

3 minutes, 17 votes, many grins

Tiny town revels in tradition of first U.S. balloting

Paul J. Gough



A Dixville Notch resident casts his ballot during Tuesday's primary.

By Paul J. Gough

DIXVILLE NOTCH, N.H. — Mix the drama of an election and democracy with a little of Christmas and Groundhog Day and you've got the quadrennial spectacle that is the first-in-the-nation voting in this tiny hamlet.

Every four years since 1960, dozens of reporters and cameramen travel the four or so hours from the primary central of Manchester to the remote little town

nestled in the woods near the Canadian border. They converge on the Balsams Resort Hotel, a Victorian-style grand hotel that serves as the site of the voting and where the residents live and work.

Like so much in the Granite State, which prides itself on fierce independence and a strict adherence to the idea of retail politics, there's something more than a little quaint about the ritual that began almost a half-century

See DIXVILLE on page 33



Axiom might have dealt its last paycheck

By Borys Kit and Carolyn Giardina

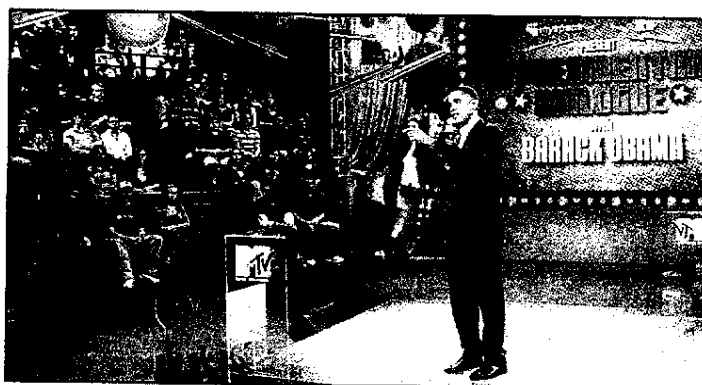
LOS ANGELES — Axiom International, the industry's largest payroll services providers and a source for production and gap financing, has closed its doors indefinitely.

The company's home office on Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles and its offices in Burbank, New York, Vancouver, Toronto and London were quiet, with employees told via e-mail not to show up to work starting Tuesday.

Sources said that company president Ruben Rodriguez was no longer with the firm. Calls to his mobile were met with a recording saying the number had been disconnected or no longer in service.

Speculation swirled that the company was faced with a

See AXIUM on page 33



Sen. Barack Obama makes his political pitch to MTV's young-skewing demo.

Campaigning for eyeballs

Cablers ramp up election coverage

By Gail Schiller

Now that the Iowa caucuses and New Hampshire primary have launched the presidential race, an ever-increasing number of cameras from non-news networks are piling on to document an election season seen as just too entertaining to pass up.

While Lifetime and MTV Networks' BET, MTV, Nickelodeon

and Comedy Central have been using presidential campaigns for programming fodder since at least 1992, newcomers to the presidential race are hoping TV viewers will cast their ballots with them for election-related news and online initiatives — especially in the wake of the writers strike, which has shut down most original TV programming.

See ELECTION on page 28

Hold everything, Dingell tells Martin

By Brooks Boliek

WASHINGTON — The chairman of the House Commerce Committee has warned FCC officials that he will brook no shenanigans with documents and other correspondence that could become evidence in the lawmakers' investigation of the agency's business.

Rep. John Dingell, D-Mich.,

ordered chairman Kevin Martin and other FCC employees "to immediately preserve all electronic records, including work e-mail and personal e-mail communications relating to official work of the commission, and calendars and schedules of all employees (and paper copies and versions of those records)."

See DINGELL on page 33

al-Qaida stunt

Silvio Berlusconi was the only media figure on a list of internationally known leaders mentioned in an al-Qaida video as "enemies" of the terrorist organization. The media tycoon was named because he backed the U.S.-led Iraq War while prime minister. The list, "An Invitation to Reflection and Repentance," is topped by President Bush.

Madeleine movie

The parents of Madeleine McCann have sanctioned talks with IMG about bringing the story of their missing daughter to the big screen, the Times of London reported. Representatives of Kate and Gerry McCann met producers of the award-winning documentary film "Touching the Void" last month to hear proposals for a deal.

Blackwell bend

Mr. Blackwell put Victoria Beckham at the top of his 48th annual worst-dressed list Tuesday. "In one skinny-mini monstrosity after another, pouty Posh can really wreck-em," he contrived to say. But longtime list habitue Britney Spears is missing this year because Blackwell felt "that it was inappropriate at this time to make comment" on her difficult year.

Iron gaming

Minneapolis publisher Destineer will introduce gamers to the fierce battles in Kitchen Stadium with a new title for Nintendo's Wii based on Food Network's "The Next Iron Chef." The game is slated to reach shelves in the spring and follows the success of Majesco's "Cooking Mama" series of titles for Nintendo's portable DS system.

Honeyed Mailer

Norman Mailer had a honey-toned side, his newly publicized letters reveal. When Clint Eastwood wrote him to say that he liked the version of him Mailer showed in a profile, Mailer replied: "Listen, it wasn't that hard to write — all I had to do was tell the truth. It's the phony pieces that throw out the literary back."

Brand Biz	9
Festivals	10-11
Money	11
Games Reporter	14
TV reviews	14, 27
Oscar Screening Guide	25
Film reviews	26
TV Rate Race charts	30-31
Obituaries	32
Today's events	39

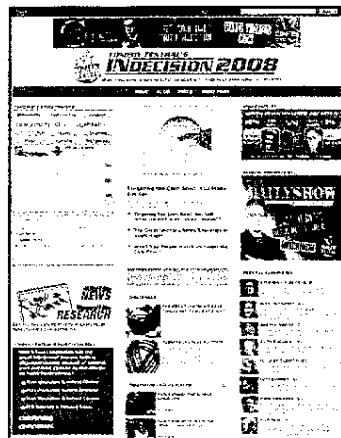
Election

Continued from page 2—

“This election is gearing up to be perhaps the most interesting TV series of the season, and everyone technically has the rights to it,” said Robert Thompson, professor of television and popular culture at Syracuse University. “This is a highly dramatic, complex election that networks can package as an initiative to get out the vote or with something as formal as a presidential dialogue. It’s a way of getting programming out of a national drama that with no ‘24’ this season is about the next most exciting thing.”

Rainbow Media’s WE tv and Independent Film Channel and MTVN’s Spike, Logo and CMT are among the novices to the political horse race, creating content online, on-air or both.

In addition to witnessing the past success other networks had in creating programming, scoring ratings, selling ads and building connections with viewers with presidential campaign-related content, the 2008 election — with its



Indecision2008.com is Comedy’s first stand-alone political humor site.

potential for making history with the first woman, black or Mormon president — has proved to be a major draw for entertainment-driven cable networks.

“I don’t know what it is about this election, but everyone is trying to figure out how to engage their audiences around it,” said Alicin Reidy-Williamson, senior vp corporate responsibility and public affairs for Viacom/MTV.

With the election season having started so early and technology allowing for so much more interactivity, such veteran cable outfits as MTV, Nick and Lifetime are expanding their campaign-related content.



Queen Latifah, right, has joined Lifetime’s “Every Woman Counts” campaign.

“It does feel like people are jumping on this moving train,” said Evan Shapiro, exec vp and GM of IFC, a newcomer to presidential campaign coverage. “I think you’re going to see a lot of the non-news networks jump into this and play a part. I think the more people that cover it, the better it is for the country.”

The cable networks declined comment on what they are spending on election initiatives, but IFC said it is making a “big investment” and MTV said its presidential dialogues — while less costly than ABC or CNN debates — were among the five most expensive specials produced by MTV News last year, including the Video Music Awards and the MTV Movie Awards.

IFC is aiming to expand its brand by taking its independent spin on film and culture to the political arena for the first time, with documentary-style reporting aimed at independent voters.

“We’re trying to bring issues to bear and talk about things that most notably don’t get covered in presidential election coverage because most of the networks seem most interested in pitting the extremes of the two sides against each other,” Shapiro said.

Logo entered the fray in August with a first-of-its-kind on-air forum on issues of importance to the LGBT community with Democratic presidential candidates including Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, John Edwards and Bill Richardson.

Spike TV has launched a voter registration drive in partnership with Ultimate Fighting Championship that includes PSAs with top UFC stars. CMT also will feature election-related issues content, though its plans are not yet

nailed down. WE tv has announced a national grassroots initiative aimed at registering more than 1 million women to vote while educating them on key issues. Kelly Ripa, LeAnn Rimes and Kerry Washington have signed on for the campaign.

Veterans in this game also are stepping up: Comedy Central started the season off early with a pre-strike presidential bid by Stephen Colbert in his home state of South Carolina. While Colbert might have failed to get his name on the ballot, the two weeks of episodes focusing on his bid were the most watched in “Colbert” history with an average of 1.5 million viewers, a network spokesman said.

Comedy Central also has launched Indecision2008.com, its first stand-alone political humor site that features daily campaign news and clips from “The Colbert Report” and “The Daily Show With Jon Stewart” when they are in production. The network is doing two Indecision 2008 live tours and planning politically themed stand-up comedy and movies from the Comedy Central library.

Probably more than any other entertainment-driven cable network, Comedy Central has experienced firsthand the benefits of creating programming around a presidential campaign. Boasting ratings that are 10%-15% higher during election years, Comedy Central is selling sponsorship packages to advertisers that cover all the live, on-air and online elements of its campaign coverage.

For its part, MTV is utilizing technology, the Internet and consumer-generated media to expand things this time. So far in partnership with MySpace, it has co-hosted online and on-air dialogues with Obama, Edwards and John

McCain in which viewers have not only been able to ask questions in real time but also respond to the candidates’ answers as well, with their feedback incorporated into the dialogue.

MTV also has recruited 51 young citizen journalists — one from each state and Washington — to present the issues that matter to young people through text, photos, video and audio.

“We will have more content partly because we’re going to be soliciting a lot more from our audience, which we weren’t doing at all in 2004,” said Ian Rowe, vp public affairs at MTV. “Consumer-generated is definitely the innovation this year.”

The network also has other election-related programming in development for 2008 such as TV series, longform documentaries and issue-based specials, Rowe said.

Lifetime has joined forces with Queen Latifah for an “Every Woman Counts” campaign. Interstitials with Latifah, Jodie Foster, Halle Berry and Mary J. Blige, election polls and plans for a town hall with the candidates are all part of the network’s content.

“A lot of the issues women care about deeply are getting lost in a lot of the crossfire and the horse race of the media coverage,” said Meredith Wagner, exec vp public affairs.

Lifetime plans to weave many of the election themes relevant to women into its programming and has a movie about an unnamed high-powered political woman in development for the fall.

Nickelodeon is extending its Kids Pick the President initiative, holding its first kids’ primary vote online the week after a primary news special that will air Sunday. BET is hosting interviews with Clinton, Obama and other presidential hopefuls in the first quarter.



Ballot measures
For highlights of cable network on-air and online initiatives tied to the 2008 presidential race, turn to THR.com.

