KTRK-TV

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• KTRK-TV, virtual and VHF digital channel 13, is an ABC owned-and-operated television station licensed to Houston, Texas, United States.

• The station is owned by the ABC Owned Television Stations subsidiary of The Walt Disney Company (through its Walt Disney Television division).

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KTRK-TV's studios in the Upper Kirby district.

History

• The station took the ABC affiliation from KPRC-TV (channel 2) and has stayed aligned with the network since its debut.

• Capital Cities bought ABC in 1986, making KTRK an ABC owned-and-operated station and the first network-owned television station in the state of Texas.

• However, for years it called itself "The Houston Chronicle Station."

The station grew out of the Federal Communications Commission-imposed VHF "freeze", when three entities vying for the channel 13 assignment, including the Houston Chronicle, decided to merge as Houston Consolidated Television. The group also bought the studio facilities of KNUZ-TV (channel 39), a DuMont affiliate which had gone dark.

The station first signed on the air on November 20, 1954, as KTRK-TV; as the Chronicle was the largest shareholder in the partnership. The station took the ABC affiliation from KPRC-TV (channel 2) and has stayed aligned with the network since its debut. The station's original studio facilities were located at 4513 Cullen Boulevard (at the defunct Texas Television Center district on the University of Houston campus); this studio later housed KHTV (now CW affiliate KIAH, the present channel 39) and PBS member station KUHT (channel 8). Like many stations located on "unlucky" channel 13, it used a black cat as its mascot.

In 1955, the Chronicle bought out its partners. Although this theoretically left the paper free to change its callsign to KTRH-TV to match its radio station, it opted not to. However, for years it called itself "The Houston Chronicle Station." Soon afterward, the station moved to its current Bissonnet Street facility. The studio was the first domed structure in town, predating the better-known Astrodome by ten years. Both projects were designed by the same architect, Hermon Lloyd.

Early programs involved a heavy emphasis on local flavor and reflected themes of the day. Some of the more popular local shows included:

Kitirik: a children's program, hosted by an actress in a cat costume.

Cadet Don: A space-themed children's adventure program that focused on the exploits of an interstellar adventurer and the locations he visited. His alien puppet friend Seymour was from the planet Katark.

Dialing for Dollars: A game show of sorts where a viewer would be phoned by the host and would win a cash prize by answering questions.

Good Morning Houston: The successor to Dialing for Dollars, which debuted in the late 1970s and expanded to include discussions on local events and topics important to viewer's lifestyles.

In 1967, the Chronicle sold KTRK to Capital Cities Broadcasting (later to become Capital Cities Communications), earning a handsome return on its 1937 purchase of KTRH. Under Capital Cities ownership, KTRK introduced its "Circle 13" logo – which is loosely patterned after the Circle 7 logo long used by ABC stations and affiliates broadcasting on channel 7 – in 1971. The original version, used until 1995, was set in a Helvetica typeface, with the bottom of the "3" trailing off outside the circle (similar also to the way the stem of the number 7 terminates at the bottom of the Circle 7 logo)--a nod to livestock branding of the Old West.

Capital Cities bought ABC in 1986, making KTRK an ABC owned-and-operated station and the first network-owned television station in the state of Texas. That year, the trailing portion of the station's logo was "trimmed" and was turned slightly horizontal in a similar fashion to the present-day version (the logo began to be superimposed over a stylized version of the Texas state flag on July 3, 1992).

Capital Cities/ABC was sold to The Walt Disney Company in early 1996. Not long after, the new Disney-led ownership directed KTRK-TV to clear the entire ABC schedule, though there have been instances where local special events have aired in place of network programming (the annual running of the Chevron Houston Marathon is one notable example of this as live race coverage, anchored by the station's news team, pre-empted the Sunday edition of Good Morning America).

On April 30, 2000, a dispute between Disney and Time Warner Cable resulted in KTRK being pulled from TWC's Houston service area for over 24 hours. Other ABC stations in markets served by Time Warner Cable, such as New York City, Los Angeles and Raleigh-Durham, were also affected by the outage before the FCC forced the provider to restore the affected ABC stations to those areas on May 2 (Time Warner traded the Houston franchise to Comcast in exchange for the latter's Dallas-Fort Worth system in 2007).

As of 2019, KTRK is the only major network affiliate in Houston that continues to occupy its legacy studios from the 20th century. Fox owned-and-operated KRIV (channel 26) relocated to its current facility in 1997, while in 2017 KPRC-TV constructed a new studio complex in the parking lot of its previous 1970s-era facility that would later be demolished. CBS affiliate KHOU (channel 11) would lose its facilities (originally built in 1960) to damage from Hurricane Harvey later in 2017 and eventually relocated to an office building along Westheimer Road near Uptown Houston. Consequently, KTRK is now also the only Big Three affiliate with studios located inside Loop 610.

Digital television

Digital channels

• The station's digital channel is multiplexed:

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Analog-to-digital conversion

• As most of ABC's owned-and-operated stations moved their digital channels to their former analog allocation post-transition, the station's digital signal relocated from its pre-transition UHF channel 32 to VHF channel 13 for post-transition operations.

• Even though Live Well no longer produces original programming and is essentially moribund as of 2015, the ABC Owned Television Stations division continues to program Live Well on the second digital subchannels of KTRK and its other ABC O&Os.

KTRK-TV discontinued regular programming on its analog signal, over VHF channel 13, on June 12, 2009, as part of the federally mandated transition from analog to digital television. As most of ABC's owned-and-operated stations moved their digital channels to their former analog allocation post-transition, the station's digital signal relocated from its pre-transition UHF channel 32 to VHF channel 13 for post-transition operations.

The station's two digital subchannels, which originally featured additional news coverage and features programming on 13.2 and The Local AccuWeather Channel on 13.3, would eventually take on their current subchannel affiliations upon their respective launches (2009 in the case of Live Well Network; 2015 in the case of Laff). Even though Live Well no longer produces original programming and is essentially moribund as of 2015, the ABC Owned Television Stations division continues to program Live Well on the second digital subchannels of KTRK and its other ABC O&Os.

Programming

Past program preemptions and deferrals

• In mid-April 1977, it was dropped when KTRK added their Live at 5 newscast which would have cut the station's profitable afternoon staple Million Dollar Movie from two hours to 90 minutes.

• Under Capital Cities ownership, KTRK preempted some ABC programs, though not nearly as much as some of the network's other affiliates, such as Philadelphia sister station WPVI-TV.

Under Capital Cities ownership, KTRK preempted some ABC programs, though not nearly as much as some of the network's other affiliates, such as Philadelphia sister station WPVI-TV. It ran The Edge of Night in pattern at 3 p.m. CT from the program's ABC premiere. In mid-April 1977, it was dropped when KTRK added their Live at 5 newscast which would have cut the station's profitable afternoon staple Million Dollar Movie from two hours to 90 minutes. The less profitable Edge was dropped instead, and Million Dollar Movie was pushed back into the 3-5 time slot until September 1992 (though KTRK did air some Afterschool Specials). Many of the other programs that channel 13 declined to air were not widely run in many markets, though KTRK did preempt the first half-hour of Good Morning America in favor of a local newscast, continuing into the early 1990s when the newscast was moved to a pre-7 a.m. start time. After 1991, the station's only regular preemption was the first half-hour of The Home Show, an arrangement which continued when the show morphed into Mike and Maty, though many ABC affiliates also preempted and moved those series due to their lack of success (The View has been seen in full since its premiere).

Syndicated programming

• (which is produced by sister station WABC-TV in New York) until 2002 when KTRK gained the Houston rights to the show from WB affiliate KHWB (channel 39, now CW affiliate KIAH).

• at 3 p.m. before Inside Edition, making KTRK the last ABC-owned station to carry the long-running quiz show.

• The station also airs off-network reruns of Wipeout and Castle, both former ABC programs, during late night weekends.

KTRK has long differed from many ABC-owned stations in that it never aired The Oprah Winfrey Show, which had been a staple on all of ABC's other O&Os since 1986 (having its roots in a morning show hosted by the titular host on sister station WLS-TV in Chicago) until it left the air in 2011. Until 2015, it also never carried the current syndicated editions of Jeopardy! and Wheel of Fortune, also mainstays on ABC's O&Os for around the same time period. All three programs, distributed by CBS Television Distribution and predecessor company King World, have aired instead on CBS affiliate KHOU (channel 11) since 1986 (the latter two began on NBC affiliate KPRC-TV) and were crucial to KHOU's rise from one of CBS's weakest affiliates during the 1980s to one of its strongest by the 1990s. In fact, at one point during the late 1980s until 1992, Donahue was the only syndicated daytime program on KTRK's lineup. This was largely due to its hour-long 6 p.m. newscast (which debuted in September 1982) as well as its popular movie showcases and local programming at the time, including Good Morning Houston and the aforementioned Million Dollar Movie which aired at 3 p.m. over two hours from mid-April 1977 to September 1992 (from September 1972 to mid-April 1977 it aired at 3:30); Oprah traditionally aired on 4 p.m. on ABC's other O&Os in addition to KHOU. Starting on September 14, 2015, KTRK began airing Jeopardy! at 3 p.m. before Inside Edition, making KTRK the last ABC-owned station to carry the long-running quiz show. However, KHOU, which has expanded its 4 p.m. newscast to one hour in place of Jeopardy!, continues to air Wheel in its traditional 6:30 p.m. time slot, making Houston the largest TV market where both game shows don't air on the same station.

Despite the cancellation of the Million Dollar Movie by 1992, KTRK nonetheless filled the two hours (as well as that of Good Morning Houston which it canceled in 1993) with talk shows hosted by Sally Jessy Raphael, Geraldo Rivera and Jerry Springer, and also picked up The Rosie O'Donnell Show in 1996, eventually airing opposite Oprah at 4 p.m. Since debuting its 4 p.m. newscast in 2001, KTRK was left with only three hours of programming outside of local and ABC programs, mainly distributed from corporate sibling Disney–ABC Domestic Television and its predecessor Buena Vista Television, including short-lived talk shows from Wayne Brady, Tony Danza and Katie Couric as well as the syndicated edition of Who Wants to Be a Millionaire, itself a former ABC network program. It would not carry Live! (which is produced by sister station WABC-TV in New York) until 2002 when KTRK gained the Houston rights to the show from WB affiliate KHWB (channel 39, now CW affiliate KIAH).

As of 2019, outside of Jeopardy!, Millionaire and Live with Kelly and Ryan (the current incarnation of Live!), KTRK's only other first-run syndicated programs include Inside Edition and Right This Minute. The station also airs off-network reruns of Wipeout and Castle, both former ABC programs, during late night weekends.

Sports coverage

• KTRK also has served as the official local television home of the Houston Marathon, which airs live on the morning of the race and preempts any local or network programs that air during the marathon.

• KTRK also broadcast both of the Houston Dynamo's MLS Cup titles (which both aired on ABC in 2006 and 2007 as part of that network's Major League Soccer coverage) and also carries select nationally televised Houston Rockets games via ABC's network coverage of the NBA.

KTRK has been the official television home of the Houston Texans since the team began play in 2002. The station has televised all of the NFL franchise's preseason games that are not carried on national television since the team's inception, and also carries Texans 360, a weekly recap of highlights and news coverage of the Texans, on Saturday nights at 11:00 p.m. following its 10 p.m. newscast throughout the entire year. In addition during the Texans' regular season, KTRK airs the post-game show Houston Texans Inside the Game (hosted by sports director Greg Bailey and Spencer Tillman) on Sunday nights at 10:35 p.m.; a recap where Bailey and Texans head coach Bill O'Brien review the previous Sunday's game during KTRK's 6 p.m. newscast the day following the Texans game (usually on Mondays); and Extra Points: Houston Texans Edition, an extension of its sports program Extra Points, on Saturdays at 6:30 p.m. KTRK also has the right of first refusal to Texans Monday night games thanks to its common ownership with ESPN, usually deferring to another station in the Houston market when it conflicts with live telecasts of ABC's Dancing with the Stars.

KTRK also has served as the official local television home of the Houston Marathon, which airs live on the morning of the race and preempts any local or network programs that air during the marathon.

Historically, KTRK was the original television home of the Houston Astros, from the team's inaugural season in 1962 until 1971; however, the station only aired the team's Sunday afternoon road games. It also broadcast any Astros games that were part of ABC's broadcast contract with Major League Baseball from 1976 to 1989. KTRK also broadcast both of the Houston Dynamo's MLS Cup titles (which both aired on ABC in 2006 and 2007 as part of that network's Major League Soccer coverage) and also carries select nationally televised Houston Rockets games via ABC's network coverage of the NBA.

News operation

• On September 10, 2018, KTRK became the first television station in Texas to air a 3 p.m. newscast.

• Appropriate for a station with roots in the Houston Chronicle, KTRK has long been a very news-intensive station.

• On August 13, 2007, KTRK became the second television station in the Houston market to begin broadcasting portions of its local newscasts in high definition, becoming the seventh ABC-owned station to make the transition.

KTRK presently broadcasts 44 hours, 55 minutes of locally produced newscasts each week, including 7 hours, 5 minutes each weekday, five hours on Saturdays, and 4½ hours on Sundays. The station airs its 10 p.m. newscasts for one full hour on weekends and the standard 35 minutes on weekdays, and has long carried the only hourlong prime access hour (6 p.m. CT) newscast of any ABC owned-and-operated station.

Appropriate for a station with roots in the Houston Chronicle, KTRK has long been a very news-intensive station. However, in the first two decades KTRK traditionally placed a distant third in the Houston ratings behind rivals KPRC and KHOU, who at times took turns at No. 1 during this period. However, following its acquisition of KTRK Capital Cities began to invest heavily into the station's newscasts, which would take on the Eyewitness News name in the 1970s. Since then, the newscasts have long led Houston's news ratings for most of the last 40 years, coinciding with the rise of ABC's primetime ratings during the 1970s, and are also among the highest-rated newscasts in the United States. KTRK ranks in first place among various demographics such as men and women 18 to 49 and 25 to 54 years old, African Americans and suburban audiences. In addition to KTRK's longtime ratings dominance in news, KTRK also ranks #1 sign-on to sign-off and often places first in primetime viewership, outperforming ABC's national primetime ratings.

KTRK's success over the years has been attributed in large part to the station having both popular personalities and the most experienced news team in the Greater Houston market. Many of the station's anchors and reporters have been at the station for at least 15-20 years, with some even dating back to KTRK's days under Capital Cities ownership. From 1968 to 2017, Dave Ward served as the station's main anchor, the longest tenure of anyone in American television history, and continues to contribute periodically to the station with various feature segments.

KTRK also became known for its legendary consumer and investigative reporter, Marvin Zindler, whose week-long reports on a La Grange brothel in 1973 led to the closing of the Chicken Ranch, a bordello that was later immortalized in the musical and film, The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas and ZZ Top's hit song "La Grange." Zindler was also widely noted in the Houston market for his Friday night Rat and Roach Report focusing on Houston restaurants that have failed health inspections, which ended with his trademark line "Slime in the Ice Machine". Zindler signed a lifetime contract with KTRK in 1988, making him the first person ever offered such a contract by then-owner Capital Cities, which had a reputation for being a financially frugal company. Zindler continued to work for the station until his death from pancreatic cancer in 2007, even filing reports from his hospital bed during treatment. As of 2013, the station's consumer reporting is now handled by Action 13 consumer investigator Jeff Ehling and Stretch Your Dollar feature reporter Patricia Lopez, while the station's investigative reporting is now handled by investigative reporter Ted Oberg.

During the 1970s and 1980s, Ward, along with Zindler, sports director Bob Allen and weatherman Ed Brandon, led KTRK to the #1 position at 6 and 10 p.m. In mid-April 1977 the station also debuted its 5 p.m. newscast, Live At Five, which also grew to become the top-rated program in its timeslot, and saw its 6 p.m. newscast expand to a full hour by 1980. Later in the 1980s, Ward was joined on the anchor desk by Live at Five anchor Shara Fryer. While the newscasts (and ABC's primetime lineup) came to dominate the Houston ratings during the 1980s well into the 1990s, KTRK also had to face spirited competition from KPRC-TV, which became one of the most respected NBC affiliates in the country during the 1980s as NBC came to lead the national primetime ratings, as well as a resurgent KHOU by the dawn of the 1990s and new competition from charter Fox owned-and-operated station KRIV and independent stations KHTV and KNWS (channel 51; the latter operating as a 24-hour "all news" channel) during this period, even though the latter two eventually shut down their news operations later in the 1990s due to poor ratings.

On October 7, 2002, new Chief Meteorologist Tim Heller (who joined from Fox O&O KDFW in Dallas) would succeed Brandon as the station's lead weatherman, Heller will preside over the station's 10 p.m. weather reports, though Brandon would continue to preside over the station's 6 p.m. weather reports until his retirement in 2007 after a 35-year career (with occasional appearances as a fill-in weather anchor afterwards), while Fryer would be succeeded by former MSNBC anchor (and former KTRK morning anchor) Gina Gaston around the same time. In January 2013, sports director Bob Allen left KTRK after a 38-year career with the station, having been succeeded by Greg Bailey (who held the same position at WCNC-TV in Charlotte) four months prior on September 4, 2012. (Allen would later join KHOU as their lead sports anchor, remaining in that position until his death in 2016.) In 2019, Tim Heller retired from the station after a 17-year career, and was replaced by current chief meteorologist Travis Herzog on January 14.

On August 13, 2007, KTRK became the second television station in the Houston market to begin broadcasting portions of its local newscasts in high definition, becoming the seventh ABC-owned station to make the transition.

On August 17, 2009, KTRK became the first station in the market to expand its weekday morning newscast to 4:30 a.m.

On January 4, 2014, KTRK expanded their weekend 10:00 p.m. newscast to one hour.

On September 10, 2018, KTRK became the first television station in Texas to air a 3 p.m. newscast.

On August 26, 2013, KTRK-TV debuted a new 6:30 p.m. newscast with Erik Barajas and Ilona Carson.

Notable current on-air staff

• Jessica Willey – general assignment reporter

• Gina Gaston – anchor

• Ilona Carson – anchor

• Art Rascon – anchor & reporter

Ilona Carson – anchor

Gina Gaston – anchor

Art Rascon – anchor & reporter

Jessica Willey – general assignment reporter

Notable former on-air staff

• Wayne Dolcefino – 13 Undercover investigative reporter (1985–2012), currently working for media relations for the City of Houston.

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Troy Dungan – meteorologist (?–1976); later at WFAA-TV in Dallas-Fort Worth and now retired

Katie McCall – anchor/reporter (2009–2014); now at WTSP in St. Petersburg/Tampa, FL

Dan Rather – anchor/reporter (late 1950s); former anchor of CBS Evening News

Jim Rosenfield – reporter/anchor (1983–1989); now at WCAU in Philadelphia

Dave Ward – anchor & reporter (1966–2017; retired)

Marvin Zindler – Action 13 consumer reporter (1973–2007; died in 2007)

References

External links

• Query the FCC's TV station database for KTRK-TV

• Program Information for KTRK at TitanTV.com

Official website

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