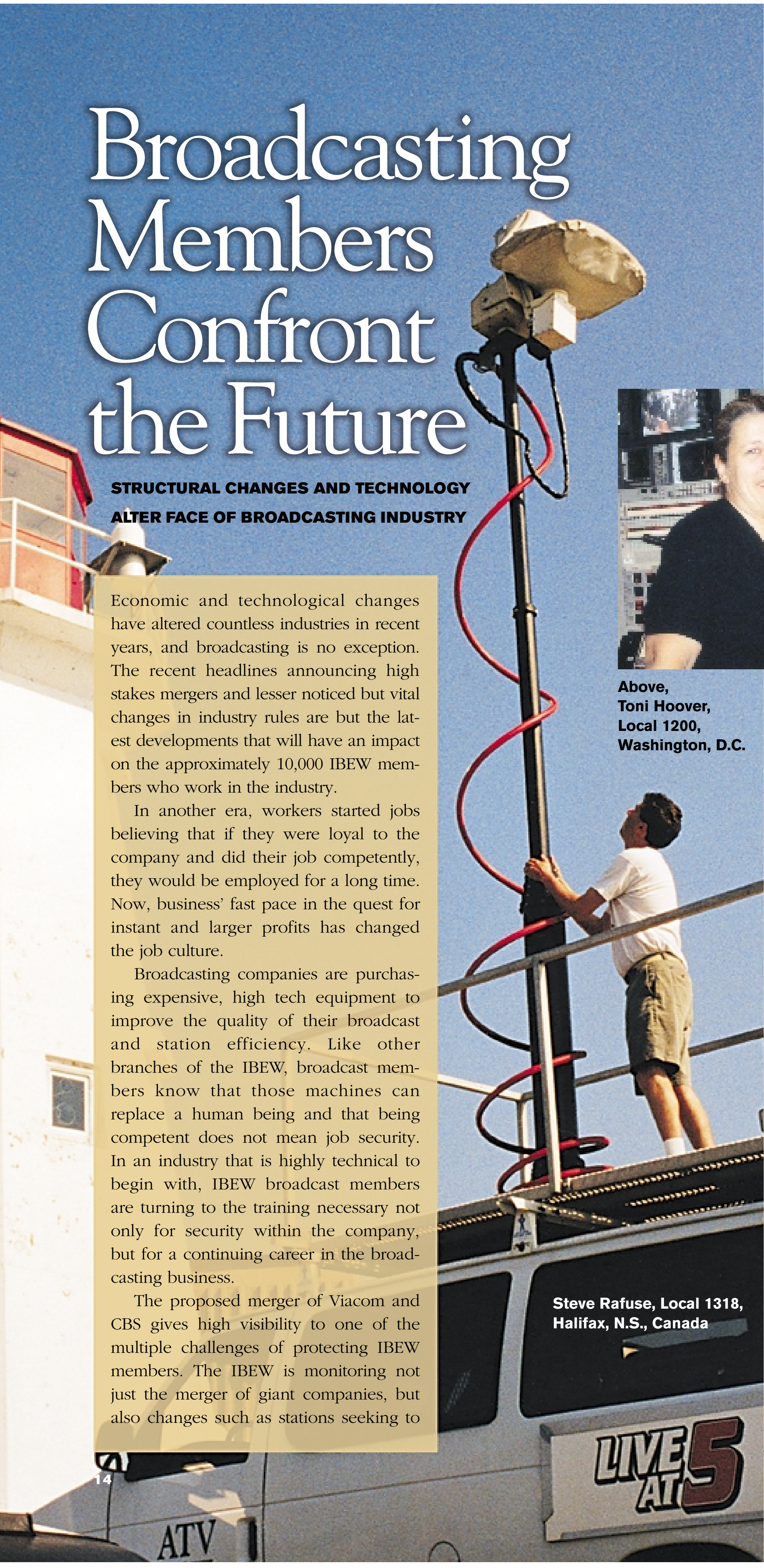


# Broadcasting Members Confront the Future

**STRUCTURAL CHANGES AND TECHNOLOGY ALTER FACE OF BROADCASTING INDUSTRY**

Economic and technological changes have altered countless industries in recent years, and broadcasting is no exception. The recent headlines announcing high stakes mergers and lesser noticed but vital changes in industry rules are but the latest developments that will have an impact on the approximately 10,000 IBEW members who work in the industry.

In another era, workers started jobs believing that if they were loyal to the company and did their job competently, they would be employed for a long time. Now, business' fast pace in the quest for instant and larger profits has changed the job culture.

Broadcasting companies are purchasing expensive, high tech equipment to improve the quality of their broadcast and station efficiency. Like other branches of the IBEW, broadcast members know that those machines can replace a human being and that being competent does not mean job security. In an industry that is highly technical to begin with, IBEW broadcast members are turning to the training necessary not only for security within the company, but for a continuing career in the broadcasting business.

The proposed merger of Viacom and CBS gives high visibility to one of the multiple challenges of protecting IBEW members. The IBEW is monitoring not just the merger of giant companies, but also changes such as stations seeking to merge some of their programming to cut costs.

Part of the change in job culture can be directly traced to the modification of regulations governing the broadcasting industry. Historically, U.S. law held that the airwaves belong to everyone and access was controlled, with ownership of multiple media within one market closely watched. But a new Federal Communications Commission (FCC) ruling relaxes station ownership rules *(see sidebar)*.

**Above, Toni Hoover, Local 1200, Washington, D.C.**

As in the telecommunications industry, concentration of ownership has played a prominent role in broadcast, as in General Electric owning NBC, Disney acquiring ABC and the very recent merger of Viacom and CBS, whose production divisions previously competed. The trend will continue, experts say, as all the players struggle to grab the largest pieces of the entertainment and advertising pie.

As with all industries represented by the IBEW, creative approaches to bargaining and vigilance to protect the rights of members are essential. Part of that vigilance is to make certain IBEW members have ample opportunity to enhance their job security by updating their knowledge of broadcasting techniques and equipment. The continuing education offered IBEW members has also become an important organizing tool for local unions.

Training in the broadcasting industry poses unique challenges. As multiple IBEW locals seek to sensitize employers to the need for up-to-date employee training, they have faced the continuing problem that television equipment is too expensive for locals to purchase for training, so they must depend on employers making equipment available for use during down times. Even when the union supplies the trainer, this limits the number of members who can attend training.

None of this, however, has stopped IBEW locals from meeting the challenge.

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**Steve Rafuse, Local 1318, Halifax, N.S., Canada**

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Some local unions have arranged for training or education discounts at area schools, while others have negotiated tuition reimbursements and mandatory training from the employer. Still others have worked with equipment manufacturers to offer seminars about using the newest equipment being sold to broadcasting stations.


Left to right: Dennis Jamison and Jeff Johnston, Local 1200, Washington, D.C.

Local 1220, Chicago, Illinois, and Local 1200, Washington, D.C., have worked with Sony to provide high-tech training. In special sessions for IBEW, Sony representatives demonstrated the latest equipment used in area stations. Some of the seminars have covered fundamental issues of aspect ratios, compression and the applications for digital television plus demonstrations of how to use the camera in the changed format of HDTV, use of nonlinear editing systems and linear field and edit bay systems.

Others have provided one-on-one demonstrations of the capabilities of Sony equipment, with plenty of time to practice on the equipment when the demonstrations are finished. Sony has paid all the costs of the seminars and, since reservations were on a first-come, first-served basis, the seminars have a waiting list. Members completing these seminars gave them enthusiastic commendations.

Local 1212, New York, New York, members have received training from HBO as HBO moved from online editing to linear editing. And, since much of the production is handled through automated systems, when computer software was updated from DOS to Windows to NT, HBO made sure employees knew how to use the new software. Unlike the networks, HBO has been adding more services. The company has not added jobs, but automation hasn't caused layoffs, either, with reductions by attrition only.

IBEW representatives are confident that worker training will remain an important part of the HBO philosophy.

In Boston, Massachusetts, Local 1228 has sponsored workshops about nonlinear editing and safety training in electronic news gathering. Job safety is particularly important since neglecting to check for overhead utility wires or tree branches when raising the news truck's 80-foot mast antenna can cause fatalities. The seminar covered that and other potential hazards.

International President J. J. Barry recently announced the creation of a special committee to keep IBEW ahead of the issues of the future in the broadcasting industry. The panel, formed of members of the Broadcasting branch, will discuss how the IBEW can best represent the membership in this industry. They will review and advise as to whether existing IBEW programs are adequate, how resources might best be directed, what organizing opportunities exist and what strategies should be developed to meet the needs of our members. The results will be shared with other branches of the Brotherhood.

"The need to fight for expanded training and education exists in all industries in which our members work," said President Barry. "In the 21st century, the IBEW intends to continue to be a major force to ensure that our members have every opportunity to keep their skills in tune with the rapid pace of technological change."

## FCC RULES SPEED UP BROADCAST CHANGES

"Monopolies" are banned in any one broadcast market, but now "duopolies" have been created under the new FCC rules. The term refers to the fact that the FCC now allows television and radio/television cross-ownership in a market under certain conditions. Here's a summary of the new rules affecting mergers.

A company may now own two television stations in one market if the second outlet is financially troubled, a startup, or is not among the four top-rated stations at the time of purchase. At least eight independent television stations need to remain in the market. An owner may own two stations with overlapping signals as long as they are based in different market areas.

- Existing local market agreements not complying with the above criteria and which were instituted before November 5, 1996, are grandfathered until 2004 when the FCC will review their position. Nonconforming local market agreements that were written after November 5, 1996, will have to divest within two years. They can also be sold during the grandfather period.
- A company with two television stations may own up to six radio stations in a market if the market has at least 20 separately owned broadcast, newspaper and cable outlets. Two television and four radio stations are permitted if 10 outlets remain. One television and one radio are allowed regardless. If a company presently exceeds the new restrictions under an FCC waiver, they may keep the stations until 2004 when there will be a status review.
- Under new ownership rules, all debt or equity investments totaling 33 percent or more of a station's assets count toward ownership if the owner holds another station in the same market or supplies programming to that station. The threshold for counting passive investments increases from 10 percent to 20 percent of the total assets. The minority threshold rules were also tightened.

Even before duopolies were recognized, employers who owned other stations around the country were able to take work from stations in one market and move it to another in order to combine or eliminate jobs. The emergence of recognized new duopolies reinforces stations' ability to pool their technologies. Rather than broadcasting from each station, programs and commercials can be broadcast from a central location to serve both stations—merging workers and the new technologies that can carry out this type of work.