

THE EAST HAMPTON STAR

SHINES FOR ALL

South Fork Signs On With Resort Television

BY KATE MAIER

A team of East End property owners will take the helm within the month at Resort Sports Network, a conglomerate better known as RSN Resort Television. It airs programming through affiliate stations at over 100 "vacation destinations" across the country.

Mark A. Burchill, John Cooney, John Cumming, and Len Conway have bought the company, which is based in Maine. With the help of Ernie Schimizzi, who co-owns WVVH-TV Hamptons Television with Greg Schimizzi, his brother, they plan to take the Hamptons and its associated lifestyle to target audiences.

According to Jeff Dumais, RSN's president, the deal is expected to be sealed by the first week in February. Initial contracts were signed in October, and once the F.C.C. gives final approval, the network, which broadcasts in such places as Aspen, Colo., and Palm Springs, Fla., will change hands.

He said they prefer to call the company RSN Resort Television, over Resort Sports Network, because "we're not really sports programming, we're lifestyle programming. It's not about spectator sports," but rather skiing, snowboarding, and other vacation-oriented recreational activities. "Most of the people who live in or visit the resorts we are programming are active people."

According to Mr. Dumais, the new group recognizes that RSN viewers have "other interests, so we're starting to expand into shopping, dining, and real estate." On Monday, a program called "Destination Real Estate" will air. Showcasing luxury houses across the nation, it is aimed at wealthy audiences, and it will tell them how to get in touch with realtors should they be interested in making big purchases.

The show will feature houses on the

East End, "as [Mr. Schimizzi] is able to create relationships with local developers and agents," Mr. Dumais said. "In terms of what will be represented locally, that will really be up to Mr. Schimizzi."

"Our real estate market has value in other markets," Mr. Schimizzi said. "We've found there is a great interest in this market, this lifestyle." He said one thing that makes RSN such a "perfect fit" for Hamptons TV is that both the network and the affiliate gear their programs for vacationers and local residents.

Mr. Schimizzi said he has had difficulty getting Cablevision to pick up his station outside Suffolk County, but that he has been pursuing other outlets to expand WVVH's broadcast range. Verizon Fios, a new competitor for Cablevision, will pick up the station and broadcast its programming as far as Manhattan and New Jersey in the coming months.

A streaming television broadcast can be viewed online at the station's Web site, www.wvvh.com. According to Mr. Schimizzi, "Last year, 2.5 million people logged on to our Web site," from places as far away as Japan.

Despite the presence of Plum TV and LTV (public access Channel 20), Hamptons Television, at Channel 78 on Cablevision and Channel 50 by old-fashioned antenna, is the only F.C.C.-licensed station in Suffolk County. It runs "six hours of RSN programming every day, interspersed with our own special local coverage," Mr. Schimizzi said.

Mr. Dumais said the Hamptons Television team will be able to shoot footage for new spots like "Destination Real Estate," which would be edited with other footage by the folks at RSN.

"We're very enthusiastic, we're working with them jointly," Mr. Schimizzi said.

According to Mr. Dumais, "The Hamptons programming will hopefully

continue to focus on the more creative programming which helps turn the visitors into locals," making them "fully orientated" consumers who know "what to do and experience and enjoy in that market."

His assertion that the "Hamptons lifestyle" is a point of interest for those with an expansive travel budget has not been lost on the new investor group, all four of whom own summer houses on the South Fork. Mr. Dumais said that plans are in the works for a shopping show, as well as a "high-end cooking show" in which "chefs from resorts around the country" will be profiled. As part of the network's South Fork connection, Mr. Schimizzi will have a hand in who makes it into those profiles.

"His crew will do the shoots, he'll find the content, and we'll put it together," Mr. Dumais explained. He added that additional footage for spots like the cooking show could be filmed at either of RSN's studios, in Portland, Me., and Panama City, Fla.

The investor group, a hodgepodge of entrepreneurs who have more than cash in common, are connected through major ski destinations in the West. Mark Burchill is a part-time resident of Quogue who is on the board of directors for Group for the South Fork. He spends winters in Telluride, Colo., where he runs a business as a venture capitalist.

John Cumming, the C.E.O. of Powdr Corp, which owns Mount Bachelor in Oregon, Park City Mountain Resort in Utah, and Alpine Meadows, Boreal, and Soda Springs in California, also spends summers on the South Fork, along with John Cooney, who owns EUE Screen Gems Ltd., a Manhattan-based film production company, and Len Conway, a former partner in Telluride Ski and Golf Corporation, who owns a house in Westhampton Beach.

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