

Omaha World-Herald

AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER OWNED BY EMPLOYEES

Parents TV council gets local push

Best and worst

The Parents Television Council staff watches almost every second of TV broadcast on cable and free networks and grades them according to violence, language and sex. The group is releasing its list of the best and worst most-watched programs by children. Here's a sneak peek:

Some of the best:

"Extreme Makeover: Home Edition"
"Are You Smarter Than a Fifth Grader?"
"Dancing With the Stars"
"American Idol"
"Deal or No Deal"

Some of the worst:

"Family Guy"
"CSI"
"Grey's Anatomy"
"Desperate Housewives"
"Prison Break"

Ty Pennington of "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition."



BY DANE STICKNEY

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

As the owners of a miniature golf business in Bellevue for 30 years, John and Monie Thompson saw firsthand how children have changed.

The Thompsons noticed that children seemed more aggressive, talked about more adult topics and were more obsessed with pop culture. The Thompsons didn't like it. They closed their business in 2003 partly because they didn't want to be around it.

The couple place much of the blame for what they saw as a rowdier and raunchier attitude of kids on increasingly violent, graphic and sexual TV programming.

Now that they're retired, the Thompsons have volunteered to organize Nebraska's first local chapter for the Parents Television Council. The national group with no political or religious affi-

For more information

To learn more about the local grassroots organization of the Parents Television Council, visit www.parentstv.org/gr/omaha, e-mail omahachapter@parentstv.org or call 800-291-6909.

liations puts pressure on advertisers, cable providers and national and local politicians to discourage graphic TV content.

More than 1 million Americans belong to the council, and the Thompsons hope they can add a few more from the Omaha area.

"There are some disgusting things on TV that children have easy access to," John Thompson said. "It's ruining the country from within, and we need to find a way to change it."

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TV: Couple give parents council a Nebraska push

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Locally, the organization's main goal is to talk with city officials in Omaha and Bellevue and encourage them to negotiate a deal with cable provider Cox Communications that allows subscribers to pick and choose channels.

That idea — often called "cable a la carte" or "cable choice" — would allow subscribers to not have to pay for programming they don't watch or support. Families, for example, could elect to remove MTV or FX from their plan and lower their monthly payment.

"Our goal isn't to censor a certain kind of programming or stop it from being produced," said Gavin McKiernan, the council's national grassroots director. "We just don't think people should

have to pay for something they are opposed to."

Cable companies are leery. Picking and choosing channels would require a big change in the way cable companies and networks negotiate cost, said Kelly Sare, a spokeswoman with Cox Communications' Omaha office. That type of plan would likely increase cable fees for consumers and cause smaller cable networks to go out of business.

The PTC isn't so sure about that and hopes to confront cable providers and networks on two levels. It has a national headquarters in Washington, D.C., to keep a presence with Congress and another in Los Angeles, near the home base of many big networks. The council also has 45 grassroots organizations across the country — Omaha's is its newest — to apply local pressure.

The group's biggest national accomplishments include lobbying national government officials to increase the ability of the Federal Communications Commission to fine stations that air indecent content. In 2006, President Bush signed legislation that drastically increased the FCC's fining authority. The group also has pressured some large corporations to redirect their advertising dollars to more family-friendly shows.

The Thompsons first heard of the PTC about 15 years ago. A minister at Bellevue's New Life Baptist Church told the congregation about the group's efforts. The Thompsons looked into it and became members.

A year ago, national PTC president Tim Winters visited Omaha looking for people who would be

willing to start a local branch. The Thompsons — who raised two sons and dealt with thousands of children through their business — said they'd do it and attended a convention in Los Angeles to learn how to start an Omaha group.

The couple have been visiting service organizations and set up an informational booth at July's Luis Palau Festival in Omaha. This week, they're meeting with city officials and state senators. As the group grows, the Thompsons will focus on education, circulating information on recent PTC studies and initiatives.

Initial interest has been encouraging.

"The message is an easy sell," Monie Thompson said. "We want to protect children from things they shouldn't be seeing. Not many people object to that."