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"A" channel cuts newscast, 34 laid off

Posted By AEDAN HELMER, SUN MEDIA

Posted 8 days ago

Ottawa's "A" team has taken to the airwaves for its last evening newscast.

Parent company CTV Globemedia Inc. announced 34 layoffs at Ottawa's "A" channel, as part of a restructuring that will see 118 jobs slashed at newsrooms across the country.

The layoffs represent nearly half of the 75 employees at the downtown Ottawa and Pembroke newsrooms.

Among the layoffs are morning show co-host Karen Soloman, veteran sports anchor Ken Evraire, and video-journalist Doug Hempstead. The layoffs came into effect immediately.

News anchor Sandra Blaikie and weatherman Bill Welychka will join the expanded A Morning crew, which will extend its broadcast from the current three hours to four, with an additional weekend edition running from 7 to 9 a. m. Saturday.

The "A" news evening broadcasts at 6 and 11 p. m., as well as weekend evening news, were immediately terminated.

Other local "A" news journalists were retained, including Tony Grace, Jennifer Madigan, Annette Goerner and Laura Lowe.

Citing poor advertising revenues and a tough economy, CTV will also be cutting jobs and shuffling broadcasts at "A" stations in Barrie, London, Windsor and Wingham, Ont. as well as in Victoria and Halifax.


Richard Gray, the Ottawa station's vice-president and general manager, said the A Channels have been a money-losing venture for parent company CTV since they were acquired from CHUM Ltd. in 2007.

Gray said yesterday was a "difficult day."

In his 15-year tenure with the broadcaster, Gray said he could not recall a time when any A station turned a profit.

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"Our situation has gotten even more grave in this fiscal year as the result of primarily the economic slowdown. But secondly, the conventional television system has become broken," said Gray.

Last fall, the CRTC denied an application by networks to charge fee-for-carriage charges, subscriber fees that, according to Gray, would have put local stations on a level playing field with specialty channels and American broadcasters.

The CRTC decision was labelled a "devastating mistake" by the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union, who roundly criticized yesterday's layoffs.

"CTV's license approval by the CRTC was partly based on the selling pitch that bigger is better -- that the larger corporations would be able to nurture and protect the smaller stations," said CEP spokesman Peter Murdoch. "Yet, at the first sign of bad times, it is the small communities and channels that pay the price. What happened to those promises?"

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Gray said "substantive changes" were needed in the network television business in Canada.

"(Layoffs) are a short term stop-gap action that we have taken to buy us some time to get the CRTC to recognize and acknowledge that our system is broken, and we need fee-for-carriage to carry on local broadcasts in these markets," said Gray.

"No longer can we function strictly based on the sale of advertising."

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