

# Angling for Viewers in Raleigh

## Stations offer top tech tricks out of N.C.'s Research Triangle



By Michael Malone

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(From left) Greg Fishel, Jeff Gravley, Debra Morgan, David Crabtree, Gerald Owens, Jackie Hyland and Mike Maze deliver top-rated news for locally owned WRAL.

CONVENTIONAL WISDOM says family-owned TV station groups are getting squeezed as the big get bigger. Yet that doesn't quite explain the rich resources

WRAL deploys to bring the news to viewers in Raleigh-Durham, N.C. It and sister WRAZ have separate general managers in an era when most owners would make do with one. WRAL has a documentary unit (see sidebar), and its technological innovation has brought the station numerous awards. The most recent tech experiment involved members of the station's morning crew wearing Google Glass to give viewers the perspective of the anchor, director and other staffers.

The investment pays dividends for the Capitol Broadcasting station. "We do a lot for the community, and the community rewards us with their viewership," says Steve Hammel, WRAL VP and GM.

The hottest competition in DMA No. 24 comes from ABC-owned WTVD, which is no slouch in the technology department either. The station was a pioneer with the use of iPhones and cellular bonded technology in the field and has affixed a 360-degree Immersive camera to the top of the ABC11 First Alert Stormchaser vehicle, giving the viewer an all-angles close-up of foul weather. "It's one of those things that distinguish our coverage," says Caroline Welch, WTVD president/GM. "It makes such a difference when you're in big weather

conditions—it's a really, really effective way to report."

The station also offers the Watch ABC mobile app to users; ABC inked a deal with Dish Network in March to expand distribution.

The area, known as the Research Triangle, is home to three major universities: Duke, U. of North Carolina and N.C. State. Stations need to be tech-savvy to keep up with the well-educated population in the DMA, which includes Fayetteville. To best connect on digital platforms, WNCN rebranded a year ago, dropping NBC 17 for its call letters. "NBC and 17 were both irrelevant to our local content mission," says Robby Thomas, director of marketing. "We went back to our roots."

With Worldnow as its Web provider, WNCN quadrupled page views year over year. The staff got a parking lot picnic on April 1—North Carolina barbecue was served—to celebrate the record traffic.

Capitol's duopoly is affiliated with CBS and Fox. Sinclair also has a pair of stations in CW-MyNetwork-TV duo WLFL-WRDC. Media General owns WNCN and Univision owns WUVC and WTNC. WUVC airs 6 and 11 p.m. news, and the stations host the music festival UniRumba. Luis Fernandez-Rocha, Univision

senior VP and regional director, says such events and scholarship program Nuestra Juventud help "fulfill our responsibility of keeping our community informed and empowered."

### Covering a Nasty Mix

Time Warner Cable is the primary subscription TV operator. Its former News 14 channels across N.C. are dedicated to weather, politics and breaking news. TWC is rebranding its channels as Time Warner Cable News and is slotting them on channel 200 around the U.S.

TWC News has 85 people in Raleigh-Durham, the most of its North Carolina bases. It was all over the snowstorms that hit Raleigh-Durham last winter. "It's a low-probability, high-impact event for people in North Carolina," says Rick Willis, news director.

One nasty mix of snow and ice Feb. 12 left many drivers stranded. "People who were stuck in their cars did not know what to do," Hammel says. In response, WRAL simulcasted its news on local radio but still popped a 22.1 rating/30 share at 5 p.m.

Co-located WRAZ is pushing initiatives related to combating human trafficking and bullying, and is close to rolling out what VP/GM Tommy Schenck calls "a real-time streaming app" called Fox and Me.

WLFL gets a 10 p.m. daily newscast from WTVD and is an entertainment option. *The Big Bang Theory* is "a mega-hit" in access, says John Hummel, WLFL general manager; *Arsenio Hall* is also strong. "It's not gang-busters, but I'm happy with its performance," he says.

WNCN launched 11 a.m. news in January and kicked off a campaign featuring the word "Smarter"—referring to the Research Triangle's savvy populace and the station's vow to be sharper in its coverage.

WTVD will celebrate its 60th anniversary in September. It has hired Claire Campbell, former Yahoo senior news editor, as director of digital strategy and audience development. Page views are through the roof, says Welch, reaching 16.4 million in March. The station also expanded its weekend 11 p.m. news to an hour and opened up a streetside studio in Fayetteville to go with similar facilities in Raleigh and Durham.

But WRAL continues to dominate the ratings. It won the total-day household crown in the February sweeps and took the news races too, including late news with a 7.9 household rating/15 share, ahead of WTVD's 5.5/10. WNCN won primetime with a big assist from NBC's coverage of the Winter Olympics.

The DMA's high percentage of PhD-wielding viewers brings out the best in the stations. "It's such a dynamic region," says Welch, who arrived after a long run in Philadelphia. "Every day you go for your best, because that's just how this region is." ■

Next: South Bend, Ind.

## WHAT'S WORKING IN



RALEIGH-DURHAM

## IS THERE A DOC UNIT IN THE HOUSE?

Capitol Broadcasting's WRAL has one of the very few TV station documentary units in the nation. On April 2 the station aired the 30-minute *Bridge in Troubled Water*, about a controversial bridge replacement project. The docu earned a 6.9 rating/14 share from 7-7:30 p.m.—comparable to

what *Survivor* did at 8.

*Bridge* is one of seven or eight specials WRAL will produce this year. The docu unit has a full-time producer and photographer who pull in talent to contribute. Past specials have focused on child poverty and the intersection of college sports and money.

They typically run at 7 p.m. and are No. 1 or 2 in the time period, says Steve Hammel, VP and GM.

Hammel is not complaining about life with a small broadcaster. "We can make decisions quickly," he says. "We don't need approval from 1,000 miles away." —MM



Bill Leslie reports for WRAL's *Bridge in Troubled Water*.