

Cox Channel 4 Has a New Boss Behind the Camera

Media: As Padres' Season Opens, Craig Nichols Hopes to Add New Programming to Station

By **JESSICA LONG**
SAN DIEGO BUSINESS JOURNAL STAFF

Behind the scenes of Cox Channel 4 San Diego is a man who appears to have taken the career equivalent of a FasTrak lane into the local cable TV market.

Craig Nichols joined Channel 4 in April 2005 as director of TV operations, then by November, Nichols was promoted to vice president and general manager. The promotion came as Dan Novak, who was in large part responsible for launching Channel 4 in 1997, moved to Qualcomm Inc.'s MediaFlo division in late October.

"They knew I wanted to run my own shop eventually," Nichols said. "Dan was great and I would have been happy working for him for many more years, but ultimately yes, I wanted my own team."

It's been roughly three months since the 42-year-old Arizona native took over the responsibility for overall operations at Channel 4 as well as managing the station's advertising sales efforts. Although he's still relatively new to the San Diego market, Nichols has a history with Atlanta-based Cox Communications.

"Cox is a great organization," Nichols said. "I first started working with them as a broadcast partner in Phoenix. They do things differently here. Cox is a different place. They want to do the right thing for every different situation."

The married father of three young children lives in La Jolla and is a 20-year veteran of the broadcast and cable industries. Early estimates from his peers as to how he's doing so far are positive.

"It's probably a very difficult thing for him to come in after someone who started this whole thing, but I think he's doing a terrific job," said on-air personality and Station Manager Dennis Morgigno, who also helped launch Channel 4 nine years ago. "I think he's got huge shoes to fill, but so far he's doing a really good job because he's not one of those people who thinks they have to rush in and leave their fingerprints on everything. He's very detail-oriented in the things that he does and it shows."

Growing The Station

Now that he's settled into his new position, Nichols is overseeing big plans for how to make the station grow — most notably in programs unrelated to Channel 4's mainstay — broadcasting San Diego Padres games.

"Absolutely, we are completely branded as your place to go for the Padres," Nichols said. "There's no doubt about it. We've done the research, and Padres baseball will always be the cornerstone of what we do and that's great; but that only gets us through the summer and we have the rest of the year to think about."



Craig Nichols, the new vice president and general manager for Cox Channel 4 San Diego, is eager to develop new programming that highlights the region's assets.

Among the non-sports programming carried by Channel 4 are “San Diego Insider,” “In The Forefront” and “The Editors Roundtable.” All shows feature San Diego residents and in-depth newsworthy topics relevant to the region.

Game Plan

Playing off the station’s strengths, Nichols said a new marketing campaign centered on the catchphrase “Life’s Better With Baseball,” will coincide with a new Padres season, which kicks off April 3.

“We’ve got great content but as we started to do research in recent months, people don’t always know it’s there,” Nichols said.

The campaign will feature print advertisements, bus wraps, radio and TV spots and whenever appropriate, a plug for Channel 4’s non-baseball programming. The campaign was also designed to be adaptable throughout the baseball season.

“One of the things that I’ve always like about Channel 4 is we’ve never taken ourselves seriously,” Nichols said. “We’re not doing brain surgery here, we’re in TV and that’s fun, especially working with baseball so much of the time; we’d be making a mistake if we didn’t enjoy it.”

Beyond the campaign, Nichols said a push for new shows is also under way.

“I guess the best way to describe our new programming is we’re celebrating San Diego and all the great things about it,” he said.

Team Effort

In addition to the development and promotion of Channel 4’s programming, station executives are preparing for a move that will bring the entire staff closer to Petco Park via new offices in **DiamondView Tower**. Set to open in the spring of 2007, the 15-story tower will overlook the park and consolidate Channel 4’s individual Downtown sales and content offices into one 50,000-square-foot anchor tenant.

“It’ll be great to get us all in one place,” Nichols said. “Things will get done just by us passing each other in the break room, as opposed to tracking people down in other offices all the time.”

About 140 people, largely representing Channel 4, are expected to work in the new office. Those who are not with Channel 4 specifically will be sales staff for SD Interconnect, which sells spots for the entire cable system. Other Cox business staff will continue to operate in the company’s Federal Boulevard location.