

Satellite network sends programs to auto industry

DALLAS (AP) — All business. That's how Carl Westcott came to be one of the latest success stories in the television industry.

The 48-year-old Westcott, founder and chairman of Dallas-based Westcott Communications, has jumped to the forefront of the business television industry with his Automotive Satellite Television Network.

ASTN, billed as the largest private satellite network in the world, delivers about 30 hours of auto industry news and training programs to about 3,600 subscribing automobile dealerships across the United States and Canada.

The fledgling television network has been a rapid success, with about 18 percent of the nation's car dealerships currently forking over about \$385 a month to receive ASTN programming. Westcott's goal is to have his programming aired to 50 percent of the industry.

"It does take people by surprise," Westcott said of his creation's success. "They've been shocked."

Industry experts say private television networks for business are a tremendous growth industry and that the market could generate billions of dollars in business within 10 years, Westcott said.

Westcott already is looking ahead. He just moved his company into a new \$6 million headquarters with three studios and production facilities

where more than 600 thirty-minute programs will be created and produced this year.

His Westcott Communications plans to create private television programming for the banking, hotel and travel industries. Westcott said he also has contacted the Internal Revenue Service with a proposal to create training programming for its employees.

Westcott formed his private television network after buying an NBC affiliate in Tyler and discovering at a network meeting in New York how inexpensive it was to buy satellite time.

He realized that a private television network might be the perfect vehicle to provide top-quality training materials for automobile dealerships he owned. He had found that existing films and other materials were not effectively training his employees.

"We didn't invent anything," Westcott said. "But we just rolled it over into what it is now. We realize that people grow up watching 30 to 40 hours of television a week. And most people receive more information daily from television than any other source."

The private network also allows businessmen to get important industry news as soon as possible, instead of having to wait on newsletters that might not arrive until 10 days or more after something occurs.

New book details eyewitness views of 1900 hurricane

GALVESTON (AP) — John Edward Weems can't visit Galveston without thinking of the great 1900 storm which claimed the lives of an estimated 6,000 people, making it the nation's most deadly natural disaster.

"I still look for signs of the hurricane," Weems said. "A lot are no longer around."

Weems, of Waco, heard much about the storm while growing up because his Aunt Gale was born on Sept. 8, 1900, the day the storm crashed ashore.

But not until 1956, while working at Baylor University, did Weems decide the storm was worthy of historical documentation in the form of a book.

"I was looking at the old volumes of the Galveston News in the library, looking through some of the fading pages and came across it," he said. "The few missing issues represented the Galveston storm. In the first edition after the storm, it was full of the Galveston storm. That gave me the idea the Galveston hurricane would be a good subject to handle."

After six months of research and about another six months of writing, Weems' "A Weekend In September" was published, the first of 10 books he has written.

Thirty-one years later, the book — hailed by reviewers as the ulti-

mate example of the terror and violence a hurricane can bring — is being released for the first time in paperback by the Texas A&M University Press. It will debut Thursday, the 88th anniversary of the storm and the heart of the annual hurricane season.

Sadly, Weems believes none of the scores of people he interviewed to tell the story of the storm through eyewitnesses remains alive.

But the terror they experienced, as the wind howled and waves and storm surge toppled buildings with ease, is as vivid as they lived it 88 years ago.

"Most of them wanted to talk," Weems recalled of his 1956 research. "A few of them, very few, didn't. But 56 years after the hurricane, they still remembered the tragedies. The tragedies were still with them but enough time had passed so they could talk about them."

"I got the idea some of them might be paying respect to their dead friends and relatives by talking about them."

Galveston was Texas' largest city at the turn of the century with almost 38,000 people. The storm, first noticed in the high tides of morning, gained strength throughout the day, culminating in the darkness of night. And when the sun rose Sept. 9, nearly one-sixth of the city's residents were dead.

Oil slump may force closing of Remington

HOUSTON (AP) — When the Remington Hotel opened nearly six years ago in oil-booming Houston, it was one of the most expensive hotels ever constructed in the United States.

But the fortunes of the hotel that went up with oil prices also followed their precipitous drop. The 12-story hotel and restaurant is now for sale for a fourth time and is posted for foreclosure on Tuesday, the second time foreclosure proceedings have loomed.

The \$60 million hotel was built by Rosewood Hotels Inc., the Dallas-based hotel development company backed by Caroline Hunt, daughter of late billionaire H.L. Hunt. The per-room construction cost was \$250,000, compared with the industry standard for luxury hotel rooms of between \$60,000 and \$75,000.

The hotel was built on a three-acre site near Houston's exclusive River Oaks and Galleria areas when oil flirted with \$40 a barrel.

Lodging analysts say the hotel needs a \$250 per-night room tab to achieve a comfortable profit, but the viable charge in Houston's hotel market today reflects depressed oil prices of about \$15 per barrel.

Hotel manager Alexander de Toth said Remington room rates range from \$165 to \$225, with corporate rates in the \$110 to \$130 range.

Despite its woes, the Remington earlier this year posted its most prof-

itable four-month period ever, and business is up 4 percent from last year, de Toth said in a recent interview.

The hotel also reports occupancy up 17 percent and room revenues growing by 29 percent in the first four months of 1988.

But four months of better business is hardly enough to offset the hotel's high overhead, which is fueled by fine art work and luxurious displays of fresh flowers.

Nevertheless, the 248-room hotel was posted for foreclosure in July by United Savings Association of Texas, which is owed \$24 million by the Remington.

That foreclosure did not go through, and de Toth predicted Tuesday's foreclosure by United Savings is not likely to occur, either.

A buyer has been found by Dallas-based Southmark Corp., the hotel's current owner, and the closing date is scheduled for October, de Toth said. He would disclose neither buyer nor price.

"They're working with United Savings to get an extension," he said.

But Art Berner, general counsel for United Savings, said he was not aware of a buyer. "We haven't been negotiating with them," he said of Southmark officials.

Southmark has owned the Remington for a year and has been looking for a buyer, said Tom Walker, an executive vice president of Southmark.

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