

# Let people have a say in purchase of WTVK

- Joe Schwartzel's pending bid for the TV station bodes poorly for employees and news consumers.

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The purchase of WTVK by Joe Schwartzel shouldn't just concern the people who own the local FOX station. (Re: WTVK sale concerns WFTX 8/5/2006).

This purchase would constitute what may be the biggest media conglomeration ever in the Southwest Florida market.

Such an unprecedented number of media outlets under one man's control isn't just bad for his competitors, it's bad for all of us.

Journal Communications, the company that owns WFTX, is right to suspect that the connections among Schwartzel, WINK and WTVK might be closer than they look on

paper.

Schwartzel, once the WINK-TV general manager, has severed ties from the television station legally.

Nevertheless, he still has the biggest office in the building that houses the TV station and his radio stations.

The smell of his management style permeates both Fort Myers Broadcasting and Meridian Broadcasting.

It's reasonable to expect that Sun Broadcasting, the company formed to buy WTVK, will just be a further extension of his de-facto empire.

Having worked for Schwartzel's radio company, Meridian Broadcasting, and the company that owns WINK, Fort Myers Broadcasting, there was not much difference.

WINK's news was our news, our content was their content.

Conditions and pay were equally oppressive regardless of what name appeared on our checks.

The sentiment that "Joe is the guy who really runs the show," was very prevalent albeit whispered during my time working for both companies.

### **Ask the questions**

During my time at Meridian, the radio company, there was little, if any, substantial news coverage.

It was essentially rewriting and regurgitation of the work done by WINK-TV reporters and producers.

Legally and technically, there was nothing wrong with that, but the public own the airwaves in our country. As good proprietors of that commodity, we should be concerned.

There are legitimate questions being asked by WFTX that we should be asking as well.

What do we get in exchange for granting Schwartzel an extra license?

Do we get a repackaged product, or truly original programming? What kind of news product, if any, will we have when Schwartzel owns WTVK?

Will that station have an arrangement similar to what the radio stations and WINK-

TV had?

The other factor we should consider (although I'm quite sure the FCC would not weigh this as a factor) is the kind of commercial contribution Schwartzel makes in our community.

The multimillion-dollar Schwartzel industries fail to contribute to the local economy in any significant way.

In fact, it can be argued that as he acquires more media outlets, he eliminates decent jobs in favor of paying low-skill wages to the high-skill professionals.

This was the case when he purchased Palmer Communications in 1996 and terminated numerous employees.

Those who did stay on with the company were rewarded with stagnant salaries and diminishing benefits.

### **FCC approval likely**

It's unlikely the FCC will reject Schwartzel's license application.

Rejections are uncommon. The agency has in recent years favored loosening ownership limits.

Sadly, it doesn't seem the government provides any clear mechanism for the public to contribute to the process without having to hire an attorney.

When I requested documents of an FCC employee, I was asked if I was "in town" as in, Washington, D.C.

The FOX documents and Schwartzel's reply weren't available on-line.

When I asked about submitting public comment in the case, I was told first that there was no public comment on the case.

When I pressed, the woman on the phone did a 180-degree flip and gave me an address before saying I should talk to an attorney handling the case before she answered any more questions. I simply wanted to write a letter and have whoever is making a decision on this read my opinion for whatever it's worth.

Although Sun Broadcasting's application will probably get the green light, the company should be required to provide the public with detailed information about how that license will be used and what relationship, if any, there will be with WINK-TV.

It's the least they can do to be granted usage of our airwaves.

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