

CBS buys UHF's in Atlanta, Detroit

Network spends \$46 million to plug affiliation holes

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The latest strike in the affiliation war leaves the winner yet to be determined. CBS last week bought two low-rated stations on the high end of the UHF dial—WGPR-TV Detroit, a religious outlet on ch. 62, and WVEU-TV Atlanta, an independent with a partial weekly menu of foreign language programming on ch. 69.

But observers say the deals put a major crimp in Fox's plan to package and sell its owned stations in Atlanta (WATL-TV) and Dallas (KDAF-TV). With CBS's recent affiliation deal in Dallas with Gaylord's KTVT-TV and the deal to buy WVEU in Atlanta, the Fox outlets in those markets are left without any prospects of a network affiliation. Sources say Fox had hoped to get as much as \$300 million for the stations—anticipating that they both would hook up with CBS.

Now that won't happen, and the value of the stations will fall signifi-

cantly below that figure.

CBS paid \$24 million for WGPR-TV and \$22 million for WVEU-TV. The deals plug major holes made by the defection of the New World stations from CBS to Fox, although to grab a viable portion of the audience CBS now faces the challenge of upgrading the two facilities and promoting the stations.

"We're ready to move and make the upgrades and other changes and the promotion and marketing needed to reach our audience," says CBS Distribution President Tony Malara. "When you own it, you can move at the speed you dictate. And now those stations will have the CBS schedule, which you underestimate at your own peril."

Fox officials were said to be shocked that CBS bought the poorly viewed stations, given CBS's experience in Miami, where it bought WCIX, expecting to turn it around. So far the station's progress has had mixed results.

At one point in recent weeks, Fox, which initially refused CBS overtures to buy WATL, reportedly offered to sell it for \$175 million-\$180 million. CBS refused and began talks with WVEU.

Both of the new CBS stations are the lowest-rated in their markets. "On a good day, WGPR-TV gets a 1 share," says one researcher familiar with the Detroit market. WVEU tends to average a 1 or a 2 share and is expected to gross \$4 million-\$5 million in revenues this year.

In Detroit, CBS reportedly approached the owners of WXON-TV, a stronger mainstream independent, but was rebuffed. WGPR-TV, owned by the International Free and Accepted Modern Masons Inc., has been on the air since 1975. CBS is losing its current affiliate, New World's WJBK-TV, to Fox. WDIV-TV and WXYZ-TV have re-upped with NBC and ABC, respectively.

WVEU-TV is licensed to Broadcast Corp. of Georgia, 75% owned by David Harris. ■

Cameras banned from federal courts

Broadcasters and cable programmers expressed anger and dismay at last week's decision by 27 federal judges to ban cameras from federal courts.

The vote puts an end to a three-year experiment that brought cameras to selected civil courts across the country. The last day cameras will be allowed in federal courts is Dec. 31.

In reaching its decision, the Judicial Conference of the United States cited concerns about the effects cameras might have on witnesses and jurors, according to conference spokesman David Sellers. The vote was held behind closed doors.

The vote came as a surprise, since the judiciary branch's research arm, the Federal Judicial Center, backed permanent access for cameras. A staff report says that cameras had minimal impact on the court proceedings and their participants.

The judicial conference, which is headed by Chief Justice William Rehnquist, was influenced by data from state courts, Sellers says. Currently, 47 states allow cameras in their courts.

Court TV CEO Steve Brill, whose network has videotaped more than 300 state trials, calls the conference's



This high-profile case was seen on Court TV.

decision "bizarre." Court TV has covered 36 federal cases without a single bad review from a judge, according to Brill.

Brill vows to take the fight to Congress, which he will lobby to enact a law allowing cameras in courtrooms.

Although both Court TV and C-SPAN took advantage of the opportunity to get into federal courts, local TV stations were responsible for the majority of the 257 applications to cover trials during the experiment.

The experiment covered only civil trials in federal court. When it voted against cameras in civil trials, the conference also ended any hope of cameras being allowed in criminal cases.

The National Association of Broadcasters also criticized the decision. "An entire branch of our federal government has chosen to conduct its business outside the public view," says Eddie Fritts, NAB president.

Timothy Dyk, a Washington-based lawyer who represents a coalition of broadcasters, says the vote was dominated by judges who had no firsthand experience with cameras in their courts. "Judges with experience with cameras" reacted favorably, says Dyk, who is a partner at Jones Day Reavis & Pogue

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