

# Philadelphia TV Station to Surrender License

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PHILADELPHIA, Aug. 17 — It was just after 9 A.M. on Thursday, July 14, and Neal Zoren was rushing out of his Philadelphia home to drive to the studios of WKBS-TV, where he had been employed for the previous five years as arts commentator.

Just before he was to get into his car, a neighbor yelled at him: "What's happening with your station? Do you still have a job?"

That was when the 32-year-old commentator learned that his station was to be dismantled by the company that owned it, Field Enterprises Inc. of Chicago. The next day the station an-

nounced it would surrender its broadcast license to the Federal Communications Commission at the end of the broadcast day on Aug. 29.

WKBS-TV, Channel 48 in Philadelphia, is the first major television station in the United States to surrender its license to the commission in at least 10 years, said Clay Pendarvis, chief of the F.C.C.'s television branch.

Mr. Zoren, along with the station's 82 other employees, will be out of a job Aug. 30, but he says he is more concerned about the older employees.

"I saw 17-year veteran technicians see union-protected jobs just vanish," he said.

Last summer Field Enterprises Inc. announced it was divesting itself of its five independent UHF television stations in Chicago, San Francisco, Detroit, Boston and Philadelphia.

Field sold all of the stations except WKBS-TV in Philadelphia. On July 15, Field announced that instead of selling the station it would be dismantled and its programming and equipment would be sold piecemeal.

This news caught most of the television industry off guard, prompting speculation that Field was unable to sell the station.

"When you have television stations in this country selling anywhere from

\$20 million to \$200 million, how they were unable to sell it is a total mystery to me," Robert Wussler, president of Turner Broadcasting in Atlanta, said in an interview Friday.

Randall Smith, general manager of WTAF-TV, one of WKBS's two independent UHF competitors, said he still had trouble believing the station would end its 18 years of broadcasting.

WKBS-TV, even in its last few months of operation, was not doing that poorly by industry standards. The May Arbitron ratings showed the station finishing fifth in a field of seven Philadelphia stations.

Lee M. Mitchell, president of Field Enterprises, said WKBS was not sold simply because the corporation felt it could make more money that way. It was not a case where no one would buy

the station, he said.

Mr. Mitchell said several buyers did examine the property, but no deal was ever made. He speculated that the highly competitive Philadelphia market might have frightened off some potential buyers.

Philadelphia "has three active independent television stations, and I suspect that the parties who looked at the property felt that the competition was difficult and they did not want to invest in the station at the level we had hoped to realize from it," he said.

Vincent Barresi, the general manager of WKBS-TV, said his station was and always had been a profit-making operation.

The sale of the stations was initiated by disagreements between the company's two major stockholders, Marshall

Field 5th and Frederick W. Field.

Company officials say the two brothers did not want to work together any more and demanded payment for WKBS in cash to facilitate splitting the money between the two. This demand reportedly made the station's sale somewhat more difficult.

At one point in negotiations, Field Enterprises tried offering WKBS-TV to the University of Pennsylvania free as a tax-deductible gift, only to have the university turn down the offer.

The equipment and programs have all been sold, said Donald Curran, president of Field's communications subsidiary in San Francisco, which held jurisdiction over the television stations.

"The boat has sailed," he said.