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WBQC cable deal only a ceasefire



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By **John Kiesewetter**
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“The War” between low-power UPN station WBQC-TV and Time Warner Cable may be over, but not the fight.

Friday's announcement that Time Warner here will carry 4 1/2-hours of WBQC-TV's lineup on basic cable Channel 20, starting Sept. 3, will not end the station's campaign aimed at the area's largest cable system.

“I didn't get the best deal in the world, but we've got our foot in the door,” says Elliott Block, the WBQC-TV owner and general manager. He had labeled his 10-year battle with Time Warner as “The War” on the station's Internet site, www.WBQC.com.*

“For 10 years we didn't have any visibility on Time Warner Cable. Now we have it, and people will see it, and hopefully want more.”

The one-year renewable agreement allows Time Warner subscribers to see *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, which moves from WB to UPN on Oct. 2; the *Star Trek* prequel called *Enterprise* premiering Sept. 26; and UPN's top-rated *WWF Smackdown!* wrestling show. WBQC-TV is giving the programming free to the cable company, which has shifted infomercials to other channels to accommodate WBQC-TV.

Time Warner will air WBQC-TV from 6-11 p.m., except for the station's repeat of Channel 9's news at 7 p.m. It will not pick up the *Ricki Lake* talk show; *The X-Files* reruns; Billy Ray Cyrus' *Doc* and other PAX TV shows; and Saturday afternoon SEC football and Big 10 basketball games.



Sarah Michelle Gellar

Promotions for those shows will appear during the 4 1/2-hour Time Warner window.

“If you're an *X-Files* fan, you're going to say, “Why isn't that show on (Time Warner), too?” Mr. Block says.

He says he received copies of almost 1,000 e-mails sent to Time Warner requesting UPN after newspaper stories last spring about *Buffy* and *Roswell* moving to UPN, and the *Enterprise* premiere.

“Channel 25 viewers and *Enquirer* readers told us what they wanted to watch,” Mr. Block says.

Before the *Buffy* announcement, Cincinnati Time Warner Cable President Virgil Reed had said he only wanted UPN's two-hour prime-time lineup, because he didn't have a full-time basic channel for WBQC-TV. The break-through came July 12, when Mr. Block dropped his long-standing demand for 24-hour carriage.

"After that change, in a very short time, we were able to reach an agreement," Mr. Reed says. He calls the deal "good for (Channel 25) viewers and good for our customers."

Although the Federal Communications Commission doesn't require cable systems to offer low-power stations, WBQC-TV has appeared for years on Northern Kentucky's Insight, Delhi Township's Adelpia and Lebanon's municipal system. (UPN has 26 low-power affiliates carried by cable systems.) Mr. Block says Adelpia systems in Clermont, Butler and Warren counties could soon add his station, which is not available over-the-air in most of those communities.

"We're anxious to see what happens when people who have never seen us, or never heard of us, finally can get us," Mr. Block says.

The Labor Day debut means Time Warner subscribers will see the first fall TV show that night. UPN's premieres *One on One*, a sitcom starring Flex Alexander (*Girlfriends*) as a sportscaster with a 14-year-old daughter (Kyla Pratt from *Love and Basketball*, *Dr. Dolittle*), two weeks before the season starts.

What Time Warner viewers won't see this fall on WBQC-TV is *The X-Files* (at 5 p.m. Saturday and 11 p.m. Sundays) and PAX TV's new *Ponderosa* series about young Ben Cartwright (Daniel Hugh Kelly) and his sons (4 p.m. Sundays starting Sept. 9).

Also excluded are the *Steve Harvey Show*, *Diagnosis Murder*, *Touched by an Angel*, *Soul Train*, *Bonanza* and *Mysterious Ways*.

Mr. Block says he's counting on Time Warner customers who want those shows to keep the cards and letters (and e-mails) coming.

"If they like what they see of our other programs, we hope they'll ask for more," he says. "It worked once. Why won't it work again?"