

Numbers game proving 10/11 'strong'

By Kent Warneke

When talking in terms of athletics, when one has a proven, winning combination, one does not make any unnecessary changes.

When talking in terms of television stations, the same thing applies and KOLN-TV/KGIN-TV has had that winning combination for the past 10 years.

Based on national ratings, during the past 10 years KOLN-TV/KGIN-TV (Channels 10/11) has had their 10 p.m. news show rated first or second nationally every year in terms of local share of TV audience.

10/11 Strong, as their image campaign presents them, is owned by Fetzer Broadcasting Company, which consists of four stations, one in Kalamazoo, Mich., and the others being KOLN based in Lincoln, KGIN in Grand Island and KMEG in Sioux City, Ia. John E. Fetzer is owner of Fetzer Broadcasting Co., and also of the pro football Detroit Lions, and purchased 10/11 Strong soon after its birth on February 18, 1953.

10/11 Strong is a CBS-affiliated, commercial television station that employs 118 people.

Paul Jensen, station manager of 10/11 Strong said he feels that there are definite reasons behind their station's long-standing success.

Matter of habit

"The first reason I think is due to habit and a low rate of turnover at our station. When people get used to watching certain broadcasters, it's hard for them to switch and we've had the same broadcasters for a long time," Jensen said, "But, of course,

you need people that are acceptable to the viewers in the beginning to form these habits and we feel that we certainly have them."

"Another part of our success is that while other news stations have been changing their format as time passes, we have stuck with our original format because we feel we've got a winner. We still have our weather first, then local and national news and follow up with sports and we're going to stay that way because it's been successful in the past and it still is," Jensen said.

However, staying with the original format doesn't mean that changes have not taken place at 10/11 Strong.

"We've done a lot of things to upgrade our coverage and content in our station," Jensen said, "In fact we were second in the state of Nebraska to use the new electronic news gathering equipment, or what everybody knows as mini-cams."

"We usually receive an average around 50 to 60 percent of the audience in our viewing area, which is a 79-county area in northern Kansas and Nebraska and includes Lincoln, Kearney, Hastings, Grand Island, North Platte and Columbus, and we're not satisfied unless we receive approximately that percentage, while most other stations around us are satisfied with say 35 percent," Jensen said.

"Every news station in the country has their critics and we've got ours and they ask why we haven't gone to more of the in-depth series-type stories, but we feel that we have such a large area to cover that we can't afford to do a piece that would take say two minutes of air time that only the Lincoln community would be interested in, we've got to remember that 80 percent of our audience is outside of Lancaster county."

Selling time

According to Jensen, selling time is basically commercials and advertisements, whether on a national-network basis or through our local sales department. When you become an affiliate of one of the three major networks part of the affiliation is the agreement on the rate of money received for commercials," he said.

"Of all the money received from these commercials by the network, two-thirds of that goes for production of the commercials and furnishing the finished product to the affiliate," Jensen said, "The other one-third of the revenue is divided up by the affiliates across the country."

"The top rates for us are between 7 and 10 p.m. or the prime-time viewing, and right now our rate is \$825 an hour. For other viewing time, the rate is cut in half and then we still only receive one-third of the total," Jensen said.

The hourly rates agreed upon by the affiliates varies from area to area, as New York City has a higher hourly rate than Grand Island or Lincoln as they would have more viewers watching the commercials and there are also some exceptions where no revenue is received at all by the affiliates as in the case of pro football.

"When the bidding for broadcasting rights got to be so atrocious, it came down to making a bid and not expecting to make a profit or not making a bid at all," Jensen said, "We (the affiliates) ultimately, almost unanimously agreed on televising football even without the revenue."

"Advertising has changed tremendously within the past years," Jensen said, "You don't find any more advertisers solely sponsoring shows, now it's more that three or four advertisers buy participation spots in a show."

Affiliation with a major network is a key to success for a television station, something that is next to impossible to get at this point of time.

"It isn't easy to reach an affiliation agreement with a network, most of the markets have been defined by the FCC (Federal Communications Commission)," Jensen said, "And although most of the channels operably are filled today and few new agreements reached, there still can be a lot of moving and switching around by the affiliate and the network."

Abundance of programs

"The obvious main advantage when you're an affiliate is that you have an abundance of programs available to you. If you don't have an affiliation, then you are forced to purchase programming or develop your own local programs and in most all cases, no local station is going to have the budget available for that, where a

national network does," Jensen said.

"We're not bound in any way to televise a set amount of network programming, but there's an unwritten rule in our industry that you should show a reasonable amount of the network's programming, and besides you should want to because you have the exclusive rights to that programming," Jensen said.

For special events, such as national elections, an affiliation with a network is the only way to be able to televise these events, said Jensen.

"We're more than happy with our agreement with CBS," Jensen said, "Of course we wish that they could be ranked higher in the ratings this year, but we're not going to be just fair-weather friends. CBS is a proven product, we have confidence in them and they had been ranked Number 1 for an unprecedented 18 years in the recent past."

Deb Kneip McDermott, director of public relations-promotions at 10/11 Strong said that a day of work for a reporter is not a routine job.

"We get all kinds of press releases from all over and then our assignment editor assigns a story to all of the reporters and they follow that up unless something else comes up more important—which usually happens," McDermott said.

Gimmick

"With the advent of mini-cams the news gathering job has taken much less time than when film was used," McDermott said. "However, part of the image of the mini-cam is just a gimmick. A lot of stations are claiming live mini-cam reports when, although they do have the capacity to do it live, most reports are just filmed live and then shown during the regular news shows."

10/11 Strong, besides carrying large amounts of network shows carries a sizeable amount of locally-produced shows.

The Morning Show, a news, music and variety type show is televised from 7 to 8 a.m. every morning with *Romper Room*, a pre-school orientated show, broadcast 9 to 9:30 a.m.

A five-minute news magazine is broadcast at 10:55 weekdays and then there is the noon report which concentrates on farm market reports, news and weather. *The Kalamity Kate* show is on 3:30 during the afternoons and the 6 and 10 news reports rounds up the daily local programming.

Thursdays at 6:30 p.m. a magazine type show is televised with varying topics. *The Bob Devaney Prediction Show*, *The Joe Cipriano Show* or *The Tom Osborne Show* are shown at 10:30 on Sunday nights during the appropriate season. *For Children Only* seen on Sunday mornings from 7:30 to 9:30 concludes 10/11 Strong's local programming.

"Leta Powel Drake, who is Kalamity Kate and has been with the station since January of 1961 has recently been named Director of Talent Development and Local Children Programs," McDermott said.

"Leta works very hard to get the best programming for children, shows that can be educational," McDermott said, "Last year Leta Produced *Quid Kids* and this year will be featuring a show called *Double Trouble*."

"She has put in extensive work with muscular dystrophy and driven all over the state on her own time and money to help raise funds," McDermott said. "She feels that children are very important and tries to get programming that is educational for them."

News most important

However the name of the game for any television station is their news programming and it's no different for 10/11 Strong.

"Traditionally our most important piece of programming is our news and we do more of it and devote more time to it than any other kind," station manager Jensen said.

"There is a certain amount of prestige when you are the leader in the news rating, for as the news goes, so goes the programming," Jensen said.

"10/11 Strong is a business, just like Gateway or any other store, and our chore is to get people to turn to our channels," Jensen said. "The challenge is to find the programming that works so well so that advertising rates are sufficient to pay the bills and yet make a profit and we feel that we've done a good job with that."

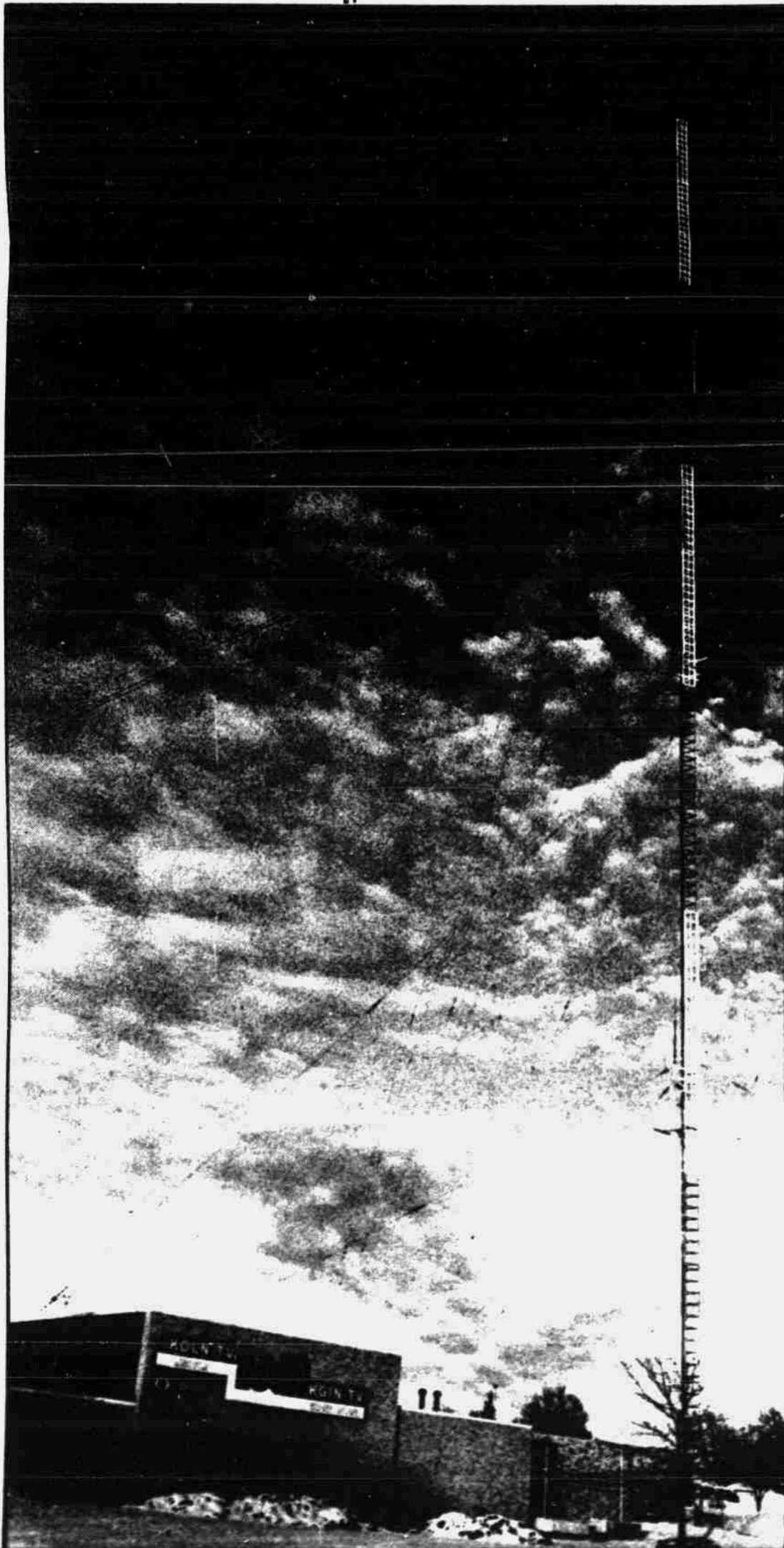


Photo by Bob Pearson