

'Nonexistent' problem keeps frustrating FCC

United Press International
WASHINGTON — Judging from the mail — more than 11 million pieces so far — the most controversial issue to ever hit the Federal Communications Commission is one that never existed.

With administrative costs mounting, the FCC is beginning yet another effort to persuade the public that it is not considering a ban on religious broadcasting.

The issue apparently is perpetuated by some person or group that sends petitions mostly to rural, evangelical churches for forwarding to the commission, said FCC officials and spokesmen for major church groups.

It all began in 1974 when two California men, Jeremy Lansman and Lorenzo Milam, filed a petition urging the FCC to restrict use by religious organizations of FM frequencies reserved for educational use.

Lansman and Milam questioned whether the "Back to the Bible" programs of many churches qualified for reserved educational channels.

By the time the commission acted eight months later, it had received 750,000 pieces of mail — the most ever on a single issue, and much of it from persons who appeared to believe the proposal would ban all religious broadcasting.

At the same time, the name of atheist Madalyn Murray O'Hair, who won the Supreme Court decision prohibiting prayer in public schools, erroneously became attached to the issue.

The FCC rejected the petition on First Amendment grounds, but in the seven years since then, the outpouring of mail has not ceased. Most of it is form letters urging the commission to ensure that religious programming continues.

The letters claim O'Hair has been granted a hearing in Washington; that her petition "would stop the reading of the Gospel on the airwaves of America"; that she filed a petition with 27,000 signatures to back her stand; and that if she is successful, "all Sunday worship services being broadcast either on radio or TV" will stop.

"It's all totally, factually, a lie," said FCC public affairs director William Russell.

Russell said his office has contacted 50 evangelical groups in the past couple of weeks as well as religious groups in Washington to explain the situation. Another FCC official is contacting each congressional office to offer background.

In a previous communication effort in 1980, the FCC

contacted the major religious denominations and asked them to inform their congregations. That stemmed the flow somewhat, but came nowhere near stopping it.

Russell said none of the forms contains a name or return address.

"Since all the petitions have the same format, there must be one person involved with it," he said. "We can't find out who is making up the form and mailing it on."

The commission asked the U.S. Postal Service to look into the matter, but the agency responded that it has no jurisdiction unless there is a request for money involved.

The National Religious Broadcasters Association, concerned the petitions may be counterproductive, also wants to lay the issue to rest, as do most major religious denominations.

Dr. Ben Armstrong, the group's executive director, said: "It seems to be someone trying to embarrass the FCC or religious broadcasting, and frankly I don't know which it is. Here it is seven years later and it's still being revived."

"When you find the identical thing and no source or no name, you feel there's somebody out there trying to do a number on somebody."

'Bed and breakfast' offers new alternative to hotels

United Press International
EVANSTON, Ill. — The European tradition of "Bed and Breakfast" — staying in private homes instead of hotels, already established in some parts of the United States, now has spread to Chicago's posh North Shore.

Three suburban women, who have entered the business, said one thing overlooked about the practice is that it can be as good for the host or hostess as the guests.

The bed and breakfast idea came to Jeannine James, 45, and her husband while they were visiting their daughter at the University of Virginia.

"We were not able to get into an inn (because) they were filled for parents' weekend," James said. "So she arranged for us to stay at this Bed and Breakfast."

And I thought it was just remarkable." Personal touches make the difference.

Bed and Breakfast hosts can add such endearing gestures as putting out a bottle of wine, fresh flowers and candy for their guests, plugging in fresh coffee in the morning, providing reading material, offering the use of their library, and building a fire on a cold day.

James, Janet Remen, 51, and Tommy Solberg, 50, began their project last fall.

They now have 25 hosts — 75 percent along the North Shore and 25 percent in Chicago. Their first guests from abroad are expected this spring from New Zealand.

Hosts and hostesses generally are outgoing, adventurous and

well-traveled. Some are multilingual. They are of all ages — some live alone, some have children.

However, some are lonely and enjoy the company.

Solberg said: "There are some that may live alone. They do have extra rooms and they

find it's a nice way to have company and still make a little money. The added income is sometimes a nice thing to have."

Money does not seem to be the key factor for North Shore hosts, however. Some are embarrassed to accept money, so Bed and Breakfast can donate the fee to their favorite charity.

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Jail blaze kills seven prisoners

United Press International
JERSEY CITY, N.J. — A fire on the eighth floor of the overcrowded Hudson County jail killed seven prisoners early Wednesday, authorities say.

A police department spokesman said the blaze was confined to the eighth floor of the prison and was controlled within an hour.

County spokesman Cas Rakowski identified the seven dead men as inmates of the jail. Their names were not immediately released.

More than 70 other prisoners imprisoned on the eighth floor were moved to makeshift quarters in a third-floor gymnasium, Rakowski said.

The blaze was discovered by a corrections officer stationed on the eighth floor of the nine-floor jail, near the center of the city, he said.

The prison, built in 1926 for 300 prisoners, held about 500 on eight floors at the time of the blaze, Rakowski said. The ninth floor is used for maintenance equipment storage.

Authorities said they were investigating the cause of the fire.

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