



Spanish-language V-me hits air, showcasing 'quality entertainment'

By Frazier Moore
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With a ceremonial pressing of a button Monday, the new Spanish-language network V-me hit the air.

"V-me is fundamentally about encouraging and facilitating the emergence of the new American Latino culture," said Mario Baeza, the network's founder, shortly after the network signed on. "But most of all, it should be entertaining."

A for-profit venture partnered with public television, V-me (pronounced "veh-meh," from the Spanish *verme*, for "see me") is a 24-hour digital broadcast network carried on basic digital cable and satellite systems. The network will be partners with public TV stations, which will receive V-me at no cost.

V-me initially is available in San Diego, New York, Miami, Los Angeles, Houston, Chicago, San Francisco and San Antonio, among other cities, representing more than 60 percent of all Hispanic households. It reaches 28 million homes, the network said.

Programming is composed of original productions, acquisitions and public television fare adapted for American Latinos, with content organized into four categories: lifestyle, factual, movie/special events and kids (with V-me devoting 36 hours per week for programming for preschoolers).

"V-me will offer Latinos the opportunity to enjoy quality entertainment and educational programming associated with public television," said Myrian Solis Coronel, the channel's manager in San Diego.

The channel is sponsoring the movie "Elsa and Fred" Saturday at the San Diego Latino Film Festival to promote its 11 p.m. movies.

Solis, who will be working out of the KPBS facilities at San Diego State University, said

the local channel plans to produce some original programming by the end of the year.

The new channel will be aired by Cox Cable on Channel 111 and by Time Warner Cable on Channel 311. More information is available at www.v-me.tv

V-me has established content and co-production relationships with PBS producers WGBH and Thirteen/WNET, in addition to Sesame Workshop, HiT Entertainment, Alliance Atlantis and others.

Familiar programs on the schedule range from "Cyberchase" and "Plaza Sesamo" to "Nature" and "Great Performances."

The network's flagship original program, "Viva Voz," is a nightly interview series that promises to discuss social issues affecting Latinos and society as a whole.

The schedule will be provided as a national feed that each local station can air intact on its channel or tailor to the local audience.

"We offer a critical mass of high-quality content, but there's also localized presentation to reflect the complex and diverse groups that make up each local Hispanic viewing community," said John Begert, marketing vice president for V-me Media.

Airing without commercials, the programs will carry the sort of underwriting associated with public broadcasting. Revenues will also come from syndication of the network's originally produced programs, and sales of DVDs and other products.

The New York-based network is a venture of V-me Media Inc., a partnership of Thirteen/WNET New York as well as private investors including the Baeza Group and Syncom Funds, both of which specialize in investing in media companies to reach underserved markets.

Staff writer Hiram Soto contributed to this story.

