

Channel airs on trial basis

ACTS debuts on McCaw

By SUE A. KRENEK
Reporter

McCaw Cablevision is running a monthlong broadcast preview of a Christian television network that may be added to the company's permanent lineup.

Joe DiBacco, McCaw vice president, says ACTS, the American Christian Television System, began airing on cable Channel 5 Monday at 8 a.m., and will continue until April 1 at 8 a.m.

DiBacco says although the network has been operated by the Southern Baptist Convention since it was founded in 1985, it broadcasts programs produced by several mainline denominations.

The company decided to give the network an on-air tryout after a group of about 25 area pastors and church members began writing letters in support of the channel, he says.

DiBacco says McCaw's decision on whether to add ACTS to its permanent lineup depends on the results of surveys conducted by McCaw and by Joe Buser Advertising Co., a consultant to the local ACTS support group. He says the decision probably will not be made until several weeks after the trial run ends.

Dr. Richard Maples, spokesman for the local ACTS support group, says he is optimistic about the network's chances of becoming a permanent offering on the McCaw system.

Although ACTS joins two other Christian-oriented networks currently run by McCaw, Maples, who also is pastor of First Baptist Church of Bryan, says the network is significantly different than the other channels.

He says ACTS, unlike the Christian Broadcast Network or the Trinity Broadcast Network, offers up to seven hours per week for broadcasting locally-developed programming to meet community needs.

"Most local churches cannot afford airtime to broadcast their speakers, their revivals and their special programs," Maples says. "ACTS makes free airtime available."

If the network is added to McCaw's lineup, he says, an advisory

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— Dr. Richard Maples, pastor of First Baptist Church of Bryan.

board made up of pastors of local churches will allocate airtime to local programs.

"We're not thinking about (broadcasting) church services," he says. "We're talking about teen-age talk shows, discussions with professors at the University, etc."

In addition to local programming, the network broadcasts programs that have a wider theological focus than those of either CBN or Trinity, Maples says.

The programming difference will be that ACTS represents main-

stream Christianity in the United States," he says. "The driving force behind the network is the Southern Baptist Convention, but they try to be, to the largest extent possible, non-denominational in all programming and accept programs from other Protestant sects and from Roman Catholics."

DiBacco says the network also favors original programming such as the children's show "Sunshine Factory" over the previously-run commercial television used extensively by CBN.

Maples, however, says that even with such a high degree of original programming, only 25 percent of ACTS programs are directly religious. He says the other 75 percent reflect a Christian perspective while providing wholesome family entertainment.

Another difference between ACTS and most other Christian networks is that ACTS does not solicit funds for such projects as missionary work from viewers, Maples says. He says the channel, unlike CBN, is a non-profit channel that needs money only for its operating costs.

"We do not ask for money at all," he says. "The cost of the channel is funded by Baptist churches across the nation... in communities where an ACTS channel is located."

DiBacco says solicitation of funds could play a role in McCaw's final decision on the channel since a negative perception of on-air solicitation exists. The company would have to delete another channel to make room for ACTS should it decide to broadcast the network permanently.

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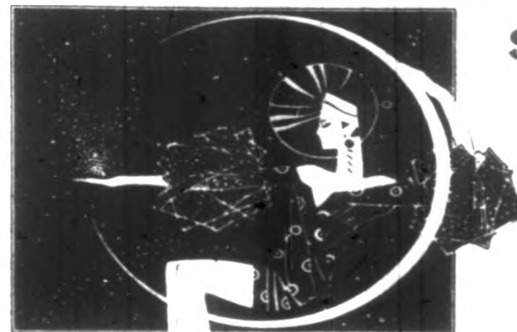
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