

# Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## Past and Present: Weather Channel Celebrates 40 Years, en Español Launch

It's been more than two years since **Entertainment Studios** announced plans to launch free Spanish language streamer **Weather Channel en Español**, and the service is finally here.

It went live Monday across **Local Now**, **Sports.TV**, **theGrio** and the **Weather Channel** mobile app. Integration with The Weather Channel television app is coming soon. **CFX** has learned it is also expected to roll out on **YouTube TV** Tuesday, and the company is in the final stages of negotiations with other distribution partners. Additional launches are expected to come over the next 30 days.

The free streaming network, first announced in 2019 ahead of a planned 1Q20 launch, was significantly challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic. But **The Weather Group**, the parent company of The Weather Channel and OTT streamer Local Now, knew that scrapping the service altogether was never a real option.

"[Entertainment Studios Founder *Byron Allen*] is ultra committed to making sure that we're doing what we can do to serve this underserved audience," Weather Group President *Tom O'Brien* told **CFX**. "For them, this is the first time ever we've got a national network that's devoted to delivery of life-saving news and information to the Spanish-speaking audience."

Weather Channel en Español has nabbed an all-star team of journalists to lead its coverage, including Emmy-winning meteorologists *Albert Martinez*, *Henry Golac* and *Milmar Ramirez*.

They'll have the benefit of all that The Weather Channel has to offer rather than having to build every tool from scratch. O'Brien has been left in awe of how his teams have been able to adapt that foundation and build an entirely new streaming service on top of it.

"Their ability to take the infrastructure, the expertise, that technology knowledge, the storytelling knowledge and bring that to life in a brand new network is extraordinarily exciting," he said.

Weather Channel en Español's launch is perfectly positioned ahead of the Atlantic storm season, but it also comes on a particularly special occasion for the Weather Channel family: the 40th anniversary of the launch of the first 24-hours cable weather network. And while the stories told by The Weather Channel have shifted since 1982 (climate change was less of a concern at that time), the most remarkable difference O'Brien noted is the technology that now powers its weather coverage. One of his proudest moments came just last year when the network's Virtual Views won a News and Documentary Emmy for Outstanding Technical Achievement. Unveiled in 2020, the technology allows meteorologists to be placed into virtual environments where the impacts of various weather events can be simulated.

"We don't look at ourselves as just a television network. We look at ourselves as a technology platform, and the fact that we've got 2,500 Star boxes, the name of the box that we put in cable headends to provide localized weather information,



The advertisement features a blue background with a white and blue logo on the left that reads "The Weather Channel THE NEXT 40 YEARS". Below the logo is a group of five weather forecasters in blue jackets and caps. To the right of the image, the text reads: "More Audiences. More Impact." and "The Most Trusted Brand in Media."

is key,” O’Brien said.

The competitive landscape surrounding weather reporting has changed dramatically since Weather broke onto the scene, and a significant portion of that has occurred within the last several years. **Fox Weather**, an ad-supported streamer with a corresponding website, launched in October with hopes of securing an audience by being as accessible as possible. There’s also **AccuWeather**, which is expanding its presence across linear packages as well as on IPTV and streaming platforms.

The folks reassuring O’Brien of Weather Channel’s leadership position through it all is the network’s audience. For 11 years in a row, **Harris Poll** has ranked The Weather Channel as the TV News Brand of the Year. It has also consistently ranked as one of the most trusted brands in America.

“This business has defined and redefined weather consistently over four decades and will continue to do so,” he said. “The competition is not pushing us. Our audience is pushing us and that’s certainly what this team has responded to since day one.”

**TIME TO POLKA OUT THE ACAC DOOR**

Sunday marked **ACA Connects** President/CEO *Matt Polka*’s 25th anniversary with the association for small and independent communications providers, but he won’t be sticking around for No. 26. The well-liked exec approached the board in October with a transition plan for his eventual exit. A search for a successor is almost complete, with the board set to reveal the new leader at its meeting in the coming weeks. Polka will remain until the end of July, when the association holds its annual **Independent Show** along with **NCTC**. The show, slated for July 24-27 in Orlando, will serve as a farewell

for Polka and a welcome for the new ACAC chief. “I have been blessed every day to lead ACA Connects, but after 25 years I believe it is time to pass on the privilege of leadership for the healthy growth and future success of the organization. I know that new vision and energy will take ACA Connects to even greater accomplishments, built upon our solid foundation of doing things the right way and never backing down or giving up,” said Polka, who plans to spend more time with family and serving in his local church. Polka, who serves as Secretary Treasurer of the **Cable TV Pioneers**, said he hopes “to find ways to give back to our members, association and industry for all I have been blessed to receive.” Polka was part of the 150 or so folks who came together in May 1993 to form what was then known as the Small Cable Business Association, a group created in response to the 1992 Cable Act and the crippling effect it could have on small operators. It began as a voluntary initiative until the decision was made in 1997 to hire an association head, with the board selecting Polka. The group changed its name to American Cable Association in 1999 and to America’s Communications Association in 2018, which it shortens to ACA Connects. Through the years, Polka’s served as the group’s top lobbyist on everything from retransmission consent to net neutrality, with ACAC Vice Chairman *Mike Bowker* crediting him with keeping the organization focused on the future. “Matt recognized that the pace of change in our businesses, combined with the dynamics in Washington, D.C., created the perfect time for the organization to look forward and ensure continued thought leadership, influence and impact,” said Bowker, who serves as COO of **Cable One**.

# Mark Your Calendars!

## Cablefax 2022 Award Submission Deadlines

**The Diversity List Nominations**

Deadline: June 3  
Final Deadline: June 10

**Most Powerful Women Nominations**

Deadline: August 12  
Final Deadline: August 19

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**BIG NAMES FOR DIAMOND SPORTS BOARD**

Signs point to **Bally Sports'** DTC streaming service launching very soon. **Sinclair** subsidiary **Diamond Sports Group** unveiled its new Board of Managers to oversee the group and the \$635 million facility to allow the group to expand its operational platform, including its RSN streaming service. Sinclair CEO *Chris Ripley*, former **Hulu** CEO *Randy Freer*, former President of **NBC Sports** Regional Networks *David Preschlack*, Senior Adviser to the NFL Commissioner *Maryann Turcke* and former NBA and NFL Senior Exec *Bob Whitsitt* make up the slate of directors. The new board became effective Sunday.

**4K COMING TO COMCAST**

**4K Universe** is bringing its streaming service to **Comcast** platforms including Xfinity X1, Xfinity Flex and XClass TV later this year. 4K Universe is a general entertainment channel broadcast in 4K resolution and a direct-to-consumer ultra HD streaming service starting at \$10/month or \$100/year.

**PEACOCK'S NEWFRONT NEWS**

**Peacock** is premiering three original films co-created with **Universal Pictures** in 2023. "Shooting Stars" follows *Lebron James'* journey as a rising basketball star in high school, while "Praise This" chronicles an attempt to modernize a Church choir's music and *John Woo* reimagines his 1989 film "The Killer." During Peacock's Newfront presentation in New York Monday, President Kelly Campbell said "Bel-Air," the streamer's dramatic retelling of Will Smith's "Fresh Prince of Bel-Air," has set a record as the service's fastest-growing and most-streamed original with more than 8 million accounts having watched. Peacock recently surpassed 28 million active accounts.

**TUBI MAPS OUT YEAR**

**Tubi** will debut more than 100 originals in the next 12 months after it saw double-digit growth in all audience segments and had a record 3.6 billion hours watched in 2021—a 40% YOY increase. Tubi is also expanding its linear offerings with more than 100 sports and local news channels, and is bringing "The Masked Singer," "TMZ" and "Gordon Ramsay" as channels to Tubi Originals and Tubi en Español.

**A+E NETWORKS PARTNERS WITH BOWIE STATE**

**A+E Networks** launched a student apprenticeship program with Bowie State University. The program provides students with work experience in content creation and new perspectives to the creative process at the company. A+E staffers will be matched with students through a remote work experience in graphic design, marketing, digital content distribution, social media creative and digital media production. The program starts this fall and will run through the spring 2023 semester.

**INDUSTRY CELEBRATES AAPI MONTH**

**HBO Max** is promoting its Asian American and Pacific Islander Voices collection in celebration of AAPI Month. The collection includes shows "Grace," "Awkwafina is Nora from Queens" and "Take Out with *Lisa Ling*," as well as movies "Crazy Rich Asians" and the "Rush Hour" trilogy. – **Ovation TV** is recognizing AAPI artists with weekly presentations during its Friday night "Red Carpet

Cinema" block, weekly airings during its "Morning Canvas" block and an on-demand programming lineup featuring titles "The Great Songwriters," "Bruno Mars: Just the Way I Am" and "Celebrity Conversations." The network's FAST channel Mystery Alley will also stream the first two seasons of "Blood and Water." – **MSG Networks** will have a month-long lineup of special programming to recognize AAPI contributors to the world of sports. Coverage includes a series of vignettes spotlighting achievements from AAPI athletes including *Wataru Misaka*, *Manalo Draves* and *Larry Kwong*. MSG will also re-air New York Knicks games from the 2012 season that saw *Jeremy Lin* take the league by storm and rise to stardom.

**YOUTUBE TO STREAM TOP GUN PREMIERE**

**Paramount** is partnering with **YouTube** to livestream the premiere event for "Top Gun: Maverick" on May 4 at 6:30pm. **MTV News** correspondents *Josh Horowitz*, *Dometi Pongo* and *Simone Boyce* will host the live stream from the film's San Diego premiere event, where cast members such as *Tom Cruise* and *Miles Teller* will be in attendance.

**RATINGS**

"100 Day Dream Home" on **HGTV** garnered over 18.1 million total viewers during Season 3. The season averaged a .52 live plus three-day rating among P25-54 and a .67 live plus three-day rating among W25-54. Additionally, the season ranked as a top-three non-news/sports cable premiere among upscale P25-54 and upscale W25-54. – **Hallmark's** "Spring into Love" event pushed the network to be the most-watched cable network on Saturdays and weekend primetime among W18+. The five premieres averaged 1.6 million total viewers and reached 6.7 million unduplicated total viewers.

**PROGRAMMING**

**Comcast** Xfinity's Watchathon returns tomorrow for its 10th year. The first two seasons of "Stranger Things" and the first season of "Girls5Eva" are available, as well as the first seasons of select **Prime Video** originals. **HBO Max**, **Starz**, **Showtime** and **Epix** will make their full on-demand libraries available, and **AMC+** will make the first season of select originals such as "A Discovery of Witches" and "Creepshow" available as well. Content from services like **Qwest TV** and **Here TV** will also be featured. – **Tubi's** first-ever original animated series "The Freak Brothers" will return for a second season this December. The series features *Woody Harrelson*, *Tiffany Haddish* and *Pete Davidson* and had twice as many viewers as the second-ranked series on the platform. – **Paramount+**'s "Yo! MTV Raps" will premiere worldwide on the service May 24. Fans can start streaming 50 of the top archival episodes of the original iteration of Yo! MTV Raps starting Thursday.

**PEOPLE**

**Crown Media Family Networks** made *Aileen Brophy* SVP, Distribution Legal and *Allison Thiel* as VP, Music Strategies and Licensing. Brophy—who comes from **ViacomCBS**—will provide legal counsel for all of Crown Media's content distribution and give guidance on opportunities domestically and internationally. Thiel will lead music licensing strategy for its original and scripted content.