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Summer birds land Hamptons TV network

By Claude Solnik

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Four investors with summer homes on the East End are acquiring the Resort Sports Network, a Portland, Maine-based network of stations in vacation communities whose affiliates include Hamptons TV.

Although East Hampton-based Hamptons TV remains independently owned, it will serve as the network's East End affiliate.

The terms of the takeover weren't disclosed and the agreement is pending Federal Communications Commission approval. The deal is expected to close in January.

The consortium of part-time East Enders control a network of 10 stations owned by RSN and 20 affiliated stations stretching from California to Florida, reaching 1.7 million homes in about 100 resorts.

Mark A. Burchill, co-founder of TV ad sales firm 24/7 Media and one of the quartet of new owners, said the group sees the potential to expand.

"We are big believers in the entertainment and marketing power of resort-based media," said Burchill. "We intend to build upon RSN's leadership position in resort media and grow all aspects of the business."

RSN, founded in 1986, first plans to grow its footprint in Colorado by launching a new station and bringing on an affiliate.

RSN President Jeff Dumais said the investor group had seen RSN at various ski resorts and on the East End.

In addition to Burchill, the other investors are John Cooney, co-owner of EUE Screen Gems Ltd., which produces programs such as "The Rachael Ray Show"; John Cumming, CEO of Powdr Corp., which owns Mt. Bachelor, Park City Resort and Las Vegas Ski and Snowboard Resort; and Len Conway, a former partner in Telluride Ski and Golf Corp.

Ernie Schimizzi, president of WVVH TV, known as Hamptons TV, said his station recently added a sixth hour of RSN programming.

Although certain RSN shows such as its morning program, "RSN Outdoors," air across most of the network, RSN also produces content tailored to local markets.

Dumais said that RSN plans to roll out new shows, potentially leading to a bigger chunk of time in affiliate schedules.

"We'll put more money into creating a greater abundance of national content," Dumais said. "We'll do more lifestyle programming."

He said RSN is gearing up to launch a high-end real estate program showcasing luxury homes in resorts markets such as the Hamptons, Lake Tahoe, Vail and Jackson Hole.

"It's a great opportunity for folks who are listing multi-million-dollar homes to have those properties showcased in front of likeminded home owners and visitors in high-end resorts around the country," Dumais said.

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