

# Three on top of the news

Being number one is the goal of every local TV news department in the country, but it's one of the most difficult goals to achieve. Viewer loyalty to TV personalities, including local news anchors, doesn't change easily. A survey of reps, news consultants and others who take the pulse of the local TV business were hard-pressed to come up with more than a handful of stations that have moved up from number two or three, across their local news dayparts, to number one in the last three years. Profiled on this page through page 48 are three that did it—KFOR-TV Oklahoma City, WTAJ-TV Altoona, Pa., and WAFB-TV Baton Rouge, La. Common to all three turnaround strategies were strong corporate commitment, community-focused news coverage, aggressive promotion and strong support from news consultants.

## KFOR-TV Oklahoma City (NBC, ch. 4)

Owner: New York Times Co.

News Director:

Mary Ann Eckstein

No. 1: 5 p.m. newscast,  
May 1996 (10 rtg/25 share)



Audience targeting was critical for KFOR-TV.

Randy Taylor

## Business approach pays off

Since KFOR-TV Oklahoma City climbed to the top of the local news race in May 1995, two key executives involved in the turnaround have moved to other stations where they hope to perform the same feat. KFOR-TV's former general manager, Bill Katsafanas, now runs WCMH-TV Columbus, Ohio, an NBC owned-and-operated station, and the former news director for KFOR-TV, Melissa Klinzing, joined KMGH-TV Denver in the same capacity six months ago.

Reached last week at her new digs, Klinzing outlined the strategy that she and her colleagues used at KFOR.

"It's critical to see what is not being done in the market," she says. "It's also important for the staff to think commercially—that this is a business, that you must be responsive to what viewers want and that there is nothing journalistically unsound about this."

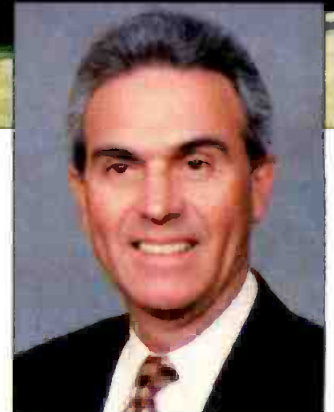
Klinzing says the station made an effort to do more "news you can use" stories and, "stylistically, to make things more entertaining and attrac-

tive." In the story-selection process, she says, the station weeded out coverage of one too many courtroom trials and stories dealing with the minutia of the legislative process.

As for on-air talent, Klinzing says there were no "wholesale blowouts. It was a mix of the really good talent we already had and a few new faces." During her tenure, a new face that was added was weatherman Mike Morgan, a rising star at a competitive station. "He really turned the whole weather thing around and was a significant factor in the ratings increase."

Two critical issues for the station, Klinzing says, were promotion and targeting the news audience that KFOR wanted to reach. "We went aggressively after the female audience," she says, with a new 4:30 p.m. newscast.

On the promotion front, the station's motto became "Oklahoma News Channel." "We wanted to be the CNN of the market," she says, and the station added updates every hour around the



KFOR-TV's former general manager, Bill Katsafanas

clock. At the same time, "we almost abandoned on-air image promotion entirely and did topical promotion. And we created relationships between newscasts, particularly our 4:30 p.m. and 10 p.m., which we would cross-promote, and in some cases, even start a story at 4:30 and finish it at 10."

But as with other turnarounds, a key ingredient at KFOR was the commitment of then-parent company Palmer Communications, which approved budgets to increase the weekly news output from 25 hours to more than 40 hours, Katsafanas says.

Frank N. Magid Associates, a station consultant, also helped significantly, she says, constantly offering promotion and story ideas. —SM