

CPTV Competing for More Viewers

WHEN the new Connecticut Public Television schedule was announced last week, it appeared to be the standard fare of national features and locally produced programs. But a look between the lines revealed a polite struggle to attract more Connecticut residents to the Connecticut channel.

The MacNeil/Lehrer Newshour, for instance, is shown at 6 P.M., an hour earlier than on WNET, or Channel 13, a New York City public television station. Dr. Who, a popular sci-

ence-fiction feature not shown on Channel 13, has been added to the Connecticut lineup. And a weekly program on Fairfield County business is planned.

To a lesser extent, CPTV programming decisions are also made with an eye to what WGBY, or Channel 57, in Springfield, Mass., is doing. Sandwiched between two of the largest public television channels in the nation, CPTV has found it must vie for the Connecticut audience.

"I don't know if I would call it a battle," said Lawrence Rifkin, a spokes-

man for CPTV, which broadcasts from facilities in Hartford (Channel 24) and Fairfield (Channel 49). "It's more that we're trying to serve the people in Connecticut. It's an attempt to tie the state together."

But Sharon Blair, CPTV's vice president for programming and manager of Channel 49, does see a struggle.

"I feel very competitive with them," said Miss Blair. "I don't want a heated battle, but I do want to be competitive, because in my ideal world the people in Connecticut watch

Connecticut Public Television."

She said programming choices were not made entirely on the basis of what the competition is doing.

But the competition figures heavily in some instances, such as trying to get popular features on earlier than in Springfield or New York, or offering local programs that the others would not do.

"We're not basing our schedule entirely on what the competition is doing," Miss Blair said. "We're just keeping that in mind when we are programming. There are few times

when you're going to find the same programs on all three channels."

CPTV does regular interviews with legislators on its "Connecticut Lawmakers" program. This fall, it will broadcast mayoral debates from several cities, including Bridgeport and Stamford.

"The Fairfield County Business Report is a perfect example of something we can do that no one else, either cable, public or commercial television, is going to want to do," said Miss Blair. "Channel 13 is not going to come into Connecticut to cover the mayoral debates. Those are the types of programs we can do. I think that's the role we have to play."

One problem CPTV faces is Channel 13 has been on the air three dec-

ades, versus five years for Channel 49. Nielson ratings on the station's share of the market are not available because they are not broken down geographically, but "we do feel that the audience is growing quite steadily," Miss Blair said, based on the increased response to programs that have been shown in recent months.

"WNET is very established in Fairfield County. To try to change that trend is like trying to race the wind, with everyone down there oriented toward New York City," Mr. Rifkin said. "To do it, we're going to have to identify ourselves with those communities."

Robert A. Hamilton ■