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# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

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## ADVERTISING

# Retirement Living TV Gets Boost

*Comcast Deal Will Expand Audience as More Marketers Pursue Older Crowd*

BY SAM SCHECHNER  
AND VISHESH KUMAR

**T**WO YEARS AGO, John Erickson launched Retirement Living TV, offering a daytime block of original programs on topics like health, finance and dating to older viewers. It was a modest venture, inspired by homegrown TV channels Mr. Erickson had hooked up in the retirement communities he founded.

Now, Mr. Erickson has signed a deal with Comcast Corp., the nation's largest cable operator by subscribers, to bring his channel into more than 12 million homes, say people familiar with the agreement. Comcast also has taken a minority stake in the network, these people say.

The deal, expected to be announced Friday, will initially bring RLTV to Comcast subscribers in the retiree-heavy markets of Tucson, Ariz., and Albuquerque, N.M., and spread to digital cable systems in other parts of the country in subsequent months.

Its programming will include an entertainment-world talk show hosted by former "Brady Bunch" mom Florence Henderson, current-events programs produced by the retiree organization AARP and a possible prime-time competition series dubbed "Senior Idol."

Madison Avenue remains obsessed with reaching younger people with marketing pitches. But over the past few years, advertisers' strategies have shifted somewhat as the number of retirees has exploded. Sony, L'Oreal, Ford Motor and Microsoft are among the many companies that have aggressively pursued an older crowd.

"Anybody that can target that, and find that niche, and do it well, it's certainly worth looking at," says Steve Kalb, director of broadcast media at Interpublic Group's MediaHub, which has placed pharmaceutical ads on RLTV. RLTV is aimed at viewers age 50 and over.

Comcast, which has aired RLTV programming in the morn-



Sex expert Dr. Ruth Westheimer, above, appears on RLTV's "Daily Cafe." At left, a couple dances on the blind-dating series "Another Chance for Romance."

ings in some of its Mid-Atlantic and New England markets, sees it as a bet on the graying of the TV audience.

"We have a significant ageism bias in our country," says the 65-year-old Mr. Erickson. "I wanted to take all that negative 'Oh, they're really supposed to sit at home in a rocking chair and watch reruns' and say this isn't the way life works at all."

Until now, RLTV's biggest distributor was Verizon Communications' Fios, which had 1.6 million TV subscribers at the end of the third quarter.

RLTV declined to disclose the per-subscriber fee, if any, Comcast is paying to carry the net-

work. Some networks in recent years have waived such fees or set them very low to help build their footprint, according to Derek Baine, a senior analyst at SNL Kagan. "It's a tough model," he says. "Making it on ad revenue alone is really, really tough."

RLTV plans to invest in new prime-time shows for its expanded audience. In addition to the "Senior Idol" idea, executives say they are exploring shows focused on philanthropy, an original game show and a dating show possibly based on its existing blind-date series, "Another Chance for Romance."

RLTV debuted in 2006, shooting original shows that now in-

clude tech series "Retired & Wired" and "Daily Cafe," a magazine-format show co-produced with General Electric's NBC News. Health is a big topic: In March, the network plans to begin airing "Whole Body Health," a holistic medicine show.

Other networks, like Crown Media Holdings' Hallmark Channel and Viacom's TV Land, have been explicitly targeting older viewers and baby boomers in recent years. But those networks are aiming younger than RLTV. TV Land, for instance, now avoids using the term "boomer," and in September unveiled a new programming strategy focusing on people between 40 and 50.

Mr. Erickson says RLTV, which initially targeted people 55 and over before drifting down to the over-50 set, doesn't plan to keep moving younger. But he is flexible about the network's name, which he acknowledges could turn off people at the bottom of his age range.