

Salhany's back and U/P's got her

Former Fox Broadcasting head to preside over launch of new network

By Steve McClellan

Lucie Salhany has joined the United/Paramount Network as president and chief executive officer.

The network will launch in January with two nights of programming—Monday and Tuesday—and three one-hour shows, including *Star Trek: Voyager* and two half-hour programs.

Network executives say that they will launch a two-hour afternoon kids block in fall 1997. In preparation for that launch, the network will begin testing and developing new animated product on Sunday mornings as early fall 1995, Paramount Television Group Chairman Kerry McCluggage says.

The network, already sold out for the first season, also will air some weekend movies. Movies are a form of relatively low-cost but lucrative programming to help fund prime time development, the executives say.

The network's goal is to expand to 10 hours of prime time programming and break into the late-night programming business, but the timetable for rolling out that programming remains fluid. "We are in this for the long haul, and there is no rush," Salhany told **BROADCASTING & CABLE** last week.

The move reunites Salhany with Paramount, where she ran the company's domestic syndication division for six years before jumping to Fox in 1991 as head of the Twentieth Television Group. She stepped down in July after network setbacks and differences over management style with Fox Inc. Chairman Rupert Murdoch. The United/Paramount Network is a joint venture between Paramount and



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**United/Paramount Network
President Lucie Salhany**

BHC Communications, a group owner of eight television stations, including WWOR-TV New York and KCOP-TV Los Angeles.

According to McCluggage, the network's corporate structure is similar to that of the USA Network. Salhany will report to a four-person operating committee headed jointly by McCluggage and Evan Thompson, president of the BHC television group. One additional representative from each company is on the committee.

Salhany's decision to join the network represents a sort of closure for an idea formed during her earlier run at Paramount, when discussions were held with Thompson and BHC about forming a fifth network, she says. But

for numerous reasons the network didn't gel back then.

Before last week's announcement, there were reports that Salhany was demanding an ownership interest in the new network. She declined to discuss any of the terms relating to her contract.

Paramount parent Viacom Inc. reportedly has considered the feasibility of trying to buy one of the major broadcast networks. Salhany says that any concerns she had about the company's commitment to the new network were put to rest by Thompson and McCluggage. "I have no questions about Viacom's support for this network," she says.

So far, United/Paramount has signed 41 primary broadcast affiliates covering 52% of the country, including 14 of the top 20 markets. Major holes include Boston, Detroit, Atlanta, St. Louis and Seattle.

By comparison, the WB Network, also launching in January, claims roughly 74% coverage, but includes the national coverage of superstation WGN-TV Chicago in that figure. The United/Paramount network is not distributing its programming over the national feed of WWOR, according to Thompson.

WB has not released a list of affiliate stations in almost 10 months, but sources say the lineup includes about 25 over-the-air outlets, including the four Gaylord stations. Gaylord and WB are now in litigation over whether they made a deal or not: Gaylord says no and WB says yes. Meanwhile, Gaylord made a deal to affiliate with CBS in Seattle and Dallas (see story, page 14).

Industry observers have been critical of both networks' ability to build a strong enough broadcast station lineup to launch a fifth network. Salhany would say only that a number of key affiliation moves are in the works and will be announced shortly.

Meanwhile, casting problems with *Voyager* will not delay the launch of the show or the network, McCluggage says. Actress Genevieve Bujold pulled out last week, citing unexpected rigors of the production schedule. She has been replaced by Kate Mulgrew. ■

Still in there pitching

Despite the abrupt end last week to the 1994 baseball season, The Baseball Network, the joint venture among, ABC, NBC and major league baseball to produce and distribute network baseball games, is out selling packages for next season. Several sponsors are already committed through multiyear packages they agreed to this season, including GM, Toyota, Texaco, MCI, Gatorade, Gillett and Avis. This year the network booked \$130 million in sales up to the start of the strike, and expected to book \$165 million in all. The strike forced advertisers to put about \$100 million of that revenue elsewhere. TBN has an initial six-year run, with an out clause for all parties after two years if TBN doesn't generate \$330 million in sales. But sources said it was possible the partners would not count this season since TBN was on track to meet the revenue target.

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