
Boston Radio; Central Air promises to heat up Hub talk; [All Editions]

DEAN JOHNSON. **Boston Herald**. Boston, Mass.: Dec 5, 2003. pg. E.35

Abstract (Article Summary)

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Full Text (432 words)

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You know fresh air and dead air. Get ready for Central Air on a radio station near you.

Central Air is a new liberal talk-radio network. Its bosses hope it will be ready to roll early next year and include a Boston outlet among its initial affiliates.

Mark Walsh, CEO of Progress Media, told the press earlier this week that he expects to close deals for "four or five of our seven overall targets" by mid-January, and he is reportedly eyeing stations in New York, San Francisco, Philadelphia, Boston and Los Angeles.

Local industry executives were mystified about a possible Boston outlet, but Walsh said most of his initial stations are not high-profile signals or actively on the market.

The network has already signed its first talk host. Martin Kaplan, associate dean for the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California, is slated to work early evenings.

Walsh also said the company was in "deep discussions" with Al Franken and Janeane Garofalo.

Franken has long been a gleeful tweaker of right-leaning talkers and politicians, including Bill O'Reilly and Rush Limbaugh.

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Though Central Air has been called a "liberal radio" operation - and initial staffers such as longtime Boston political pundit Barry Crimmins, who will be a writer and commentator, along with "The Daily Show" creator Lizz Winstead lend weight to the label - Walsh bristled at the tag, calling it a "typical knee-jerk reaction by opponents to anything not quite conservative" enough.

"I don't care whether it's called liberal or centrist. I want it to be entertaining," he said.

But if it does come to Boston, will it be successful?

"Right-wing radio has been so extreme and so consistently extreme," said Bruce Mittman, a veteran Boston broadcaster and radio consultant, "that there is now an opportunity for a more liberal point of view. I also think a

lot of unemployed, disenfranchised people out there are looking for some new voices, and that could be an opportunity for the network.

"It will work in Boston," he said. "But like any new format or station, it will take time. They're not going to come on the air and take over the dial. It will be a slow and incremental growth like any new entity, especially since it would be competing here with well-established (talk) franchises like WRKO, WTKK and WBIX."

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