

Written Statement of Michael Ward
General Manager, WNCN-TV, Goldsboro, NC
Wednesday, October 22, 2003

Good evening Commissioners, ladies and gentlemen. I am Michael Ward, President and General Manager of WNCN-TV the NBC owned and operated television station serving Raleigh, Durham, Fayetteville, Goldsboro and the surrounding metropolitan area.

I'm pleased to be here tonight speaking about broadcasters service to local communities in North Carolina. I'm pleased because NBC and its owned stations consider service to the local community to be the foundation, the corner stone of our businesses in the many communities across the United States served by our fourteen (14) English language full-power television stations and our fifteen (15) Spanish-language television stations.

I have been involved in broadcast television for the last quarter-century, in posts ranging from photographer to news director to general manager. I have worked at stations owned by small station groups and by large station groups, network groups and non-network groups. For the last several years, as general manager of WNCN, I have served as NBC's key decision-maker for the Raleigh-Durham market.

All of that experience has taught me the three "L's" that are essential to a successful TV station: **local involvement, local relevance, and local acceptance**. In a world where cable boasts hundreds of national channels, a television station that does not live by the three "L's" will die, regardless of who owns that station.

The recent ownership history of WNCN is an instructive example. WNCN used to be owned by Beasley Broadcasting Group. Beasley is a respected Southern broadcaster. Today, it owns dozens of radio stations in the Carolinas, Georgia and Florida. Yet, for several years under Beasley's ownership, WNCN was a home shopping station with minimal local programming, no community outreach, and – not surprisingly – a minimal local audience. This low-cost programming strategy did not work, and eventually Beasley sold the station to Outlet Broadcasting, which almost immediately sold the station to NBC in 1996.

Before NBC ownership there was had no reliable, full-fledged NBC affiliate in the market. That meant that the local community had no consistent access to the NBC network's award-winning public affairs, news and entertainment programming. In fact, the station's commitment to local service was limited to

airing a small number of public service announcements and operating a booth at the State Fair every October.

What has happened since WNCN joined the NBC family?

1. During the past six years, our weekly local news output has increased nearly 60% – from a mere 17 hours to 27 hours. Our news coverage has been premised on countless local stories. Also, WNCN has produces over 30 public service announcements a year at no charge to support organizations like Big Brother, Big Sister, Make a Wish and Easter Seals. Some recent community-oriented programming includes:
 - a weekly public affairs program entitled “At Issue”;
 - the inclusion of local talent and personalities in our local news and other programs – for example, Clay Aikens exclusive interviews on our newscasts during his rise to national stardom;
 - numerous half-hour programs for Easter Seals of North Carolina;
 - an annual hour-long NAACP program titled “The NAACP Today”;
 - an annual Easter Morning Service live from downtown Raleigh in conjunction with downtown churches;
 - countless news specials such as the sixteen (16) hour-long coverage of Hurricane Isabel in Sept.; coverage of the December 2002 Ice Storm that paralyzed our community; Sept. 11th live memorial services from both Durham and Raleigh and real time closed captioning of all our special broadcasts to serve our hearing impaired community;
 - And, most recently, preemptions of Prime Time and other network programming for local mayoral debates.
2. The residents of Raleigh-Durham now have consistent access to news, public affairs and entertainment programming from the nation’s most successful top-4 network.
3. WNCN is actively involved in community outreach, including:
 - our Feb. 2003 two-day health and fitness fair at the Raleigh Convention Center which drew 22,000 people and delivered over 7800 free health screens and tests to young and old;

- our annual Tree of Lights tree lighting celebration that serves local charitable organizations and provides community holiday programming over the thanksgiving weekend;
- quarterly blood drives for the local Red Cross;
- the Raise a Racquet fund drive for Breast Cancer research;
- the Duke Triathlon supporting the Duke Cancer research;
- the March of Dimes “Triangle Walk America” in April;
- the “Bill Gaines Make-A-Wish Charity Golf Tournament” in October raising more than \$30,000 to give local children a chance at a dream of a life time;
- hundreds of appearances annually by our on-air personalities to help local groups raise funds and honor local people who serve their communities; and
- the active participation of our employees on numerous boards and steering committees of organizations like The United Way, The Raleigh Chamber of Commerce, Alliance of AIDS Services, the American Cancer Society, Triangle Association of Black Journalists, March of Dimes, NAACP branches, Children’s Literacy Board and many churches and religious organizations.

In six short years, WNCN has been transformed from a barely- watched home-shopping outlet to a strong local competitor, a key source of news, public affairs and entertainment programming, and a solid contributor to the social, political and religious life of the local community.

How and why did this happen?

Recall the three L’s I mentioned earlier: local involvement, local relevance and local acceptance. These are the fundamental pillars to local success, and NBC is committed to them. That is why when NBC acquired WNCN, it did not ignore or de-emphasize the three L’s – that frankly would have been financial suicide – but instead reinvigorated them. That is why NBC looks to me and my colleagues at the station to address the critical daily issues facing the station and our community, our friends and our neighbors. It is also why NBC continues to provide substantial financial and other resources to let me do my job.

The result is the best of both worlds: a station that combines NBC’s extensive resources and expertise with an unwavering commitment to remain highly responsive and committed to local concerns.

The history of WNCN shows why the identity or characteristics of the owner of a station do not automatically translate into quality local service. It also shows that an owner's financial resources and demonstrated commitment to localism can be far more important than where its corporate headquarters are located. And it shows that the current system works – that stations do serve their communities without legally problematic government intrusion into what programming stations air, and those that may be unable to afford the not insubstantial costs of doing more local programming often get purchased by parties – like NBC -- who want to increase a station's local focus.

My point is this: local involvement, local relevance and local acceptance are simply good business. When NBC invests the tens or hundreds of millions of dollars necessary to acquire and operate a television station, it will not jeopardize that investment by airing programming that offends a substantial number of viewers, or that does not appeal to the local community. Indeed, because it wants to expand its local audience, NBC is able and willing to spend even more in order to produce the truly locally oriented programming and to fund the community activities that are the hallmark of a successful television station.

Local involvement, local relevance and local acceptance are the three reasons NBC 17 improved its viewership and bottom line in just six years. The three L's will continue to guide our strategies and performance as we move forward. The Commission needs look no farther than WNCN to confirm that successful broadcasters actively pursue local service to the communities in which they operate.