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Chicago's Italian legacy brings stations together

Robert Feder

In what's being billed as an unprecedented partnership, two local television stations are teaming up to celebrate the history and contribution of Italian Americans in Chicago.

"And They Came to Chicago: The Italian American Legacy," a documentary hosted by actor Joe Mantegna, is being presented as a joint venture by WMAQ-Channel 5, the NBC-owned station, and WTTW- Channel 11, the Window to the World Communications public television station.

Channel 5 will premiere the documentary on Columbus Day (Oct. 9) and air it two more times. Channel 11 will then broadcast an expanded version on Oct. 17, with additional airings and a DVD offering to follow.

Gia Marie Amelia, a Chicago writer, producer and director, will serve as executive producer of the project.

"My Italian heritage has always been an important part of my identity and plays a vital role in my personal and professional life," she said. "It is a labor of love to pay tribute to this community, and this unique partnership will help to bring our rich and complex story to a new generation of Italians in our city and beyond."

TRACKING: TRIB EXEC IN LIMBO

- The sale of WATL-TV in Atlanta raises questions about the future of former Chicagoan Steve Carver, who's been vice president and general manager of the Tribune Co.-owned station since 2003. Before that, he was vice president and general manager of the company's news/talk WGN-AM (720).

As part of its plan to sell off assets, Tribune Co. announced Monday that it had agreed to sell WATL -- soon to switch from WB to MyNetworkTV affiliation -- for \$180 million to Gannett Co. In Atlanta, Gannett already owns NBC affiliate WXIA-TV.

"Steve's done a great job in Atlanta, and before that as the general manager at WGN Radio here in Chicago," said Gary Weitman, vice president of communications for Tribune Co. "He'll remain at WATL through the transition to the new owner. After that, we're hopeful of keeping Steve with Tribune if at all possible."

Before joining Tribune Co. in 1998, Carver was vice president and general manager of CBS all-news WBBM-AM (780).

- Paul Konrad, WGN-Channel 9's morning meteorologist, rates a cameo role on tonight's episode of "Pepper Dennis." He plays the emcee of the fictional ACORN (Achievement in Chicago Regional News) Awards.

The WB sitcom, starring Rebecca Romijn as an ambitious Chicago TV reporter, airs at 11:30 p.m. on Channel 9. Struggling in the ratings, the show has not been picked up for fall by WB's successor, the new CW network.

- Sun-Times columnist Carol Marin goes behind the scenes at "Wait, Wait . . . Don't Tell Me," the National Public Radio comedy quiz show produced in Chicago, for a special report on Channel 5's 10 p.m. newscast tonight.

Marin focuses on some of the personalities who've made the show a surprise hit, including host Peter Sagal and regular panelist Paula Poundstone.

DIALING: JOHNNY B. BREAKFAST

- It'll be "Breakfast With Brandmeier" on Friday when Jonathon Brandmeier originates his WLUP-FM (97.9) morning show live

from 6 to 10 a.m. at the House of Blues, 329 N. Dearborn. It's his first remote broadcast from the venue since Johnny B. returned to the Loop last November.

For tickets from the Emmis Communications classic rocker, see: www.wlup.com

- "Randy Jackson's Hit List," a new syndicated urban countdown show hosted by the veteran music producer and "American Idol" judge, has been picked up by Crawford Broadcasting's rhythmic adult contemporary WSRB-FM (106.3).

The show, which also features interviews with top artists and a segment on "What's in Randy's iPod," airs from 5 to 7 p.m. Sundays on Soul 106.3.

- Citing scheduling conflicts with technical board operators, WZZN-FM (94.7) has shifted Chet Coppock's weekend run from Saturday afternoons to Saturday nights. His "Saturday Night Dance Party" is airing from 7 to 10 p.m. on the ABC-owned "True Oldies" station.

- David Rehe, new president and chief executive officer of the National Association of Broadcasters, will deliver the keynote address at this week's Illinois Broadcasters Association convention in Springfield.

Also on hand will be Gary Fries, who heads the Radio Advertising Bureau, and Chris Rohrs, who heads the Television Bureau of Advertising.

Fries will be presented with the IBA's Lifetime Achievement Award.

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