



PBS gets Hispanic network

By PETER LAURIA

Long on the receiving end, PBS switched roles and doled out some cash of its own, taking a minority stake in **V-me**, a Spanish-language digital cable network.

The deal with V-me, which airs on public television stations nationwide, extends PBS' reach into the red-hot Hispanic media market.

The Baeza Group, an Hispanic-owned merchant bank, is serving as lead investor in the network, which launched on Monday, with additional seed money being provided by venture capital outfit Syncom Funds.

Programming on the 24-hour network is divided into four genres: kids, lifestyle, factual, and movies/

specials.

A heavy emphasis is placed on educational content, with a six-hour kids block beginning each programming day.

According to V-me President Carmen Drenzo, the commitment to quality children's content is what convinced PBS to invest in the network.

"It's an extension of the PBS mission to use media to engage and educate as well as entertain," Drenzo said.

According to Syncom Funds general partner Tony Thomas, V-me's mix of programming fills a void in the burgeoning Hispanic media marketplace that is poised to explode.

Thomas should know — his firm was among the earliest investors in such minority-focused media companies as Black Entertainment Television, TV One, SiTV and Radio One.

V-me has initial distribution in 28 million homes in 18 markets featuring large Hispanic populations — among them New York, Miami, Los Angeles, San Diego and Denver.

