



Is He Dead?

French report says typhoid killed bin Laden; others skeptical A3

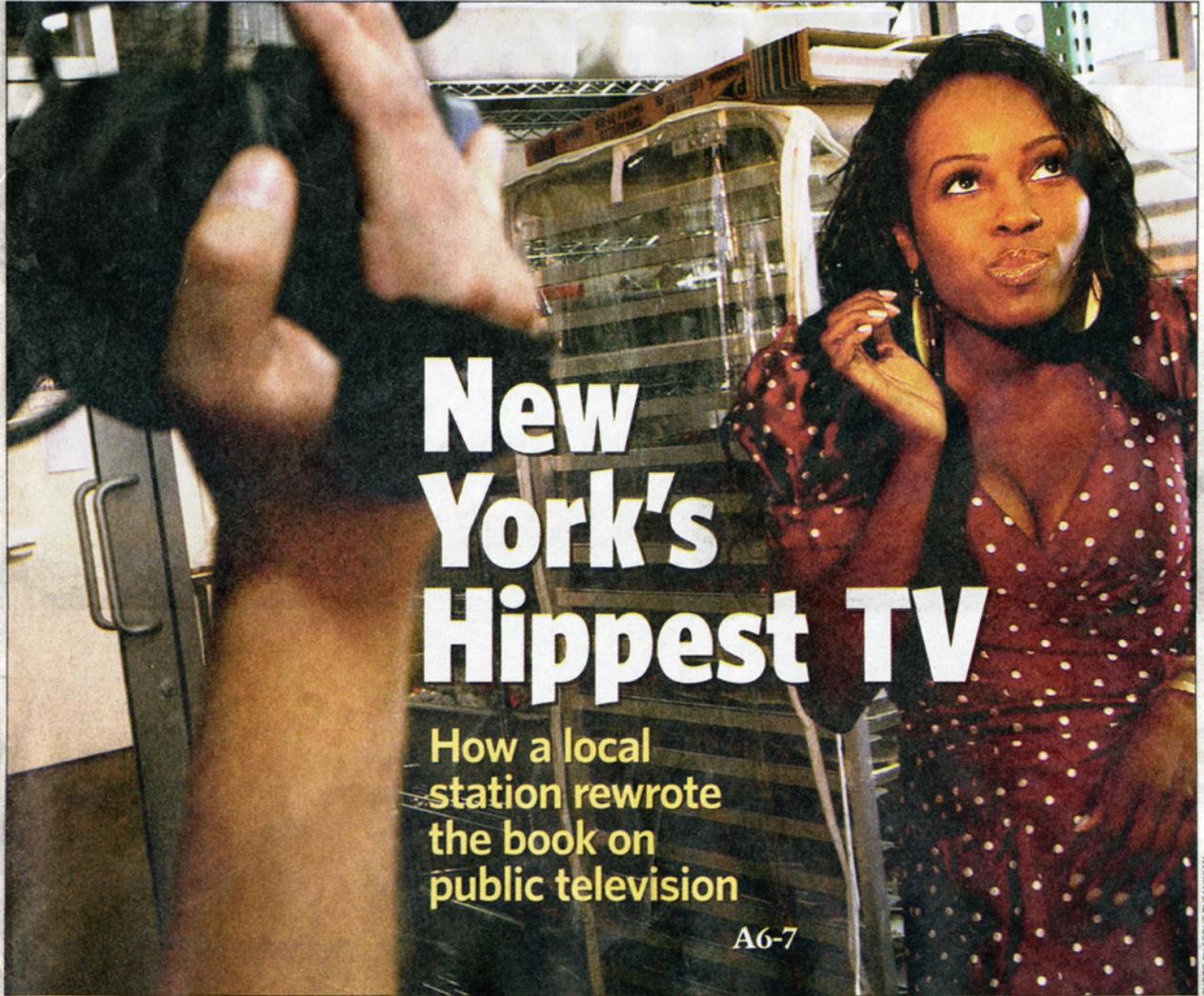
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New York's Hippest TV

How a local station rewrote the book on public television

A6-7

Miryam Basir, host of NYC TV's show "\$9.99," tapes an episode in Jacques Torres' famed Chocolate factory.

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GOING HOME

Tony Bennett left his heart in Astoria

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SWEET DREAMS

Getting kids proper rest A27



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Channeling a

■ **Government station NYC TV brings more flash, style than its counterparts, but some say it has lost its focus**

BY MELANIE LEFKOWITZ
STAFF WRITER

A prime-time viewer flipping through what used to be called the end of the television dial might be forgiven for feeling a little confused by NYC TV.

With its quick cuts, flashy graphics and programs that showcase the hottest bands, coolest restaurants and newest fashions, the 3-year-old station could not look less like what it actually is: Government television.

It's a little bit MTV, a little bit E!, a twist of Discovery Channel and, of course, a dash of C-SPAN. It's "Sex and the City" without the sex, Seinfeld minus Jerry and the gang — nothing to distract from New York City itself, NYC TV's main ingredient and biggest star.

"We said there's no reason that we should continue to look like what is quote-unquote typical government television. We have to look like regular TV, TV that people are used to watching. So we made it hip. We made it flashy," said Arick Wierson, NYC TV's general manager, who with Seth Unger developed the station's new concept and lineup in 2003. It's seen on broadcast Channel 25.

"What is the average New Yorker's daily contact with government?" he asked. "Some people do go and hang out at the city public meetings, but for the most part, people are interacting with the parks, the public schools. So that would be our new definition of what government content would include."

By many measures, that new concept has been wildly successful. Original shows like "Eat Out New York," which features everything from interviews with celebrity chefs to hard-to-find restaurants, and "New York Noise," about the city's music scene, have helped draw an estimated 100,000 viewers each night in the tri-state area, including Long Island.

The station has won 14 New York Emmys, attracted interest from would-be imitators as far away as Seoul, Rio de Janeiro and Paris, and most recently became the first public station to enter into a deal with a major private broadcast network — NBC — to air its shows.

Far from its purpose?

NYC TV has proven so good at turning broccoli into dessert, in fact, that one city council-



woman suggested in a hearing this month that it's swung too far.

"There's a lot of sizzle to the walking up and down the runway and the cooking, but it's not really what I think of as government programming, which doesn't have to be boring," said Councilwoman Gale Brewer (D-Manhattan), who is chairwoman of the council's technology committee. "I think we have the most exciting city in

the world, and there's so many topics — what's going on in terms of immigration policy, the new poverty report, discussions with the people who made that report. That's the kind of thing that could be interesting."

Wierson and other city officials counter that in addition to NYC TV, the city operates cable Channel 74, which continues "gavel-to-gavel" coverage of council hearings and mayor-

al news conferences.

NYC TV, previously known as Crosswalks Television, underwent its renovation after Mayor Michael Bloomberg (who says he does not watch TV) was elected and saw the potential of the station, along with 311 and the city's Web site, to help link New Yorkers with their government, Deputy Mayor Edward Skyler said.

"We felt we could use the infrastructure of NYC TV as the

microphone to talk about fun things about New York City, whether it's New York City industry or New York City food or cultural institutions or bargains," Skyler said. "I think we struck the right balance, and I think people are voting with the remote control."

Skyler said that so far, NYC TV has exceeded expectations. "If you had told us four years ago that NBC would be buying content from us, we wouldn't

hip new view



Ken Euseroff, a cameraman on "\$9.99," films a worker at a Jacques Torres Chocolate factory.

have believed it," he said. But David Hyman, vice president of creative services and programming for WNBC, said that NYC TV's fresh, hip, locally oriented shows suit the network perfectly. Channel 4 is airing five of NYC TV's shows, including "Cool in Your Code," "Blueprint/NYC" and "Eat Out New York," from 11 a.m. to noon

weekdays until December.

Too soon to judge

"These shows move at warp speed around the city," Hyman said, adding that anecdotal feedback has been "terrific," but it's too soon to judge their ratings. "They're very nicely done. They really cover the length and breadth of New York, the hosts are dynamic, and we

thought they'd be great pieces to put on our air."

City Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications Commissioner Paul Cosgrave said NYC TV is part of Bloomberg's mission to put "transparency in government." But it's also a resource he would have appreciated when he was a teenager growing up in Nassau County.



Host Kelly Choi of NYC TV's "Eat Out NY"

The city shows off

BY SOPHIA CHANG
STAFF WRITER

NYC TV has shows ranging from the ridiculous to the glamorous, always with a Big Apple bent.

- "Backdrop NYC" — This show's focus is on short films that were shot and set in the city. The host of the show, Cat Greenleaf, interviews filmmakers about the challenges of making their documentaries, animated pieces or just regular short flicks, in the city.
- "It's My Park" — Nature lovers who find themselves stuck indoors watching television would do well by this show, which highlights the features of some of the city's nearly 28,000 acres of parkland.
- "NYC 360 Degrees" — The channel's answer to "Entertainment Tonight," this show has host Amy Palmer guiding viewers through trends in fashion, music, advertising and even blogging.
- "NYC Paradetown USA" — The name says it all. This show features the city's many parades.
- "Secrets of New York" — Host Kelly Choi traipses through the city's sewers, subway tunnels and history, dispensing trivia about infrastructure and neighborhood lore.
- "The Bridge" — This show, hosted by Ralph McDaniels, chronicles hip-hop's early days, with each episode featuring a vintage video of the New York scene.

Source: NYC TV Web site

"Looking back, I didn't come to the city enough," he said. "Maybe I just didn't know enough about it."

Brewer said she was investigating whether the City Council could compel a change in NYC TV's programming. The city provides about half of the station's annual \$5.8 million cost.

The rest of its budget, which includes the salaries of about 75 employees, comes from sponsors, franchise fees and time leased to others, Wierson said.

Still, Brewer said she would like to see the station better integrate education and policy — such as hosting a program that addresses the impact of the fashion industry on the city's economy, rather than filming

models strutting down aisles for Fashion Week.

If shows like "New York 360 [degrees]" (billed as "Behind the scenes in the New York entertainment world") and "The Bridge" ("Old-school hip-hop is new again") seem geared toward younger viewers, that's intentional, Wierson said.

"Older demographics will always tune into younger-skewing shows," he said.

Judging from the interest he's gotten from stations around the country seeking to remodel themselves, including in Los Angeles, Chicago and Houston, NYC TV has created an innovative form for municipal television, Wierson said.

"They really look to us as the pioneers," he said.

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