

hearing and our follow-up efforts will have the same salutary effect."

Ness says she is optimistic that broadcasters will put a "renewed emphasis on quality, education and wholesome fun in children's programming."

Hundt and Chong also have indicated they would like broadcasters to improve their children's TV record. "The issue of providing good-quality children's programming is something many of us at the commission care about," Ness says.

During the hearing, Hundt said television has the potential to "reach children beyond the schoolhouse door—to be the nation's educator by bringing to our homes shows that inspire our children's intellects and animate their imaginations."

Like Ness, Chong raised the issue of children's TV with the independent TV station managers: "Over-the-air broadcasters have an obligation to serve the educational and information-

al needs of children," Chong told them. "While some of you may say this is an onerous obligation, I must respectfully disagree. [Broadcasters] can meet your obligation in ways that will advance both your societal interest and your financial interests."

The FCC in 1993 asked for comments on how it might clarify the rules it adopted in implementing the Children's Television Act of 1990. Under the act, TV stations are required to air educational and informational programming as a condition of license renewal. The FCC's rules give broadcasters wide latitude in determining what is educational programming and how much is enough.

At the FCC hearing, advocates for improved children's television such as the Center for Media Education (see page 72) called for guidelines requiring stations to air seven hours per week of 30-minute educational programs. Broadcasters said the act is

working and they are providing adequate educational and informational programming without such mandates.

The commissioners seem divided about how to proceed. Hundt, Ness and Chong may be leaning toward some regulation while Commissioners James Quello and Andrew Barrett oppose any programming requirements.

"I am always uncomfortable when government gets into the business of telling programmers what to do," Barrett said at the hearing.

"Children's TV is important. But it is also important for children to grow up with freedom of speech and freedom of the press," Quello said.

For the time being, the FCC is not expected to move on the issue of children's TV. Commissioners may wait to see what broadcasters put on the air this fall.

Whether or not the commission will regulate, Ness says, "is in the hands of the broadcasters." ■

SYNDICATION

continued from page 56

durability on the air for five years," says W. Russell Barry, president of TPS. "It has adventure combined with environmental values, which makes it FCC-friendly."

Some of the shows are covering costs by splitting runs, such as the recent decision to strip Disney's syndicated *Bill Nye the Science Guy* on the Public Broadcasting Service this fall.

However, playing on station hedging against possible FCC content requirements, at least six new shows will brave the market, some with novel approaches to winning children's hearts.

Samuel Goldwyn's *Gladiators 2000*, a kids version of the company's hit *American Gladiators* that will combine kids events and instruction on healthful living, is given the greatest chance for commercial success.

New players also may help redefine the market. With New World Entertainment's acquisitions—including syndicator Genesis Entertainment and animation production houses New World Animation and Marvel Films—the company is entering the syndication market in a major way. This fall it will convert *Biker Mice from Mars* to a strip and will launch the Marvel Action Hour, a vehicle that will feature two half-hour weekend shows, with the

aim of stripping one each year.

Because of New World's tremendous synergy, it can provide strong support for a show that a more limited distributor cannot. The company can syndicate a show domestically and internationally, use characters from and advertise in its own comic books, and promote the show on its own television stations.

Another player planning for rapid growth and featuring similar synergies is Turner Program Services. Bolstered by the acquisition of production house Hanna-Barbera, Turner already has introduced two successful syndicated shows, *Swat Kats* and *2 Stupid Dogs*. In addition to those Nickelodeon-influenced shows, the distributor is digging into its animation heritage. It will syndicate its classic *Scooby Doo* episodes in the fall, and in 1996 it will produce new episodes of the 1960s animated adventure *Jonny Quest*.

Group W has had some recent success in reviving a '60s standard with *The New Adventures of Speed Racer*, which in the most recent sweeps recorded a 3.1 rating/17 share with a new generation of viewers (kids 2-11).

Another major player, MCA TV, will strip returning show *Exosquad*, its first Monday-Friday kids show and one that, if successful, will mark the entree of another of Hollywood's

movie studios into a significant children's syndication presence.

The market is tougher for independents, who must compete against an increasing number of power blocks, big marketing dollars and spectacular big-budget animation.

"The kids market is becoming like the adult market—it is governed by the big guys, with independent distributors becoming a thing of the past," says Allen Bohbot, president and chief executive of syndicator Bohbot Entertainment.

His own company and Cluster Television are two independents far from being relegated to the history books. Distributing product from nine different independent producers, Bohbot handles three of the top five kids weeklies, which run in an 8-10 a.m. Sunday block that has seen ratings soar during the past year. In addition, the company handles hit strip *Sonic the Hedgehog* and this fall will debut strip *Mighty Max*.

In 1995-96, Bohbot plans to launch a one-hour block that will target an underserved segment of the kids market: girls.

Cluster, is transforming its successful weekly *Transformers Generation 2* into a strip and is launching *Mutant League* and a revival of the *Baby Huey* character in new weekly series. ■