

Cable in the Classroom' begins 10th season

NEW YORK (AP) — As millions of children head back to school, so do more than 40 cable television networks.

This month marks the 10th year the Cable in the Classroom program, which has quietly wired schools across the country for free or low-cost cable TV service and provided programming for teachers to implement their curriculum.

More than 40 networks participate, most airing educationally oriented shows without commercials in the early dawn hours for teachers to tape and use later. Networks, such as CNN, Discovery and The Weather Channel produce shows specifically for students.

"This is the best use of television," Judith McHale, president of Discovery Communications, Inc., said. "It is an incredibly powerful medium. If used appropriately, it can really enhance a child's experience in the classroom."

The motives are not entirely altruistic. If a network's programmingiques a young consumer's interest, might create a fan for life. Free lookups at schools seem a worthwhile investment.

Three quarters of 800 teachers surveyed last year said they used videos or television programs with their classes, just under the 79 percent who include computers. Two-thirds said they were aware of the ca-

ble service and most of those use it, according to the survey paid for by Cable in the Classroom.

Programming from PBS, Discovery, The Learning Channel and CNN was among the most widely sampled, the teachers said.

"This is the best use of television."

— Judith McHale, president, Discovery Communications, Inc.

"C-SPAN has been popular among some of the teachers I've talked to," Kathleen Lyons, a spokesperson for the National Education Association in Washington, said. "Many are using the series on the American presidents. People like C-SPAN because they view it as non-biased."

The teachers union has worked with the cable industry to develop guidelines.

"Television has been another arrow to put in a teacher's arsenal of teaching tools," Lyons said. "It's not something that should be overused, but it definitely has its place."

Networks this month are showing some of their educational pro-

gramming in prime time so parents can see what is being made available to schools. While occasionally some of what networks call educational seems a stretch — like VH1's rock star soap opera, "Behind the Music" — most of it is solid and informative.

The History Channel, for example, presents a miniseries on "The Great Depression." Outdoor Life Network airs a show on the grizzly bear and A&E showcases a biography of P.T. Barnum.

Over the decade, the networks have learned how to tweak their shows to make them more classroom-friendly. For example, Discovery has cut some programs into shorter segments because students and teachers prefer this format, McHale said.

So far, cable companies have wired an estimated 85,000 schools across the country for TV service, Megan Hookey, managing director of Cable in the Classroom, said.

In addition to the 500 hours of programming cable networks offer to the schools, Cable in the Classroom also offers teacher training in how best to incorporate this video into the curriculum.

"The biggest barrier we have," Hookey said, "is that not enough teachers know that it is available."

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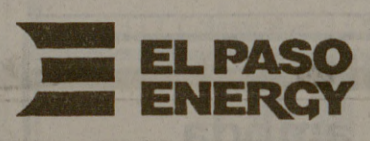
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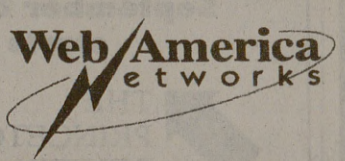
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