

PUBLIC POLICY

by Rosalind C. Truitt

FOR THE RECORD

■ The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources agreed in February not to fine publishers unable to obtain newsprint with 40 percent recycled-fiber content while papers and the Wisconsin Newspaper Association lobby for a law to ease the state mandate (Presstime, Jan. 1998, p. 26).

■ Oprah Winfrey exulted that the "First Amendment rocks!" after a jury found she had not disparaged cattlemen in a talk show about "mad cow disease." Observers say no veggie-libel precedent was set—a federal judge earlier dismissed that aspect of the case, leaving the future of such laws mushy.

■ The Federal Communications Commission will allow Tribune Co. to own a television station and a paper in South Florida while the FCC reviews its request for a cross-ownership waiver (Presstime, March 1998, p. 30).

NYC Newsracks: A Model?

Boxes attract interest along with sales

Chicago, Philadelphia, San Francisco. Kathy Kahng, marketing manager of the Grand Central Partnership in New York City, fields lots of calls from city officials in such places these days. They all want to know about a multivendor newsrack program that the partnership began operating in midtown Manhattan in 1994.

In light of San Francisco's recent six-month test of multivendor newsracks and a 1997 court decision that removed newspaper vending machines from the Beacon Hill area in Boston, Kahng says city officials and publishers nationwide want information on New York City's voluntary program (Presstime, February 1998, p. 20).

"We see this as a compromise, one that protects the First Amendment rights of publishers to place their publications on the street but also allows us to monitor newsracks as street furniture, to ensure that the racks are attractive and well-maintained," Kahng says.

The Grand Central Partnership, a business improvement district, or BID, covers a 68-block area from roughly 35th to 54th Streets and from Second to Fifth Avenues. The same group also manages the 34th Street Partnership, another BID that covers 31 blocks from 30th to 36th Streets and Park to 10th Avenues. Grand Central also operates the Bryant Park Restoration Corp. that

restored and maintains a famous old park behind the New York Public Library.

The BIDs receive funds from special real-estate assessments on commercial property collected by the city. Tax-exempt bond issues pay for capital improvements.

Grand Central operates 151 newsracks for 67 paid and free publications. Most have slots for at least six publications. Kahng says some publishers complain that a multiple-publication rack can strip them of the identity they enjoy with single racks.

But Mike McCaffrey, vice president of circulation for the Daily News, says executives there are pleased with the boxes. "Anytime you can make your product readily available to your customers, it's good." As for any identity problems, he adds, "Our readers know how to pick out the Daily News."

Meanwhile, officials at the New York City Department of Transportation are considering newsrack ordinances that would cover placement of racks on city streets. The Grand Central boxes meet the requirements of the proposed ordinances currently under consideration by the New York City Council.

Publishers are allotted space in the multiple-publication racks at no cost if they agree to remove single-unit newsracks from the area. Grand Central purchased the newsracks; publishers pay for the doors and maintenance of the mechanisms. That fee is presently \$6 per door per month. ■

The Bench and the Press

A survey of retired state supreme court judges reflects mixed attitudes toward First Amendment rights, with the most negative views focused on cameras in the courtroom.

Dennis Hale, a journalism professor at Bowling Green State University in Ohio, surveyed 50 justices from 33 states. They were retired an average of two years and had a median age of 72.

Sixty percent of those surveyed disagreed that "journalists should enjoy significant rights to take cameras and broadcast equipment into state courtrooms."

In an interview, he said the justices offered somewhat "liberal" views and were supportive of the right to "erotic" speech and access to court

documents and proceedings. However, the professor says they do not agree that the media have a right to photograph in or broadcast from the courtroom.

Hale also asked justices whether their attitudes about courtroom cameras had changed since the 1996 O.J. Simpson murder trial in California. Of those surveyed, 54 percent said there had been no change in attitude, while 44 percent said their attitudes had become more negative.

Hale says the retired justices may be more negative about courtroom cameras than current state supreme court justices. Their average age is 13 years younger, and the group includes more women, which he termed "liberalizing factors."