

WFBC-TV HISTORY

Channel 4 was allocated to Greenville when the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) ended its multi-year freeze on TV station applications in April 1952. Prior to the freeze, in September 1948, the Greenville News-Piedmont Company, publisher of the local newspapers The Greenville News and The Greenville Piedmont and owner of radio station WFBC (1330 AM), had applied for channel 10. WFBC was one of three groups to apply for channel 4, along with Carolina Television, a group of local businessmen, as well as the Textile Broadcasting Company, owner of WMRC in Greenville. The three companies agreed to a merger under Carolina Television's application in July 1953; the combined firm took the name WMRC, Inc., and won the permit for channel 4. The merger led to the closure of WMRC on November 15, 1953; its management and staff moved to WFBC and station WAKE took over its frequency and facilities.

After the merger, construction of WFBC-TV began in September 1953. The new station signed an affiliation contract with NBC and began building a transmitter site and interim studios on Paris Mountain. A test pattern was broadcast for the first time on December 26, and WFBC-TV signed on at 11:30 p.m. on December 31, 1953—in time to carry the ball drop from Times Square to ring in 1954. Shortly after, at the direction of station manager Wilson Wearn, the station produced a live remote broadcast of a basketball game between Furman University and Newberry College on February 13, 1954—its first live local sports broadcast. That night, Frank Selvy of Furman scored 100 points, setting a college basketball milestone. The studios and transmitter both left Paris Mountain within five years. WFBC radio and television moved in April 1955 to a new 25,000-square-foot (2,300 m²) facility on Rutherford Street, near what were then Greenville's city limits. In 1958, channel 4 began broadcasting from Caesar's Head, expanding coverage and eliminating multi path interference in the city of Greenville.

In its early years, channel 4 was recognized for a variety of children's programs, including Kids Korral, Romper Room, and especially Monty's Rascals, which aired under that title from 1960 to 1978. Hosted by Monty DuPuy, who had come to WFBC-TV from the radio station, and Stowe Hoyle, the show featured a live children's audience. After DuPuy left Rascals, the show continued as Rascal's Clubhouse until 1982.

The News-Piedmont Company expanded its broadcasting interests beyond Greenville when it acquired WBIR radio and television in Knoxville, Tennessee, in 1960, followed by WMAZ radio and television in Macon, Georgia, in 1962. On January 1, 1968, the WFBC, WBIR and WMAZ stations, as well as the News, Piedmont, and Citizen and Times in Asheville were reorganized as Multimedia, Inc.

In the 1970s, federal regulators took a new tenor toward cross-ownership of newspapers and broadcast stations—such as the News and Piedmont and the WFBC stations. In 1975, the FCC moved to bar future acquisitions that created cross-ownership and ordered 16 such groups in small markets to break up their holdings, though others were allowed to remain grandfathered. Two years later, on March 1, 1977, a federal appeals court amplified the policy; instead of merely barring future purchases against the rule, it ordered the divestiture of all such pairings except those that were in the public interest.

Within days, Multimedia announced an agreement with McClatchy designed to extricate both groups from their heaviest cross-ownership burdens. Where Multimedia owned the WFBC stations and two daily newspapers, McClatchy had a similar situation in Sacramento, California: it published The Sacramento Bee, owned KFBK and KFBK-FM radio, and owned KOVR, an ABC-affiliated TV station. McClatchy and Multimedia proposed a straight trade whereby the former would acquire WFBC-TV and Multimedia would receive KOVR; as a result, neither company would own a newspaper and a TV station in the same market. Petitions were lodged against the deal by organizations in Greenville and Sacramento, as well as the San Joaquin Communications Corporation. The former two groups emphasized the unfamiliarity of the companies to their new markets, calling McClatchy "totally foreign" to upstate South Carolina and Multimedia "completely unknown to the Sacramento community". The latter had been in a legal battle since 1974 seeking to wrest KMJ-TV in Fresno from McClatchy control. While the community organizations abandoned their opposition to the trade, San Joaquin Communications Corporation refused to yield, and the transaction reached its deadline date of March 1, 1978, without being adjudicated by the FCC. Negotiations to extend the term failed, and the deal was called off by mutual agreement later that month. During this time, a radio annex was built at the WFBC studios, separating the radio and television operations.