noon to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday—last November. Birdwell said the all-news format, which the station had hoped to extend to 14 hours a day, was adopted in part to avoid having to pay for syndicated programming, the cost of which had been escalating rapidly in the Oklahoma City market.

So, with the assistance of two anchor-men, who rotated three-hour shifts, and the station news director, who anchored a one-hour shift, the station put out "mostly local news" in one-hour, updated segments, Birdwell said. The local news programming, consisting largely of feature material, was supplemented by international and national news supplied through a reciprocal arrangement with Cable News Network.

Although Birdwell said the news programming caught on in the business community—barber shop and service station operators enjoyed having an alternative to soap operas to flick on for waiting customers—it didn't catch on in TV households, where ratings are measured.

After 10 months on the air, the news programming still wasn't averaging much more than a one rating. As an obvious result, Birdwell said, the station wasn't attracting sufficient advertising revenues.

Birdwell said he thought the service wasn't picked up by households for two reasons. First, he said, Oklahomans just didn't buy "this type of live, extended, locally produced news." But competition was also a significant factor, he said.

He pointed out that Oklahoma City, which only had three commercial stations and a Public Broadcasting Service outlet three years ago, now has eight stations—six commercial, one PBS and one all-religious.

Birdwell added that the change should have no effect on Golden West's Video Entertainment Unlimited, the subscription television service for which Golden West leases the evening and the majority of the weekend hours from the station. That service, Birdwell noted, is "booming" and currently has about 13,000 customers.



Metromedia's Silverbach (l) and Lazarus

## Metromedia to expand reach of programming arm

**Company says it has 'major corporate commitment' to make MPC major force in programming**

Metromedia Inc., the diversified media owner that recently pledged a record \$220 million for WCVB-TV Boston, intends to become a major producer of programming for the commercial broadcast networks, worldwide distribution and domestic syndication.

The seriousness with which the company, through its distribution and production arm, intends to carry out its new strategy will be demonstrated this month when Metromedia Producers Corp. distributes a one-shot music special produced for \$1.5 million.

*A Gift of Music*, a two-hour program commemorating the Los Angeles bicentennial, will air in at least 90 markets during September. The program, highlighting American musical composition and performance, was produced by Bob Banner Associates in association with MPC.

The special is one of the first to emerge from a new program development team

assembled at the Metromedia division by MPC President Robert D. Wood, the former CBS-TV president who joined the company in July 1980. Wood has brought former network and syndicated programming executives to MPC, including Ethel Winant, Joseph Sargent, Herb Lazarus and Alan Silverbach.

"We have a major corporate commitment to turn MPC around," explained Silverbach, whose Silverbach-Lazarus Co. partnership was acquired by Metromedia last September. "[The commitment is] to make it a major force in both network and syndicated programming. We are very energetically approaching the marketplace." According to Silverbach, Wood's team is "concentrating on getting out network series, network features and so on. We're working with them closely because any successful series would have potential down the line for international distribution and domestic syndication."

Silverbach is executive vice president and Lazarus senior vice president for worldwide distribution at MPC. Their company was responsible for syndication of *Carol Burnett and Friends* and was a consultant to major television producers.

"*A Gift of Music* was unique," says Silverbach. "Under normal circumstances it would not have been produced as a syndicated show. Metromedia wanted to give something back to Los Angeles, California and the country ... We didn't go to the networks with it because we wanted Metromedia [independent] stations to play it."

However, Silverbach emphasized that in its new incarnation Metromedia Producers Corp. is treating Metromedia stations as equals in its distribution activities.

"We are really interested in producing and syndicating programs for the marketplace, without any necessary regard for the Metromedia owned-and-operated stations. There are many programs we want to distribute and produce that really have no place on the Metromedia stations. They program differently from the affiliates," said Silverbach. He noted that *Rainbow Patch*, a new children's program being distributed by MPC, will air on competing stations in at least two Metromedia markets. For many future MPC-related

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