

# BROADCASTING & CABLE

April 12, 2004

## BROADCASTER OF THE YEAR

DAVID BARRETT

Hearst-Argyle's David Barrett

**Good News,  
Good Guy**

KENNETH GABRIELSEN



# BROADCASTER OF THE YEAR

## DAVID BARRETT

Here's some good news about a man who helps good newscasts happen: At April 15's TVB Conference in New York, David Barrett, president and chief executive officer of Hearst-Argyle Broadcasting, will receive BROADCASTING & CABLE'S annual Broadcaster of the Year Award.

The gregarious Chicago native gets the nod this year for his tireless efforts ensuring that Hearst-Argyle stations are among the strongest in the country in serving their communities, while watching the bottom line and expanding the company's business opportunities.

The newscasts of the Hearst-Argyle stations are usually No. 1 or 2 in their markets. And that's due not to sweeps

stunts but to quality journalism that has been recognized with the country's most prestigious TV-journalism awards. This year alone, WESH Orlando, Fla., is being awarded both a George Foster Peabody Award and duPont-Columbia Award.

Last year, WISN Milwaukee received a Peabody and WCVB Boston a duPont-Columbia for local news efforts. Those awards are the gold standard for TV journalism. So is Hearst-Argyle's comprehensive campaign coverage.

The 55-year-old Barrett understands that better than most. Barrett believes in the values of good television and community service. He loves news, supports it, and sets high standards for everyone involved in every aspect of his operation.

BY STEVE MCCLELLAN

**W**hen David Barrett joined Hearst Broadcasting to run WBAL (AM)/(FM) Baltimore nearly 20 years ago, one of his first missions was to grab the radio rights to the Baltimore Orioles baseball team from a rival station. It took him three years, but he finally persuaded then-station owner Edward Bennett Williams to give in.

It didn't hurt that the incumbent rights holder had defaulted on payments. Barrett lobbied hard to get corporate approval for the multiyear, multimillion-dollar rights deal. He knew the payoff would be handsome, even if the Birds, in rebuilding mode during the 1988 season, played only average ball.

But alas, they didn't play average ball. Not even close. They played like dodos, starting the season 0-21. Barrett was as embarrassed as the players.

"My name was all over it," says Barrett today, adding that the spring of '88 "is a time I will never forget."

During the streak, his boss, mentor, and then-vice president and general manager of Hearst Broadcasting, John Conomikes, called him after each loss to give him a proverbial slap on the back of

the head. But Barrett lived to tell about it and, eventually, to laugh about it.

That says a lot about Barrett, Conomikes, and the culture at Hearst. Then as now, says Barrett, "We take risks and make decisions together on matters of great import in a collaborative way."

That's why Barrett is the third-ever Broadcaster of the Year, an award he'll receive at the Television Bureau of Advertising's annual conference April 15. Unlike the two other winners—Viacom's Dennis Swanson (who won the award when he was general manager of New York television station WNBC) and Tribune Co.'s Dennis FitzSimons—Barrett cut his teeth in radio, not television.

Like the best radio stations, though, Barrett knows the value of hyper-local broadcasting.

Hearst-Argyle is among a handful of group owners that keep an eye on the principle of serving the public interest without hurting the bottom line.

Five years ago, the company bought the nine Pulitzer Publishing Co. TV stations for \$1.7 billion, a deal Barrett calls a "defining transaction" for the company.

In today's world of media consolidation, broadcasters have been forced to decide whether to grow and stay in the game or sell out and leave the business. The Pulitzer deal put the industry on

notice that Hearst-Argyle intended to stay. "We said we were going to go for it. It was a risk for the company," but it helped Hearst leap into the big time of television ownership, Barrett says.

The business philosophy behind that

**"We define success in television as how effective we are in local communities with our news services and how engaged we are with the community. Part of that is ... being good partners with our advertisers."**

**DAVID BARRETT**, Hearst-Argyle

decision to go for it has been engrained in Hearst executives for generations. At Hearst-Argyle, Barrett is both steward and benefactor of an approach that says well-reasoned risk is risk worth taking.

"Today, I'd say if we're doing things



As head of WBAL(AM/FM) Baltimore, Barrett grabbed the rights to the Orioles games away from a competitor.

right, we're not hanging any individuals out there on their own to make high-risk decisions. That goes back to the culture of the company and how we like to operate. The story about the Orioles is fun to tell now, but, once the decision was made, I had the commitment of the company."

In January 2001, Barrett was named CEO of Hearst-Argyle Television, the No. 7 group TV operator by revenue, according to Bear Stearns. The 20-year Hearst veteran has been toiling in the industry since 1970.

### HIS RADIO ROOTS

More than half of Barrett's career has been devoted to radio. In fact, he had never worked at a TV station before 1989, when Hearst handed him the reins of WBAL Baltimore, where he'd been running a TV-radio combination for five years. (Technically, Hearst Corp. alone owns the radio station, and Hearst-Argyle owns the TV station, but both are commonly run.)

His radio career started in Chicago, not far from the suburbs where Barrett

## The Barrett File

**CURRENT POSITION:** President and CEO, Hearst-Argyle Television

**BORN:** June 20, 1948, Chicago

**EDUCATION:** Seven semesters at Loyola College, just one short of a degree. Doesn't seem to have held him back, though.

**FIRST JOB IN BROADCASTING:** Account executive at WGLD(FM) Chicago in 1970. He was still at Loyola.

**FAVORITE NATION OUTSIDE OF THE U.S.:** Oh, that would be Canada. That's where he got his first big break, running radio stations in Montreal and Toronto in the 1970s. Also, two of his three kids were born there and have dual U.S./Canadian citizenship.

**MARRIED:** Elizabeth Balzer, March 3, 1973

**KIDS:** Casey (29), Kate (25), and Liza (21)

**FAVORITE SPORT:** Swimming. Olympic swimming to be exact. Son Casey swam in the '96 games for the Canadian swim team. The girls swam, too, but not at that level. "I spent a lot of time by pools holding a stopwatch," Barrett says.

**BEST CAREER MOVE:** Turning down an offer to run a New York radio station and joining Hearst Broadcasting. That was 20 years ago, when Hearst was barely a blip on the industry radar screen. Today, it's the No. 7 TV group in terms of revenues.

**MENTOR:** John Conomikes, who ran Hearst-Argyle before him and taught him a lot about both business generally and the business of television.



NAACP's Kweisi Mfume, here with Barrett, hosts series *The Remarkable Journey* for Hearst-Argyle.

was born and raised. As a senior at Loyola College, he "fell into" a radio job to help pay his college bills. (He also moved furniture and was a lifeguard.)

He and his siblings learned quickly to take care of themselves and each other. Their father died when Barrett was 20, forcing his mother to take a job. In addition to Barrett and an older brother, there were two younger sisters in the family, so anything he could do to earn a little extra money would be helpful.

Working for rock station WGLD(FM), he

discovered, "I had a pretty good aptitude for sales," and, as advertisers soon learned, he was also good at collecting payments. (To know Barrett is to suspect as much: He's built like a lineman for the Chicago Bears.) That was important back then, since compensation was based on payments received.

After two years, Barrett was reading the classified ads in BROADCASTING magazine (as this publication was

called then) and came across a sales-management position for a Montreal rock station.

It turned out to be a huge risk and big break. "I was ready for something different," Barrett recalls. Station owner Geoff Stirling was looking to the U.S. for someone with experience selling the album-oriented rock (AOR) format, which had first taken root in the states. So Barrett headed north,



Barrett's station group won the University of Southern California-Annenberg School's Walter Cronkite Award for excellence in journalism in 2000 and 2002. Bottom: NBC correspondent James Hattori presents the 2002 prize to Barrett.

## Growing the Business

**Hearst-Argyle grew through shrewd acquisitions of other major broadcast groups. Here's a look at how the company put it all together**

**1928** Hearst Corp. enters broadcasting with acquisition of WSOE-AM Milwaukee. The station becomes the foundation of WISN-TV.

**1931** Hearst acquires WTAE-AM Pittsburgh.

**1935** Hearst acquires WBAL-AM Baltimore.

**1948** WBAL-TV Baltimore, the nation's 19th TV station, is launched.

■ WLWT-TV Cincinnati, the nation's 20th station, is launched by Crosley Broadcasting.



■ WBAL-TV was a pioneer in color TV. The station also introduced the legendary *Romper Room* in the early 1950s.

**1953** WBAL-TV is among the nation's first stations to transmit in color.

■ Also in the '50s, television licenses are granted for WISN-TV and WTAE-TV.



Hearst was a TV pioneer, launching the nation's 19th station.

**1972** License for WCVB-TV Boston is awarded to Boston Broadcast Corp.



**1981** Hearst acquires WDTN-TV Dayton, Ohio, and agrees to acquire KMBC-TV Kansas City, Mo.



(In 1967, Phil Donahue (left) began his innovative talk show format at WDTN Dayton, Ohio, when it was called WLWD.)

**1986** Hearst acquires WCVB-TV Boston for \$450 million—at the time, the highest price paid for a TV station.

**1994** Argyle is founded, acquires WNAC-TV Providence, R.I.; WZZM-TV, Grand Rapids, Mich.; WAPT-TV, Jackson, Miss.

**1995** Argyle acquires WGRZ(TV) Buffalo, N.Y., and KITV(TV) Honolulu (including satellite stations KMAU, Wailuku and KHVO Hilo, Hawaii).



Hearst-Argyle executives celebrate being listed on the New York Stock Exchange on July 22, 1998 (Barrett is at far right).

made a pitch, and got the job.

The big break came just four months later, when the general manager left and “they turned to me and said ‘you look after it.’” At the tender age of 24, Barrett was general manager.

A year later, he married his long-time Chicago sweetheart, Elizabeth Balzer, and, after four years in Montreal, yearned to come back home. But the Bronfman family persuaded him to put off those plans. In addition to owning distiller Seagram and Major League Baseball’s Montreal Expos, they owned a news, talk, and sports boomer in the Montreal market and wanted Barrett to run it, along with an FM beautiful-music station. “It was a spectacular time to be running those

stations in that market,” says Barrett. Montreal was gearing up to host the 1976 Olympics at the time.

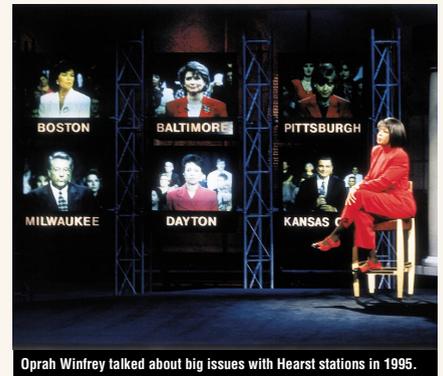
#### JOINING HEARST

By 1980, though, the Canadian economy was heading south, and soon so was Barrett. The Bronfmans sold the radio stations, and Barrett returned to the U.S. to accept a job running Doubleday’s KWY(FM) St. Louis. Not for long, though. A year later, he was back in Canada, recruited by media baron Ted Rogers to run a pair of Toronto radio outlets. “It was an unstable period in my life,” recalls Barrett. “I wasn’t letting any roots sink in.”

After two years of running the Toronto combo, Barrett departed

## Growing the Business

- Argyle goes public.
- The new studio at KITV(TV) is America’s first commercially licensed digital TV station.
- Also in 1995, Oprah Winfrey hosted a public-affairs show, linking all of Hearst’s stations together for the evening.



Oprah Winfrey talked about big issues with Hearst stations in 1995.

- 1996 Hearst acquires WTMV(TV) Tampa, Fla., renaming it WWWB(TV). Today, it is WMOR(TV).
- Hearst launches KCWB(TV) Kansas City, Mo., through a local marketing agreement, later renaming it KCWE(TV).



- Argyle acquires KHBS(TV)/KHOG(TV), Ft. Smith/Fayetteville, Ark.
- Argyle announces exchange of WZZM(TV) and WGRZ-TV with Gannett Inc. for WLWT-TV Cincinnati and KOCO-TV Oklahoma City.



1997 Hearst acquires WPBF-TV, West Palm Beach, Fla.

- Hearst Broadcasting and Argyle announce and complete merger; Hearst-Argyle Television is formed.



- Hearst-Argyle successfully syndicates \$1 billion credit facility to a consortium of international banks.
- Hearst-Argyle successfully completes public offerings of 4 million shares of Series A common stock and \$300 million of 10-year senior notes and 30-year debentures, improving its trading, liquidity, and cost of capital.
- Company’s bank credit facility and senior notes receive investment-grade ratings from Moody’s and Standard & Poor’s.
- KITV transmits digital TV in December, becoming nation’s first commercially licensed station to do so. KITV is subsequently named “Broadcaster of the Year” by *Television Broadcast magazine*.



KENNETH GABRIELSEN



Canada for good, briefly rejoining Doubleday in Washington, D.C., to run WAVA(FM). Within months, however, he left after a falling out with his boss. It was not the best time for him professionally.

But what Barrett didn't know at the time was, his career was about take a turn for the better. John Conomikes, the general manager of Hearst Broadcasting, needed someone to run Hearst's two radio stations in Baltimore and offered Barrett the job.

But not right away. Conomikes liked Barrett and was quite impressed with his knowledge of radio. "But I was concerned that he was unemployed, so I interviewed 12 other people, who were employed. None of them were in the same league as David Barrett." But by the time he made a job offer, Barrett was mulling one to run a New York City radio sta-

tion. However, Conomikes convinced him that his long-term future was better served at Hearst.

"It was probably the best decision I made in my life," Barrett says. Within a year, he was given responsibility for all seven radio properties in the Hearst portfolio. (That seems quaint in today's world, where the biggest player, Clear Channel, owns 1,200 stations.) Fifteen years into his career, Barrett was, in his own words, "totally a radio guy."

He had gained some exposure to television but no operating experience with the medium working for the Bronfmans' CTV station. As the head of Hearst's radio group, he increasingly realized that "95% of what we covered was related to TV."

And he was right. Hearst had largely concluded by then that its investments in the future would be in TV

## Growing the Business

- 1998 Hearst-Argyle successfully completes public offering of \$200 million of 20-year notes.
  - Hearst-Argyle refinances nearly all of its subordinated debt.
  - Swap of WDTN(TV) Dayton, Ohio, and WNAC(TV) Providence, R.I., for KSBW(TV) Monterey-Salinas, Calif., and WPTZ(TV)/WNNE(TV) Burlington, Vt./Platts-



burgh, N.Y., is announced.

- Hearst-Argyle announces it will acquire Pulitzer Publishing Co.'s broadcast group's nine TV and five radio stations.
- Hearst-Argyle announces it will acquire the Sacramento, Calif., TV properties of Kelly Broadcasting Co., including NBC affiliate KCRA(TV) and a time brokerage agreement for The WB affiliate KQCA(TV) Sacramento.
- Hearst-Argyle receives FCC and regulatory approvals of Pulitzer and Kelly transactions



- 1999 Hearst-Argyle completes acquisitions of the Pulitzer and Sacramento stations, bringing the company to 26 TV stations reaching about 17.5% of U.S. TV households, as well as seven radio stations.



- John Conomikes (left) steps down as president and co-CEO of Hearst-Argyle, concluding a distinguished career of more than 45 years in broadcast TV. Conomikes, who remains on the company's board, is succeeded by David Barrett, who had been executive VP and COO.

- Seven Hearst-Argyle stations are digital-ready, placing Hearst-Argyle among companies in the forefront of the transition to digital television (DTV) and high-definition television (HDTV).
- Hearst-Argyle announces a partnership with Internet Broadcasting Systems Inc., developer of Web sites for TV stations, to create a "network" of Web sites including sites for Hearst-Argyle stations. Hearst-Argyle also acquires an approximately 30% equity interest in privately held Internet Broadcasting.

- 2000 Hearst-Argyle completes its acquisition of The WB affiliate KQCA(TV) Sacramento, creating a successful duopoly with NBC affiliate KCRA(TV).
  - Hearst-Argyle launches "Commitment 2000," a year-long project throughout the station group to commit to thorough daily political-news coverage during the 2000 campaign and election season. Later in the year, as part of "Commitment 2000," Hearst-Argyle becomes the first large TV-station group to commit to a minimum of five minutes' nightly newscast airtime to candidate coverage and is subsequently followed by other major station groups.
  - Hearst-Argyle becomes one of the first major station groups to announce a policy of not airing advertising for R-rated movies during the family viewing hour in prime time.
  - Hearst-Argyle partners with Belo Corp. and LIN Television to launch a Broadcast Sales Academy to train the industry's next generation of sales professionals.
  - Hearst-Argyle announces it will sell its three radio stations in Phoenix to Emmis Communications and will simultaneously acquire WMUR(TV) Manchester,



and cable and, in 1989, rewarded Barrett with responsibility for WBAL(TV), then Hearst's co-owned CBS affiliate in Baltimore.

Conomikes says he knew six months after Barrett joined Hearst that the young radio executive was destined to run a big TV group some day—Hearst's or someone else's. "It just became so obvious that this guy had all the tools to be a big player. He's a special guy, and the TV industry is lucky to have him."

Soon after, fate intervened with the death of the Mickey Hooten, deputy general manager of Hearst Broadcasting and Conomikes' No. 2 executive. Barrett's work at WBAL and at the radio stations had made an impression on Conomikes. He was so impressed that he tapped Barrett as his new deputy, to help him run the entire Hearst Broadcasting group: seven ra-

dio properties and six television stations, including flagship WTAE Pittsburgh and WCVB Boston, which Hearst had acquired in 1986 for \$450 million, at the time a record price for a single TV station.

#### LESSONS LEARNED

That's when Barrett's real education and immersion into the TV business began, with Conomikes as his mentor. For the next eight years, the pair worked closely, dramatically expanding Hearst's TV holdings.

They also branched out into new businesses, including a production and syndication venture with NBC and Gannett and a Web-site venture with Internet Broadcasting System.

"Being John Conomikes' understudy for eight years," says Barrett, "was the best learning opportunity anybody in the TV business could possibly have."

## Growing the Business

N.H., from Imes Communications in a three-way, like-kind exchange. The transactions are completed in March 2001.

■ In a groundbreaking industry development, Hearst-Argyle, Gannett Broadcasting, the NBC station group, and NBC Enterprises jointly announce a venture to develop and carry syndicated programming on their respective stations, which collectively reach 60% of U.S. TV households. Hearst-Argyle subsequently merges its production and syndication unit into NBC's unit, which is part of NBC Enterprises.

■ Following the company's management succession plan, Bob Marbut, co-CEO since 1997, becomes non-executive chairman of Hearst-Argyle Television at year-end; David Barrett, president and co-CEO since 1999, becomes CEO.

**2001** Hearst-Argyle and its stations lead the industry with numerous broadcast journalism awards, including a Walter Cronkite Award from the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication, for the "Commitment 2000" project.

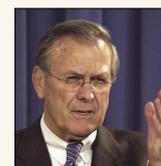
■ The NBC owned TV stations join Hearst-Argyle and other partners in the Internet Broadcasting Systems (IBS) "network" of local Web sites.

**2002** Hearst-Argyle launches "Commitment 2002" election coverage. Like Commitment 2000, it earns a Walter Cronkite Award from the University of Southern California's Annenberg School.

■ Hearst-Argyle and Belo launch the Producer Academy, an innovative training program for the companies' news producers modeled after the successful Broadcast Sales Academy formed earlier by Hearst-Argyle, Belo, and LIN Television.

■ Victor Ganzl, a director of Hearst-Argyle and president and CEO of Hearst Corp., Hearst-Argyle's majority owner, succeeds Bob Marbut as Hearst-Argyle chairman of the board. Marbut remains on the board.

**2003** The IBS Network enters the ranks of the top five national news-and-information Web sites as measured by Nielsen.



■ Hearst-Argyle's Washington news bureau conducts newsmaking interviews, distributed to the Hearst-Argyle stations via the company's dedicated satellite service, with Iraq administrator Ambassador Paul Bremer, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld (left), and President George W. Bush.

■ Hearst-Argyle stations earn awards that are among the very highest national honors granted to TV broadcasters, for groundbreaking news series: WISN(TV) Milwaukee, a national Peabody Award for a series on the effectiveness of smoke detectors; and WESH(TV) Orlando, Fla., a national duPont-Columbia Journalism Award for its coverage of the Columbia Space Shuttle tragedy (In 2002, WCVB-TV Boston earned the duPont-Columbia Award for its series on Boston's massive "Big Dig" construction project [below]). Separately, WBAL(TV) Baltimore receives a National Association of Consumer Advocates Award for its investigative series examining the business practices of a national mortgage-service provider.



SOURCE: Hearst-Argyle Television Inc.

Conomikes retired as president of Hearst-Argyle Television in 1999, but he's one of the most active retirees in the business. He's still on the Hearst-Argyle board and is very involved in the affairs of Hearst Corp. "In some ways," says Barrett, "John never retired. He is still the guy I trust and most rely in the business."

Conomikes is also on the boards of Lifetime, A&E, and ESPN (Hearst has minority stakes in each). "He's the youngest 72-year-old you'll ever meet," Barrett marvels. "As a mentor, he was the single most important guy teaching me about business and the business of television."

In 1997, Hearst spun off its broadcasting group into a so-called "reverse merger" with Argyle Television, a television group with about the same number of stations as Hearst but in smaller markets. At the time, the Hearst properties had three times the revenues of Argyle. Together, they formed the publicly traded Hearst-Argyle Television, with combined pro forma revenues of approximately \$385 million.

When the merger was completed, Barrett was named chief operating officer of the company, and Conomikes and Bob Marbut, who had run Argyle TV, became co-CEOs. The merger gave Hearst-Argyle the public currency it needed to expand, says Barrett. It did so quickly, targeting the Pulitzer stations.

With the stock transaction, Hearst Corp. remained the principal owner, but its stake was reduced from more than 80% to 66%, while Pulitzer family members were issued 37 million new shares of Hearst-Argyle stock, giving them a combined stake in the company of between 7% and 8%.

At around the same time, Hearst-Argyle bought KCRA Sacramento, Calif. But it was the Pulitzer deal that signaled Hearst-Argyle's long-term intentions. It doubled the size of the company, to 26 stations and nearly doubled the size of its annual revenue base to \$710 million.

But in days of megamedia giants, is that big enough to stay independent? "I think we can, but time will tell," says

**"The level of competition won't slow, and figuring out how to meet the needs of our customers—both advertisers and viewers—is a continual process."**

**DAVID BARRETT,**  
Hearst-Argyle

Barrett. "Five years from now, we won't be the same company with the same number of stations. We're still building it. If I ever say we've finished, it's time for me to go. It's a never-ending process."

#### **"STRAIGHT, DIRECT"**

"David is a unique manager," says Tony Vinciguerra, president of the Fox Networks Group, who worked with Barrett for five years between 1997 and 2002, when he was COO. "He's very honest, very straight, and very direct. No one ever wonders where they stand with him because he's very clear about it."

Vinciguerra recalls, "We were buying companies and integrating them, and we had lots of struggles and lots of issues. But he was always right there for support and to discuss issues and come up with solutions."

Barrett has only lost his temper once that Vinciguerra can remember. That was when a certain small and relatively new broadcast network (that shall remain nameless) pulled an affiliation from a Hearst-Argyle station after promising to renew it.

#### **FUTURE CHALLENGES**

Even-handed and level-headed as he is, Barrett still jokes that he hopes he's smart enough to figure out the business someday.

Hearst-Argyle is kicking the tires of new technology. Under Barrett, it has branched out with related ventures. It's a part owner of Internet Broadcasting System, which builds Web sites, sells ad-

vertising, and provides content for other stations. It also has a small stake in NBC Enterprises and gets dibs on new first-run offerings from the company. Both ventures are profitable, but have yet to pay off for Hearst.

Like many broadcast executives, Barrett believes it's critical that the industry figure out the best way to exploit the digital spectrum; he thinks NBC has been the most aggressive trying to come up with workable ventures that will benefit the network and its affiliates. But Barrett's not expecting much soon. Of course, none of it will amount to a hill of beans unless cable agrees to carry the entire spectrum. That, Barrett suggests, just may take governmental intervention.

"The level of competition won't slow," he says, "and figuring out how to meet the needs of our customers—both advertisers and viewers—is a continual process."

Barrett has thrown out some ideas publicly about how to do that, but they haven't always been well received. Given the longer workday and other diversions fracturing the viewing audience, he wonders if at least one network ought not call it a day at 10 p.m. rather than 11, to stem the erosion in late-night news viewing. Which network? Barrett says the worst performer in prime time ought to consider it. That, of course, would be ABC.

"Local news is something that is terribly important to our viewers, but there are days where we put it on at 11 p.m. and it's not in step with the way people use television and the way people live their lives. It's on too late."

Barrett thinks job one is serving viewers. If that happens, he says, the business imperatives should take care of themselves. "We define success in television as how effective we are in local communities with our news services and how engaged we are with the community. Part of that is being very engaged on the local sales front and being good partners with our advertisers."

Since his days in radio, he has learned how to do it like few others. And, in time, the Orioles got better, too. ■



All Hearst-Argyle stations implement the chain's mandate to provide comprehensive political coverage during the election year.

# This Station Group Takes Politics Seriously

Hearst-Argyle's "Commitment" lives up to its name



WCVB Boston's Natalie Jacobson interviewed the Democrat John Kerry at WMUR prior to the New Hampshire primary.

By KIM McAVOY

Last December, as New Hampshire voters engaged in their quadrennial flirtation with presidential politics, WMUR Manchester scrapped traditional soundbite news, opting instead for its own version of reality TV.

In a one-hour special, *On the Campaign Trail*, the Hearst-Argyle station gave viewers a much more personal slice of campaign life. In one segment, it visited the apartment that then-candidate Joe Lieberman and his wife rented in Manchester (usually candidates stay in hotels) and even offered a scene of Lieberman doing his laundry. Likewise, the special gave a glimpse of Gen. Wesley Clark's exercise routine, including swims at the YMCA, and took a campaign-bus ride with Sen. John Edwards and his two small children.

Coverage of the New Hampshire primary actually began in earnest last May. WMUR sponsored town-hall meetings, conducted one-on-one interviews, broadcast special-issue forums and live debates, as well as preparing countless reports about the candidates and the presidential primary campaign.

Like others in the Hearst-Argyle Television family, WMUR has one mandate: to provide the most comprehensive news coverage of national, state, and local campaigns possible. Referred to corporately and on the air as Commitment 2004, it has been a part of the company's policy since 2000.

It's a priority for Hearst-Argyle President and CEO David Barrett, a driving force behind the initiative. "He really believes in it," says Candy Altman, vice president of news for Hearst-Argyle Television.

"The commitment project grew out of our conviction that comprehensive coverage of the political process is something our viewers want," says Barrett. Viewers rely on us to help them be informed about candidates and issues in every election cycle."

It also makes sense on the bottom line. The heavy coverage makes the stations an even more attractive choice for political advertising, he says.

Essentially, stations commit five minutes a day to candidate-centered coverage. Those segments



WAPT Jackson, Miss., arranged for gubernatorial candidates to meet casually over dinner at the homes of average viewers.

must air during prime news times (5-11:35 p.m.) in the 30 days prior to primary and general elections.

"We encourage political programming throughout the year, not just the 30 days prior to the election," says Altman. And there are rules that give coverage some integrity. For example, a story about political poll results doesn't count as part of the five minutes. Those stories should be part of the regular coverage, she says.

During the 2000 and 2002 election cycles, Hearst-Argyle stations broadcast a cumulative 200 hours of political news, according to Altman.

Besides five minutes a day of "candidate sound," stations aired debates, interviewed candidates in their homes, televised dinners with the candidates and local families, and conducted interviews in the studio followed by questions on the Internet.

"Truth checks" of political ads were another valuable asset in covering elections. Station Web sites are also chock full of political information.

A five-minute obligation might seem a news director's nightmare. Altman doesn't think so: "Newspeople like to do political coverage. This is a fun project for news managers because it challenges them to come up with different

ways of covering politics."

Hearst-Argyle ABC affiliate WAPT Jackson, Miss., met that challenge during last year's political fireworks between then Democratic Gov. Ronnie Musgrove and his Republican challenger, Haley Barbour. Trying something new, the station set up a dinner for the candidates with a typical Jackson family. "We allowed the family to dictate the questions and the conversation," says News Director Bruce Barkley. "It was less staged and more unpredictable."

When it was Barbour's turn for dinner, something unexpected happened: His wife, Marsha, accompanied him. There was a last-minute scramble to add a place setting, and dessert had to be shared "We got a little flak from the Barbour campaign for including that piece of information," says Barkley. "They felt like we were taking a shot at them." But viewers got a frank political conversation and a real picture of a dinner party—even the kind that has a glitch.

With the campaign rife with mudslinging, WAPT had ample opportunity to do "truth checks." NAFTA and its affect on the region became a hot issue. Musgrove portrayed Barbour as a NAFTA supporter. Barbour ran an ad

**BARRETT'S KINGDOM**

STATION	MKT. (AFFILIATE; CH.)	MKT. RANK	% OF U.S. COVERED*
WCVB	Boston (ABC; ch. 5)	6	2.207
WMUR	Manchester, N.H.-Boston (ABC; ch. 9)	6	
WMOR	Tampa-St. Petersburg, Fla. (WB; ch. 32)	13	0.760
KCRA	Sacramento, Calif. (NBC; ch. 3)	19	1.151
KQCA	Sacramento, Calif. (WB; ch. 58)	19	
WESH	Orlando, Fla. (NBC; ch. 2)	20	1.148
WTAE	Pittsburgh (ABC; ch. 4)	21	1.093
WBAL	Baltimore (NBC; ch. 11)	24	0.994
WISN	Milwaukee (ABC; ch. 12)	31	0.807
WLWT	Cincinnati (NBC; ch. 5)	32	0.801
KMBC	Kansas City, Mo. (ABC; ch. 9)	33	0.799
KCWE*	Kansas City, Mo. (UPN; ch. 29)	33	
WPFF	Greenville, S.C.-Asheville, N.C. (NBC; ch. 4)	35	0.743
WPBF <sup>M</sup>	West Palm Beach, Fla. (ABC; ch. 25)	39	0.329
WDSU	New Orleans (NBC; ch. 6)	42	0.618
WXI	Greensboro, N.C. (NBC; ch. 12)	46	0.595
KOCO	Oklahoma City (ABC; ch. 5)	45	0.597
WGAL	Harrisburg, Pa. (NBC; ch. 8)	47	0.588
KOAT	Albuquerque-Santa Fe, N.M. (ABC; ch. 7)	49	0.582
KOCT <sup>S</sup>	Carlsbad, N.M. (ABC; ch. 6)	49	
KOFT <sup>S</sup>	Albuquerque, N.M. (ABC; ch. 3)	49	
KOVT <sup>S</sup>	Silver City, N.M. (ABC; ch. 10)	49	
WLKY	Louisville, Ky. (CBS; ch. 32)	50	0.287
KCCI	Des Moines, Iowa (CBS; ch. 8)	72	0.376
KITV	Honolulu (ABC; ch. 4)	71	0.376
KHVO <sup>S</sup>	Hilo, Hawaii (ABC; ch. 13)	71	
KMAU <sup>S</sup>	Wailuku, Hawaii (ABC; ch. 12)	71	
KETV	Omaha, Neb. (ABC; ch. 7)	78	0.363
WAPT	Jackson, Miss. (ABC; ch. 16)	89	0.150
WPVT	Burlington, Vt.-Plattsburgh, N.Y. (NBC; ch. 5)	91	0.298
WVNN <sup>S</sup>	Hartford, Vt. (NBC; ch. 31)	91	
KHBS	Ft. Smith, Ark. (ABC; ch. 40)	108	0.120
KHOS <sup>S</sup>	Fayetteville, Ark. (ABC; ch. 29)	108	
KSBW	Monterey-Salinas, Calif. (NBC; ch. 8)	120	0.214

\*As calculated by the FCC

S = satellite station

M = management agreement, station owned by Hearst Corp.

**OTHER MEDIA INTERESTS:** Two radio stations; program and syndication partner with NBC Enterprises. Online interests: ProAct Technologies Corp. (personal-finance-human-resources Web site); about 24% of Internet Broadcasting Systems Inc. (site developer). Parent Hearst owns Hearst Entertainment and Syndication, 50% of Lifetime Television (joint partner with ABC Inc.), New England Cable News (with MediaOne), TVA (Brazilian pay company, with ABC), 20% of ESPN, A&E Television Networks (joint venture with NBC and ABC), newspapers, monthly consumer magazines including Esquire, Town & Country, Good Housekeeping, Harper's Bazaar



For two years, WBAL's Laura Kinney pushed for an exclusive interview with President Bush. It aired on 25 of Hearst-Argyle's stations.

citing numbers showing how many jobs left during the Musgrove years and didn't include numbers for jobs added.

WAPT set the record straight. A segment illustrating the loss and gain of jobs in the state aired. Barbour's campaign grumbled, says Barkley. But the station saw a need for balance.

Clearly, others in the television industry are devoting time to election news, but Hearst-Argyle stands out. "Hearst-Argyle is a leader in this area," says RTNDA President Barbara Cochran. "I think some of the innovations they've introduced into their campaign coverage could inspire others to take a similar approach."

The group has twice been awarded the University of Southern California-Annenberg School's Walter Cronkite Award for Excellence in Television Political Journalism, for coverage of the 2000 and 2002 elections, respectively.

"Hearst-Argyle stations aired some of the country's best coverage of campaign news," says Martin Kaplan, associate dean of the USC Annenberg School and director of the Norman Lear Center, which oversees the awards, "and they also had political stories, and more minutes in those stories, than the national averages." Furthermore, he adds, Hearst-Argyle's commitment clearly dispels the notion that covering politics is "ratings poison."

That explains why Hearst-Argyle's WYFF, an NBC affiliate in Greenville/Spartanburg, S.C., preempted *Friends* for the Democratic presidential debate earlier this year. The station "owned" the night, says News Director Andy Still. Viewers tuned in for

**"This is a fun project for news managers because it challenges them to come up with different ways of covering politics."**

**CANDY ALTMAN,**  
Hearst-Argyle Television

the debate and came back at 11 p.m. for expanded news coverage.

WYFF and *The Greenville News* teamed up to pick six families to follow through the election year. The station invited those families to the studio for dinner and the debate. The dinner and reaction to the debate was featured during that newscast.

The truth check is popular in Greenville, too. During the 2002 Senate and governor's campaigns, the station ran *The Best of Truth Check*, a one-hour special on the Saturday before the election. That program even beat out *Jeopardy*. "The viewers loved it," Still says. "They went nuts."

Of course, aggressive political coverage cuts two ways. Politicians frequently gripe about the cost of political ad time but don't always jump at a chance to appear on local TV where they can't control the content. Hearst-Argyle sometimes encounters candidates reluctant to participate in televised debates or even taped interviews, says Altman: "Candidates want to speak directly to the people. They don't want any questions."

KCCI Des Moines, Iowa, shares that

frustration. In 2002, the station offered candidates in the gubernatorial and Senate races an opportunity for a prime time debate. It never happened. The incumbents weren't interested, says News Director Dave Busiek. "Incumbents don't want to give their challenger that kind of a forum. They'll give you some lame excuse and then wink at you."

But Democratic Sen. Tom Harkin accepted another station's offer. Busiek says that debate aired Saturday afternoon, opposite a University of Iowa football game.

Not surprisingly, KCCI's coverage of this year's Iowa caucuses was extensive. Democratic presidential candidates were profiled, and the CBS affiliate carried a series of interviews with each of them that were produced through a collaborative effort of co-owned WMUR and WCVB Boston. KCCI offered three hours of live coverage of the caucus starting at 8 p.m.

Even one of the industry's harshest critics, The Alliance for Better Campaigns, applauds Hearst-Argyle's commitment. In 2000, the Alliance and others urged broadcasters to comply with recommendations of a White House commission calling for five minutes per day of political coverage 30 days prior to the election.

The industry largely ignored the recommendation, says Alliance President Meredith McGehee. But, she adds, Hearst-Argyle "deserves great credit for saying we're going to invest in this because, if it's done right, we can make this watchable television."

Says McGehee: "If you have a willing management and good journalists, nothing is more interesting than American politics." ■



*Hearst-Argyle*  
TELEVISION