

Suitors

Betting line on Wall Street last week had it that Warner wasn't only company talking with Time Inc. about stock swap. Gannett, according to one informed source, had also been discussing combination. Obscure accounting rule that surfaced in Time Warner merger may in fact provide some clues to question. Rule allows favorable "pooling" of two companies' financial statements following stock merger only if neither has recently attempted to shrink equity through major share repurchases. Thus it may not be just coincidence that several large media companies have recently slowed such repurchases; among recently parsimonious are said to be Gannett, Washington Post Co., McGraw-Hill, Times Mirror and Capcities/ABC. Last named company, after announcing one million share repurchase plan more than six months ago, had by last week bought in less than 50,000 shares.

On block in Des Moines

Des Moines, Iowa-based Palmer Communications has put kwoc-TV, its VHF NBC affiliate in Davenport, Iowa (79th market), on block through broker Howard Stark. Asking price: \$45 million-\$50 million. Word has it that Palmer is already in negotiations for sale of station to veteran broadcasters starting new station group. Palmer signed definitive agreement two weeks ago to purchase VHF NBC affiliate KTVY-TV Oklahoma City (39th market) from Knight-Ridder for estimated \$50 million (BROADCASTING, March 6).

Second time around

Some who have been close to HDTV program production over past several years disputed claim made by Commerce Secretary Robert Mosbacher during House Telecommunications Subcommittee hearing (see page 33) that sending cameras and VTR's built according to 1.125/60 format to Soviet Union for planned tests of equipment in Moscow would provide Soviets with opportunity to study Western high-technology not available to them before. They point to 1982 taping of Kirov Ballet in Leningrad with 1.125/60 equipment from Japan. Although American and Japanese advisers were present, production was completed by Soviet director, cameramen and support crew. Soviets had ample opportunity to examine equipment, but equipment had been cleared for transport through international COCOM committee at that time, according to sources familiar with Leningrad project. One year following

taping, Soviet production—ballet version of "Sleeping Beauty," was one of several HDTV shows presented during International Television Symposium in Montreaux, Switzerland (BROADCASTING, June 6, 1983).

Still working on dance card

With White House showing less than sure touch for personnel work—number of top jobs throughout administration remain to be filled—there was no indication last week that decisions would be made soon on nominees for two long-vacant posts at FCC. White House continues to interview hopefuls: number, according to one report last week, was 15. But there are those who speculate entire process could have been stalled by enormous and ultimately futile effort to secure Senate confirmation of John Tower as secretary of defense. As process drags on, some candidates leave list, others are added to it. In latter category is Sherrie Marshall. One-time partner in Wiley, Rein & Fielding who served at FCC as congressional liaison before going to White House to help Tower through nomination process, Marshall had been considered front runner for FCC seat, until speculation turned to job as general counsel at Pentagon. With Tower defeat, she is seen as back in running for FCC spot—although not with great deal of confidence, at least that offer would come soon. She accepted invitation to return to Wiley firm, and begins working there today (Monday).

Meanwhile, there is new candidate to report for job as head of National Telecommunications and Information Administration. Ray Strassburger, one-time minority counsel on Senate Commerce Committee who also served as special assistant to then-FCC Chairman Mark Fowler, is being supported for NTIA job by Senators Bob Packwood (R-Ore.) and John Danforth (R-Mo.) Strassburger has Bush loyalist credentials; he served in campaign and on transition. But Janice Obuchowsky, another former aide to Fowler and now executive with NYNEX, still seems to have inside track ("Closed Circuit," Feb. 13).

Cable's lobbyist

Pamela J. Turner, deputy assistant for legislative affairs (Senate) in Reagan White House, has accepted job of vice president-government affairs at National Cable Television Association. NCTA spokesman would not confirm report, but said announcement concerning post would be made this week. It has been vacant since departure of Ed Merlis in November 1987.

Keeping tabs

Results of General Accounting Office's survey on cable rates may be released in preliminary form about time National Cable Television Association convenes its annual conference in Dallas May 21-24. GAO says it is aiming to have something ready for convention as requested by House Telecommunications Subcommittee Chairman Ed Markey (D-Mass.), who originally asked for rates study last spring. So far some 900 of 1,950 cable systems that GAO selected have returned surveys. Second mailing of 14-page questionnaire went out Feb. 13 to those who failed to reply. GAO spokesman expects eventual response rate of about 80%. Besides collecting data on rates, survey also queries operators as to whether their cable system ownership has changed since Dec. 29, 1986.

Flip-flop

In reversal of international program co-production patterns, major overseas producer is looking for U.S. co-production base. Italian media giant Silvio Berlusconi, who has extensive broadcast and studio operations throughout Europe, had his top TV-film production strategist Ricardo Tozzi in Los Angeles at recent American Film Market talking with producers to determine ways to co-produce TV movies, as well as theatrical projects, stateside.

New shingle

Ivan Braiker, Seattle-based radio entrepreneur who founded successful Olympia Broadcasting but left company last January over differences with management (BROADCASTING, Jan. 23), is set to announce major new radio deal: formation of Braiker Radio Services Co., well-financed operation expected to offer 24-hour satellite-delivered programming. Live programming to differ from most existing services in that network commercials will not be included.

Scene of the crime

Delegation of independent broadcasters will see firsthand how fiber technology works this week when they visit GTE's Cerritos, Calif., showcase center for fiber-to-home experiment it plans to undertake. About nine INTV board members will get tour of facility, which displays GTE's state-of-art telecommunications test of fiber-delivered voice and video services, including video on demand, home-to-home video transmission and conventional cable services.