

Georgetown County loses another TV station from Myrtle Beach

Once again I have received notification from Time Warner Cable (TWC) that we, the citizens of Georgetown County, will lose another television station from Myrtle Beach. This time it's the ABC affiliate WPDE-TV (Channels 9 & 108). The first time this happen in December 2008 I began a Grassroots campaign to restore the NBC affiliate WMBF-TV (Channels 10, 124 & HD 1120), but it ultimately failed due to lack of support.

The problem is very simple; it's the Nielsen Designated Market Area (DMA). Georgetown is in the Charleston DMA rather than the Florence/Myrtle Beach DMA and there is a non-duplication clause in the network affiliate contracts that prohibit out-of-market programming (carriage) on cable and satellite television systems.

For more than 3-years I personally pursued every avenue from local official to President Obama and anyone else I could think of to get the DMA changed. I met personally with Mignon Clyburn, one of 5 FCC Commissioners. I had telephone conversions with Nielsen Market Research, Robert Paine Vice-President for Local Television Policy who even suggested that Nielsen could change our DMA to resolve the issue – but in the same breath refused to help. I also wrote to and contacted Susan Whiting, Vice-President of Nielsen multiple times – all to no avail.

Nielsen determines the DMA based on their 4-sweep periods (February, May, July & November) whereby all the network stations (individually & collectively) must show viewership for two consecutive sweep periods. But that can never happen because of the local demographics; Georgetown County receives their TV broadcast almost exclusively by cable – not the traditional over-the-air antennas which are how Nielsen collects their data. Thus, the citizens of Georgetown County cannot vote for the stations they really want because they don't receive them on TWC and Nielsen will not change the DMA because they don't get the votes they need during their sweep periods. The net result is a "catch-22" that leaves the citizens in the perilous position of not receiving the TV coverage from their true community of interest... and this is a hazard!

The hazards are multiple; Georgetown citizens don't receive the local news, weather and emergency information where they live, work and do business. The emergency information is twofold: one is weather, and this is particularly important because of the potential for tropical storms and hurricanes and two, the police and traffic emergencies.

Finally, unless you are willing to accept that we will only get television broadcasts from Charleston in the future, I implore all the citizens of Georgetown to contact all their elected officials, the Nielsen Company and write letters to all your local newspapers demanding that the DMA be changed. There is power in our numbers if we all participate in the effort as I have done.

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