

Time Warner Inc. drops ABC affiliates

NEW YORK (AP) — For many fans of ABC's "Good Morning America," it wasn't such a beautiful morning today. A quarrel over transmission rights between Time Warner Inc. and the Walt Disney Co. left seven Disney-owned ABC stations off of local cable systems. The only way for cable customers to see ABC programs would be to rig their TVs to get an ABC station the old-fashioned way, through an antenna.

A total of 3.5 million homes were affected in seven markets, according to Michael Luftman, spokesperson for Time Warner. Cable customers were without ABC programming in New York City; Los Angeles; Houston; Raleigh-Durham, N.C.; Toledo, Ohio; and small parts of Time Warner systems in Fresno, Calif., and Philadelphia.

The move comes in the midst of May sweeps, the period when ratings are used to set local advertising rates. Sweeps began Thursday and last until May 24.

"Disney has taken ABC away from you," read a Time Warner message on the cable channel that normally carries WABC-TV, ABC's affiliate in New York City. "We offered a proposal that would have kept ABC for our customers. Disney said no."

Disney had offered a series of deadline extensions after the original na-

tional transmission deal expired Dec. 31. The most recent deadline, offered in March, expired at 12:01 a.m. today.

Disney said today it had already given Time Warner permission to carry the seven stations through May 24, the last day of the sweeps period, and accused Time Warner of lying to its customers.

In the next weeks, ABC is set to air four celebrity editions of "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire," the conclusion of its miniseries "Arabian Nights," the Daytime Emmys, Saturday's Kentucky Derby and virtually all of its prime-time season finales. The first celebrity "Millionaire" is set for tonight.

"Some deranged individual has deprived all of these people of ABC," said Preston Padden, executive vice president of governmental relations at Disney. "These people are arrogant manipulators."

Padden said Disney had asked the Federal Communications Commission to intervene, saying it is illegal for a cable system to take a broadcaster off the system during the sweeps period.

Disney has asked that Time Warner cable systems not only feature its new channels — Toon Disney and a soap opera channel — but also make the Disney Channel part of the basic service packages.

News in Brief

Terminal cleared for weapon search

LINTHICUM, Md. (AP) — A terminal at Baltimore-Washington International Airport was evacuated this morning after security workers detected what they thought was a weapon in a carry-on bag.

However, no weapon was found, said Maryland Transportation Authority spokesperson Kerry Brandt.

About 1,000 passengers were sent back to the main terminal, where many spent about two hours waiting for information or trying to make other arrangements.

At 7:45 a.m., workers "detected something that could be a weapon" in a piece of carry-on luggage that was being X-rayed, said airport spokesperson John White.

Airport officials evacuated both the terminal and planes awaiting departure, and bomb-sniffing dogs were taken onto the planes. Incoming flights were rerouted to another terminal.

"Once the canine units did their thing, everybody was put back through security and allowed to get on the planes again," White said.

The terminal was reopened at 10:15 a.m.

Arkansas woman faces execution

VARNER, Ark. (AP) — Prison officials prepared for the first execution of a woman in the state in more than 150 years, a nurse who killed her two children and initially blamed her action on depression over the Oklahoma City bombing.

Christina Marie Riggs, who had obtained court permission to drop all appeals, was flown early Sunday from the McPherson Unit, the state women's prison, to the Cummins Unit, where executions take place, Correction Department spokesperson Dina Tyler said.

Riggs was to choose her last meal today in advance of her Tuesday execution, Tyler said.

Jim Harris, a spokesperson for Gov.

Mike Huckabee, said the governor planned to review Riggs' case. On Friday, Amnesty International USA asked Huckabee to grant Riggs executive clemency.

Riggs, 28, was convicted of capital murder for killing 5-year-old Justin and 2-year-old Shelby Alexis in 1997. Justin was injected with potassium chloride and morphine and eventually smothered; his sister was smothered.

Riggs, a former Oklahoma City resident, initially said trauma she experienced working as a nurse after the April 1995 bombing there drove her into a deep depression.

Her mother said in court documents that Riggs worked at the bomb site. The

Veterans Administration hospital where Riggs worked disputed that but said records showed she was paid overtime for helping at another hospital that day.

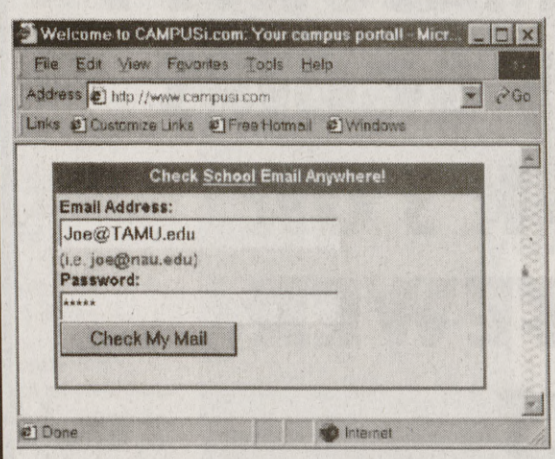
The defense did not bring up the bombing during the trial itself.

Her lawyer argued she suffered from depression and was innocent by reason of mental disease. But prosecutors said Riggs hated her son, left the children by themselves while she competed in karaoke contests and plotted their deaths for two or three weeks.

After she was found guilty, Riggs told jurors during the penalty phase: "I want to die. I want to be with my babies. I want you to give me the death penalty."

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