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Politico

Robert "Bob" Gessner said his official departure as president of MCTV — all of about 10 days old — hasn't really settled in yet.

(Bob Gessner, ACA Chairman – and ACA President/CEO Matt Polka, also featured in this article – will together provide an overview on federal activity impacting our industry next Wednesday afternoon at Cable Academy).

Although he retired on April 13, Gessner said he plans to keep his hat in the business ring for a while and continue to remain active. "You could say I'm a volunteer. I'll be doing some nonoperational-type stuff (with MCTV)," said Gessner, 65, noting that industry affairs and economic development are some examples. "I'm not on the payroll and not sure if I'll have a title anymore. And that's OK."

Gessner came to work for the company his father, Richard Gessner, started — Massillon Cable (now MCTV) — in the late 1970s, not long after graduating from William & Mary in Virginia, earning a bachelor's degree in business administration. He didn't start working at the cable company right away, as he felt the timing wasn't right to become involved with an operation that had only 10-to-12 workers and offered maybe a dozen or so local channels. He spent some time at Channel 5 in Cleveland, and later he sold insurance in Minnesota. Things changed in 1979, when there was a boom in the market.

"One day we're re-transmitting local network broadcasting, and the next day we're offering HBO, ESPN and TBS (up to probably 50 channels)," recalled Gessner, adding that he came into the company somewhat overwhelmed. "I was clueless," he continued. "There was no training for it at all."

After some fast paced, on-the-job guidance, Gessner took on multiple roles in his father's business, such as running the company's marketing affairs, developing computerization strategies, as well as planning and hiring. He later managed the introduction of satellite

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television service. "My father was a real pioneer in the industry," Gessner, a 1972 graduate of Washington High School, said. "He had to teach the community what cable TV was — a tower and a bunch of wires."

As satellite technology grew, the younger Gessner followed the path paved by his father as a settler in the industry. The company was ready to grow in the 1980s, he said, so it needed someone to create structure. Bob Gessner's job was to usher in the expansion of television service, and incorporate local advertising, as well as adding internet and phone service. "It was a steady march of progress," he said. "We branched out to neighborhoods that never had cable TV."

Matt Polka, president of America's Communications Association, an 800-member group that lobbies in Washington, D.C., advocating for small cable and internet companies nationwide, said the Gessners are trailblazers who unselfishly helped to improve technology in the industry. "They've shared new developments with other companies and didn't have to," Polka said.

One example is with a concept called TV Everywhere, said Polka, in which consumers can access and watch video on electronic tablets, cellphones and laptops via their cable service. "Bob can bridge different phases of the industry that helps us (everyone)," said Polka. "He could be self-centered, but there's not one bone like that in his body."

Bob Gessner had been involved full time with the Massillon cable company for more than 40 years. He served his final 17 as the company president, taking over for his father in 2002. The elder Gessner **died last July**. Richard Gessner started the company with his wife, Susan, in 1965. He was ambitious and worked to grow the business to serve customers in and around the city and neighboring townships. A formal passing of the company's torch never really took place, as the elder Gessner remained involved as either chairman or a board member until he died, his son said.

Gessner's daughter, Katherine Gessner, 35, was named president on April 13. She initially joined the company in 2013 as the sales and marketing manager, and her most recent post was vice president of strategic planning and policy. The transition was years in the making, her father said. "I had a written agreement with Katherine when she was in college," Gessner recalled. "She was to have more education than me (a master's degree), and three years of work experience anywhere else."

Bob Gessner has several roles in the community where he plans to remain active. He's chairman of the Stark Economic Development Board, and has positions on the Wayne Economic Development Council and Massillon Development Foundation Board. He and his wife, Nancy Gessner, are co-chairs of the Massillon Museum's Capital Campaign.

In addition, Gessner said he aims to generate more interest in the **First North professional building** at 50 North Ave. NE. Part of his "retirement" plan is to fill about 15,000 square feet of vacant space there. The building was completed in 2017. Gessner is the owner and helped with its design. "I need to rent it. It needs more tenants," he said.

Gessner is expected to step down as chairman of the communications association in July, but he plans to remain on the board as a member. Polka is confident that Gessner, a friend and business associate for at least two decades, won't be able to sit still during retirement, at least not for quite a while. "We'll see how that goes," Polka said. "Bob's an industry guy, so he'll keep his hands in it to some degree. He's a great friend and mentor, and someone who I truly cherish."

Q&A with Bob Gessner

- What was the best part about leading MCTV? Hiring people who are excited and motivated to start or advance in their career.
 - What was the toughest business decision you've had to make? Firing somebody; sometimes executives. Even when they deserve it, it's so hard. It affects their lives and families so much.
 - What was the best business decision you've made? Hiring one of the people still with us. It was out of a mess we had when we launched our internet business (in a partnership with a separate individual) in 1995 and 1996.
 - What was your biggest mistake? I'd say a missed opportunity. In the 1980s, when we were building our service area. We could have been the first cable TV operation in Green, the Lake Cable area and Jackson Township. It would have been a larger footprint for us.
 - Were there any major hurdles to overcome in the early days of cable television in Massillon? Yes, my father dealt more with that. Our first franchise (in the late 1960s) with the city prohibited Massillon Cable from producing local TV. That was part of the education process (that ensued). The city wanted to protect the newspaper, radio stations and the theater.
 - Who was your role model? My parents. Seeing how to build a good family and be an ethical business person. To have their concern for charity.
 - Who's next in line to lead MCTV (after Katherine Gessner)? (I'm) not certain. I have a 20-year-old niece in college, and I'm unsure if she'd move to Massillon. I have a 5-year-old granddaughter (in South Carolina). It's too early to tell. – **Canton (OH) Repository**
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Comcast Corp. said net profit rose 14% in the first quarter, boosted by its high-speed internet business, a spate of successful movies and the recent acquisition of European pay-television operator Sky PLC. The Philadelphia company reported a profit of \$3.55 billion, or 77 cents a share, up from \$3.12 billion, or 66 cents a share, in the year-earlier quarter. The quarterly profit exceeded FactSet analysts' estimates of 68 cents a share.

Revenue rose 18% to \$26.86 billion, thanks in part to the inclusion of Sky's results, which amounted to \$4.8 billion in revenue. Sky wasn't part of Comcast during the year-earlier quarter. Comcast said it added 375,000 internet consumers in the period, fueling a 10% rise in high-speed internet revenue. The company also posted strong growth at its wireless business, Xfinity Mobile, which was launched less than two years ago. The service reached a total of 1.4 million subscribers, compared with 577,000 last year. The spike came as Verizon Communications Inc. reported earlier this week that it lost a net 44,000 postpaid phone connections.

Although at a slower rate than its peers, Comcast's traditional pay-TV business again lost subscribers, as people continue to cut the cord in favor of streaming services like Amazon.com Inc.'s Prime Video and Netflix.com Inc. During the first quarter, Comcast lost 121,000 subscribers, compared with a loss of 96,000 a year earlier. It was the company's eighth consecutive quarter of decline. AT&T Inc. on Wednesday reported a net loss of 544,000 pay-TV customers, which include DirecTV satellite subscriptions and U-verse fiber-optic packages.

NBC's film and broadcast segments each saw a 7% increase in revenue, boosted by films including "Us" and "How to Train Your Dragon: The Hidden World." The television segment was boosted by successful series like "This is Us" and "The Voice." Overall, revenue at Comcast's NBCUniversal unit fell 12.5% to \$8.31 billion. The unit's cable networks and broadcast-television divisions suffered from the comparison with the year-earlier period, during which NBC had the rights to the Super Bowl and 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics.

Earlier this year, NBCUniversal said it plans to launch an ad-supported streaming-video service in 2020, which will be free for pay-TV subscribers. As of January, the company had about 52 million customers that subscribe to Comcast Cable and Sky. Users without cable TV will be able to purchase it for a fee. The service will include content from NBCUniversal's TV and film franchises, as well as original and acquired programming. The streaming platform will first debut in the U.S. and later be rolled out in international markets, The Wall Street Journal previously reported.

Walt Disney Co. earlier this month disclosed details of the Disney+ streaming service. The service will be offered at a \$6.99 price point, and Disney plans to include more than 7,500 episodes of television and hundreds of movies, as well as original content. Separate from the NBC streaming platform, in March Comcast launched the \$5-a-month service "Xfinity Flex" for its internet-only customers, which gives access to ad-supported streaming video channels like YouTube and Cheddar. Customers are given a device, similar to Amazon's Fire Stick or Roku, that serves as a gateway to such streaming apps. Comcast has said the new device is meant to help customers manage connected devices in their home. – **Wall Street Journal**

Democrat Joe Biden will kick off his campaign for president in the Pittsburgh area Monday. The former vice president announced his candidacy Thursday morning, after months of hints and "will he or won't he" speculation. His first campaign event will be at the Teamsters Local 249 banquet hall in Lawrenceville, where he will talk about his "plan to build a middle class where everyone comes along," according to the candidate's website. Doors open 2 p.m. Monday, and attendees are encouraged to come early, since space is limited.

Biden has visited Southwestern Pennsylvania several times recently. Last year, he came to the region to promote his book, to campaign for congressional candidate Conor Lamb, to speak at a Duquesne University event honoring the later former Steelers owner Dan Rooney, and to march in Pittsburgh's Labor Day parade. Officials at Teamsters Local 249 could not immediately be reached for comment. – **Pittsburgh Tribune-Review**



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