

RADIO TRACKS

New owner wants to take WCRB-FM national

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Not only is classical music station WCRB-FM being saved, its new owner-to-be would like to take it national.

Although the sale of the station awaits FCC approval, the proposed buyer, Nassau Broadcasting, is already working on plans to expand the station into a national classical network, according to Nassau's president and chief executive officer, Louis F. Mercatanti.

The sale, a two-part transaction that involves Charles River Broadcasting selling WCRB (102.5 FM) to Greater Media, and then Greater Media selling the WCRB name, format, and a different frequency, 99.5 FM, to Nassau, looks to be completed in November. At that point, WCRB will move from its current frequency to 99.5 FM. After that, Mercatanti says, the sky is the limit.

"The product is so good at WCRB, it's got a national reputation," says Mercatanti, whose company owns 53 stations in New England, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey.

"It could be ubiquitous."

Nassau already uses much of WCRB's programming on its four Maine classical stations, which broadcast as "W-Bach." (The actual call letters are variants of this name, such as Kennebunkport's WBQQ and Bar Harbor's WBQL.)

Once the purchase of WCRB is completed, Mercatanti says, he intends to switch as many as five of Nassau's 23 New Hampshire and Vermont stations to classical. He declined to say which stations will be flipped, but other Nassau stations currently broadcast a variety of formats, such as adult album alternative and classic rock. Nassau's three current Massachusetts stations, Cape Cod rock station WPXC-FM (102.9) and hits stations WFRQ-FM (101.1) and WFQR-FM (93.5), will not change formats, he says.

The goal is to reach beyond these Nassau-owned stations.

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LOUIS F. MERCATANTI
president and CEO of Nassau, WCRB's owner-to-be

Mercatanti hopes to have launched his proposed classical network, built around WCRB's programming, by March 2007. Although the name of the new network is yet to be determined, Mercatanti wants to offer WCRB's

sound — both music and announcers — to non-Nassau stations across the country. Although stations could opt to insert their own local programming, such as news, or to take only part of the WCRB-based programming, such as overnights, they would basically be carrying WCRB

on their local stations.

Although the classical music format is not a huge moneymaker, Mercatanti believes it is a niche format with wide appeal. Classical-music listeners, he points out, are extremely loyal. According to ratings services, they are known for listening for longer periods of time than fans of rock or talk radio. They also tend to be more af-

fluent than those listeners.

Although Mercatanti doesn't expect any top-rated stations to switch to the WCRB programming, he believes it has great promise as an option for smaller stations.

"Name a market," he says, "and there's an . . . also-ran station that's not doing well. It may not have the ratings, it may not have the revenue, but it sure has the expenses. With this niche format, we can provide a seamless platform. In Boise, Idaho, they couldn't afford these employees, but they can afford a local morning show that kicks off a day's programming provided from Boston."

Spinning the dial

WEEI-AM (850) will host its annual Jimmy Fund Radiothon to raise money for cancer research and care at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute on Aug. 18. The 18-hour event will begin at 6 a.m. and be broadcast live from Fenway Park, with celebrity guests and callers as well as personal stories of the patients, doctors, and researchers supported by the Jimmy Fund.