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## WNYT news ratings rises

Despite union problems, Menands TV station increases lead against Capital Region rivals

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Ratings for WNYT news programming surged during the February measurement period -- even though its own workers have been urging viewers to turn off the station.

WNYT Ch. 13 has long been the region's most popular source of television news. In February, the station solidified its position, adding ratings points and viewership points while its two biggest rivals, WRGB Ch. 6 and WTEN Ch. 10, dipped.

WNYT's weekday 6 p.m. program, for example, saw its share of viewers watching television climb to 25 percent from 23 percent for the same month a year ago. Its 6 a.m. weekday viewership share climbed to 32 percent from 27 percent, according to the Nielsen Co.

The share was equal to the combined viewership for its two biggest rivals: WTEN in Albany had 13 percent of viewers for its 6 a.m. newscast, while WRGB in Niskayuna had a 19 share.

The success of WNYT is bittersweet for its unionized workers, who have been urging Capital Region viewers to turn off the station. Employees at the station in Menands have been without a contract since the end of September. Members accuse Hubbard Broadcasting, the station's Minnesota owner, of trying to break the union.

Bill Lambdin, local president for the National Association of Broadcast Employees and Technicians union and a longtime reporter at the station, said the ratings upswing "points out that we're true professionals and deserve to be compensated as such."

Television stations slice and dice ratings data into many demographic categories. Some categories are considered more important than others, simply because advertisers are more eager to target particular ages or groups.

Robert Furlong, general manager at WRGB, noted that his news shows in February gained with important demographic groups, even though overall ratings slipped. "We did very well with young adults, which is something we've been working on," he said.

WTEN shocked the local media world by eliminating about 20 jobs before the start of the February ratings period. The station may have paid for the move: Nearly all of its new programs suffered ratings losses when compared to the year-ago period.

The most significant drop came at 6 p.m. on weeknights. That key WTEN broadcast saw its viewership share drop from 20 percent to 16 percent. Station manager Rene LaSpina could not be reached for comment.

Paul Conti, professor at communications at The College of Saint Rose and a former WNYT news director, pointed to the stability at WNYT as the source of its success. Compared to other area stations, its personalities are better known by viewers, he said.

But Conti warned against placing too much stock in any one ratings period. Long-term trends are more telling, he said.

At most news times, the ratings show WRGB and WTEN jockeying for the second position with WNYT clearly ahead.

An exception is noon on weekdays, when all three stations tied with a 19 percent share of the audience. In prior ratings periods, WNYT had struggled at noon, leading the station to announce earlier this month that it would move its the program to 11 a.m.

But there, too, the station surged in February. "The trends are up, and we're very happy," said Steve Baboulis, station manager at WNYT.

Ratings for the 10 p.m. newscast on WXXA Ch. 23 edged up to a 13 share. Chris Churchill can be reached at 454-5442 or by e-mail at [cchurchill@timesunion.com](mailto:cchurchill@timesunion.com).

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