

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Still Assisting: Charter Looks to Aid Community Centers, Job Training

Last October, **Charter** completed its seven-year goal of improving 50,000 homes under its Spectrum Housing Assist initiative. Now, it's taking aim at community centers, announcing on Wednesday a \$30 million, five-year effort to revitalize 100 centers across the country under the "Spectrum Community Assist" banner.

The initiative features a \$25 million investment and \$5 million in in-kind donations for building repairs and refurbishments as well as financial support of job skills training programs, new tech and 1 Gigabit internet service.

"We felt community centers really play a very significant role in many rural and urban environments, serving as a hub, not only of activities for families, but they've also been places where vital services can be provided to the people in those local communities," Charter svp and chief diversity officer *Rhonda Crichlow* told **CFX**.

Given the prevalence of unemployed or under-skilled adults, Charter decided to hone in on centers within its footprint that had existing job skills training programs or were looking to start a workforce readiness offering. The U.S. Department of Labor estimates that 8.4 million Americans are unemployed. Training took on greater importance "in light of COVID and emerging expectations of employers and new skills that may be needed in order to help people perform in an environment that relies much more heavily on technology," Crichlow explained.

Internet and video providers have long viewed community centers as effective vehicles to make a large impact. Last year, **Comcast** announced a multi-year effort to launch more than 1,000 WiFi-connected "Lift Zones" in community centers nationwide, seeing it as a way to not only offer free Internet connectivity, but also access to hundreds of hours of educational and digital skills content. For more than a decade, **Cox Communications** has developed "Tech Centers" for community centers and Boys & Girls Clubs across the country. **Hotwire Communications'** Empowering Communities Foundation, a charitable organization aimed at bridging the digital divide, has delivered broadband access and digital literacy training to a growing list of community centers, including Cornerstone Learning Center in Trenchtown, Jamaica.

While the Spectrum Community Assist project wasn't developed to help Charter bolster its workforce, Crichlow acknowledged the is potential there. "We have enjoyed a really rich relationship and partnership with our internal recruiting team, many of whom would attend our Spectrum Housing Assist events in the past. We do see it as an opportunity to potentially work with our recruiting colleagues to maybe bring some of these individuals after they've completed these programs into the fold," she said.

Charter will launch the program Saturday at the Better Family Life Community Center in St. Louis, followed by similar events in Charlotte in October and Stamford, Connecticut, in November. Some 60 Charter employees have already signed on to volunteer

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2021 CATEGORIES

In addition to spotlighting the industry's biggest leaders, Cablefax is promoting the power of one-to-one relationships. This year, we are looking for executives to sponsor a female candidate to be included in The Rising Tide and will be featured along with their sponsor in a special section of the Most Powerful Women edition of Cablefax: The Magazine.

FINAL DEADLINE: FRIDAY, SEPT. 17

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at Saturday's kickoff. The operator is working with a few national nonprofits to identify centers in its 41-state service area. Like with Spectrum Housing Assist, Charter employee volunteers will pick up paint brushes and hammers to fix up physical structures, but centers also will receive funding to strengthen their job training programs, with Better Family Life to receive about \$50,000 for its workforce development programs that span several different areas, including temporary work assistance and certifications for call center representatives.

"I personally am incredibly proud of Charter as an organization to invest so meaningfully in a program like this," said Crichlow, who joined Charter in 2016 when the operator had one signature philanthropic program. That number has now grown to six, and includes projects such as scholarship program Spectrum Scholars and the Spectrum Community Investment Loan Fund, which makes loans through community development financial institutions to small businesses whose goods and services help meet core needs in underserved communities.

"I think there's just a real value and a sense of pride that our employees feel being able to contribute to communities in a slightly different way," said Crichlow.

NAB SHOW IN-PERSON NO MORE

Another one bites the dust. **NAB Show** is the latest conference to switch to virtual in light of the rising number of COVID-19 cases linked to the Delta variant. Until now, the broadcast show was set to take over Las Vegas from Oct 9-13 with all attendees required to show proof of vaccination against the virus. "As we always kept the best interest and safety of the industry as our priority, it has become apparent in the face of

these challenges that we can no longer effectively host NAB Show or our co-located events, the Radio Show and Sales and Management Television Exchange, in person," NAB evp/ managing director, global connections and events *Chris Brown* said in a statement. "While we are disappointed that we will not be together again in person next month, we look forward to converging at the 2022 NAB Show, April 23-27, 2022, to reignite our passion for our business and focus on a bright future ahead." There aren't any specifics yet on how much of the show will be pivoted to the association's digital platform, NAB Amplify, but an email said plans are underway to make select content available online. The news comes less than a week after **SCTE** made the decision to transition its hybrid Cable-Tec Expo to a completely virtual format.

COMCAST TO DEBUT XCLASS TVS?

Comcast smart TVs may soon be hitting store shelves. The company has reportedly entered into a partnership with **Hi-sense** to develop and sell two smart TVs under the XClass TV brand. [Protocol](#) was the first to spot a temporary staging site that allows customers to create an XClass account and offers insights into what those TVs could offer. An image on the temporary landing page showed a television with an X1-like landing page and the integration of apps including **Netflix, Disney+, Hulu, YouTube** and **Peacock**. The TV also displayed an offer for buyers to get 12 months of free access to Peacock Premium upon activation of their device. A dedicated voice remote will also come with the smart TVs. It's no surprise that Comcast is interested in the space. The real question is when will it make its grand splash. Comcast chairman/CEO

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Brian Roberts said during a **Goldman Sachs** investor conference last fall that the company was examining smart TVs on a global basis. “Can we bring our same tech stack or certain capabilities in aggregation to consumers who are relying more and more on smart TVs?” he said. “We’ve done that with X1 when we syndicated it to Canada and to other operators in the United States, and we see a similar roadmap possibly for that.” Comcast offered no comment on the report.

CARRIAGE

Univision, UniMás and **Galavisión** are now available on **YouTube TV**. Subscribers in the top Hispanic markets like Los Angeles, New York, Miami, Houston, Dallas and Chicago can also access local Univision and UniMás content as part of the SVOD’s standard plan. YouTube TV also teased in a company blog post its plans to introduce an add-on package with more Spanish-language content. Called **Pantaya**, the add-on package would include networks like **Sony Cine, Estrella TV** and **Fox Deportes** for an additional \$5.99/month. – ATSC 3.0-based pay TV provider **Evoca** is now offering **NFL RedZone** to subscribers for \$59 for the season. Evoca is available in Boise, Idaho, and is coming this month to Phoenix.

FTC REJECTS VERTICAL MERGER GUIDELINES

The **FTC** voted Wednesday to rescind the vertical merger guidelines it jointly issued in June 2020 with the **DOJ**. The guidelines clarified how both agencies would examine and analyze vertical transactions to determine if they could cause competitive harm. DOJ is now conducting its own review of both the vertical merger guidelines and horizontal merger guidelines to ensure they adequately identify potential harms in both types of transactions. “The department’s review has already identified several aspects of the guidelines that deserve close scrutiny, and we will work closely with the FTC to update them as appropriate,” **Richard Powers**, acting assistant attorney general of the antitrust division, said in a statement. During the same open meeting, FTC staff presented its findings from a deep dive into past acquisitions made by the likes of **Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple** and **Microsoft** that did not require reporting to antitrust authorities. Of the 616 transactions examined, 94 exceeded the size threshold for reporting.

BET UNVEILS BET STUDIOS

BET is launching its own studio venture that will offer equity ownership to Black content creators. **BET Studios** will create shows and films for other members of the **ViacomCBS** programming family across streaming and linear as well as for third-party platforms. **Aisha Summers Burke** will lead the effort as evp/general manager and report to BET president **Scott Mills**. The initiative has some serious star power behind it. BET Studios will launch with the backing of three principal partners: writer/producer **Kenya Barris** (“Black-ish”), actress/filmmaker **Rashida Jones** (“Claws”) and screenwriter **Aaron Rahsaan Thomas** (“Friday Night Lights”).

INTRODUCING HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

Wednesday marked the beginning of Hispanic Heritage Month and programmers everywhere were ready with an angle. **AMC**

Networks launched a PSA campaign with members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, with spots airing across **AMC, BBC America, IFC, SundanceTV, WE tv** and **AMC+**. The campaign, themed “Unidos, United,” features Representatives **Nanette Diaz Barragán, Tony Cárdenas** and **Raul Ruiz**. The lawmakers discuss topics from what unites Hispanic/Latino communities, the importance of sharing Hispanic/Latino stories and the leaders that inspire them. Over at **NBCUniversal**, news anchors are telling viewers to “Come with Us” or “Juntos Imparables” over the next four weeks of Hispanic Heritage Month. English and Spanish versions of a kick-off spot for the campaign aired Wednesday morning on **NBC’s “TODAY”** and **Telemundo’s “hoy Día.”** Telemundo’s news coverage will include stories on culture and equality as well as special segments on food and music across “Medio Día,” “Noticias Telemundo,” “Al Rojo Vivo” and hoy Día. **NBC News** and **MSNBC** will debut segments and specials including “Generation Latinx,” “Dis(Owning) Hispanic” and interactive digital cross-platform program “The New Latino Landscape.” **Univision** also took a newsworthy approach, with special segments about Latinos living the American Dream on their terms on “Despierta América” and “Noticiero Univision Fin De Semana.” Interviews with on-air network talent celebrating each personality’s respective heritage will air across Univision’s entertainment and news shows including *Despierta América*, “Noticiero Univision” and “TUDN.”

FOX GIDDY ON LOCAST VICTORY

Fox Corp CEO **Lachlan Murdoch** has always been optimistic when it comes to the future of retransmission consent, and he’s even more so after a court ruling effectively shut down broadcast streaming app **Locast**. “We will always vigorously defend our intellectual property and it is pleasing to see that a threat out there, someone who thought they could steal our content for free and subvert the business model of broadcast television in this country, has been averted,” he said during an investor conference late Tuesday. Murdoch was also high on the momentum of streaming products **Tubi** and **Fox Nation**, including the impending revival of reality show “Cops” on Fox Nation. While the SVOD will always be, at its heart, a destination for Fox News fans, Murdoch said it has to broaden to gain subscribers outside of those linear viewers. “It’s important that we have a direct one-on-one relationship with our most engaged superfans, so we think that’s an important, strategic investment as well,” he said. “As a pure news, documentary, and unscripted service, there is a super fan market for that, but in order to grow beyond that, you’ll see us grow into lifestyle and entertainment categories that resonate well with our audience.”

EDITOR’S NOTE

We see them every day—women that are pushing the boundaries, influencing company policies and paving the way forward for the next generation. The [Cablefax Most Powerful Women](#) magazine is the perfect place to honor them, and this year offers more opportunities than ever before to celebrate them thanks to categories like Mentor of the Year and Women’s Advancement Champion. Nominations close Friday!

Think about that for a minute...

What's 'Cable?'

Commentary by Steve Effros

How do you define the term “cable television?” I know I’ve written about this recently, but the more I think about it, the more troublesome the entire question becomes. This is not just a rhetorical issue. There’s a lot of law and a lot of money flowing one way or another depending on the answer.

Let’s start with the obvious. It used to be simple to define the term, because there was essentially only one way for consumers to receive “cable television.” That was from a provider who also owned the wires going to their homes who offered a defined set of services, including local broadcast signals, for a fee. To be sure there were complications. What about telephone companies, which had different state and local authorizations to operate on the streets and ways if they offered such a service? What about private systems in big apartment complexes, etc.

Those questions were worked out, one at a time, and everyone seemed relatively clear about what “cable television” was. But then came “streaming” and “broadband”. The complications have multiplied exponentially since then. One example should suffice from the point of view of local authorities: the franchise fee.

In theory that fee is either for the use of the rights of way, in which case the fee should apply to anyone who commercially uses those rights of way regardless of what it is used for, or it is some form of tax or service fee based on the type of service. If it’s the latter, then you can immediately see the problem. A “cable operator” pays that fee because he or she is providing “cable service.” But that exact same service can be provided, as an example, by YouTube TV, including all the local television broadcast signals and all the “cable channels” that the “cable guy” is providing.

The one difference, again from the local authority point of view, is that in one case they require a franchise and get a fee and in the other case they don’t! It’s no secret that the bundled “cable service” package subscription numbers are diminishing. It looks like that reduction, that “cord cutting,” if you will (yes, I

know, a silly term since they still use the cord for streaming) is accelerating. But it’s also clear that most of those who drop the bundle are turning around and recreating virtually the same bundle by subscribing, on average, to five different streaming service providers, including at least one offering local broadcast signals.

So from the subscriber perspective, there’s no difference. As a matter of fact, many of those “cord cutters” are just now realizing that they’re paying roughly the same amount they were when they decided to “cut the cord” in order to save money! Not happening! But what is happening is the local cities and towns are losing their franchise fee revenue. Why? Because one service is defined as “cable television” and the other isn’t! How long do you think that’s going to last?

My answer: not very long. The artificial definition that requires one provider to include things like PEG channels and pay service fees but exempts another almost identical service from doing the same thing makes no sense.

It’s certainly true that the original “cable” service provided the cross subsidy that allowed companies to build the robust “last mile” broadband service we have in this country today. It’s also true that because escalating program costs and required ties have become so burdensome, broadband margins are now becoming favored by operators over offering program bundles. Undoubtedly, we will continue to offer both. But competitors are offering what appears to the consumer to be the same service. If

that’s true, then all of those services should have the same regulation and obligations. It’s time to redefine our business.



Steve

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(Steve Effros was President of CATA for 23 years and is now an advisor and consultant to the cable industry. His views do not necessarily reflect the views of Cablefax.)

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