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July 05, 2006

By [Lorene Yue](#)

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## Launching Oprah Into Orbit



(Crain's) — John Gehron's job is to launch [Oprah Winfrey](#) into satellite radio.

As the general manger and first employee of the newly formed Harpo Radio Inc., he's working to transform Ms. Winfrey into a lifestyle talk radio channel for XM Satellite Radio Inc.

"My first job is to organize Harpo Radio Inc.," said Mr. Gehron, 59. "Second is to put the staff together and third is to develop programming."

And he has only a few months to figure it out. "Oprah & Friends," which has a three-year contract with XM Satellite Radio, is set to debut in September.

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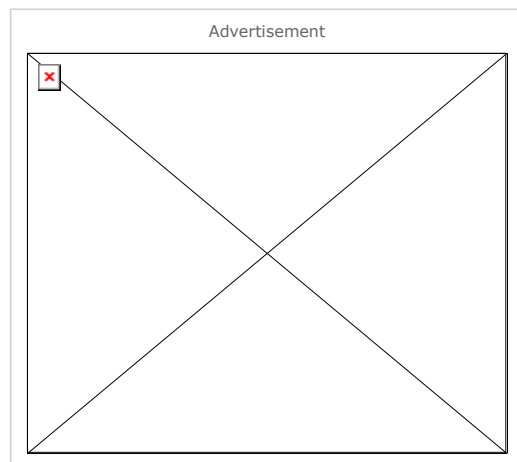
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said.

The shows will be broadcast from a brand-new radio studio being built on the city's west side. Construction crews putting the finishing touches on the studio, which will be equipped with video cameras so that Ms. Winfrey can use footage for her television program.

While satellite network has more than 160 channels and 6.5 million subscribers, it has not posted a profit in the past 10 years. Last year, it had sales of \$558 million, but lost \$686 million. It lost \$650 million in 2004.

The alliance between Ms. Winfrey and XM Satellite has big benefits for both sides, said Ron Dresner, president of Dennis PR Group, which uses satellite radio as a marketing and advertising tool for its clients.

"The revenue potential will be tremendous," Mr. Dresner said. "She's worth a lot of money to a satellite station trying to reach a female market. She brings advertising."

"Oprah & Friends" also puts XM Satellite Radio in more direct competition with Sirius Satellite Radio, its smaller rival which has sought to brand shows by high-powered personalities such as Martha Stewart. In September 2007, Barbara Walters will begin rebroadcasting interviews she's conducted for the past 30 years.

While this is the first time Mr. Gehron has worked with satellite radio in his more than 35 years in the industry, he said he feels confident that he can build "Oprah & Friends" into a successful program.

In his previous job as regional vice president for Clear Channel Radio, Mr. Gehron helped turn around several struggling radio stations including WLIT-FM and KISS-FM.

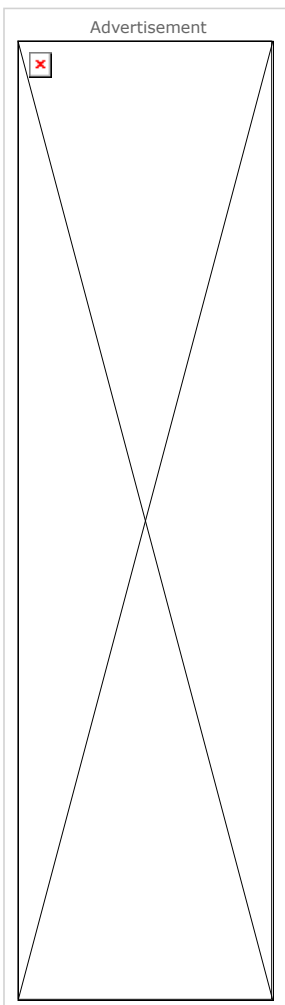
"WLIT was struggling when I came on board and KISS 103.5 was a start-up that had not grown," he said. Neither channel ranked in the top 10 among its target listeners when he joined, but they were among the top five when left Clear Channel.

J Prior to Clear Channel, Mr. Gehron was a senior vice president for CBS Radio and founder and co-chief operating officer of American Radio Systems which he helped build to 100 stations in 20 markets before it was sold to CBS.

A native of Williamsport, Pa., Mr. Gehron earned his bachelor's degree from Penn State University.

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