D3 Helping Hand

D4 TV listings

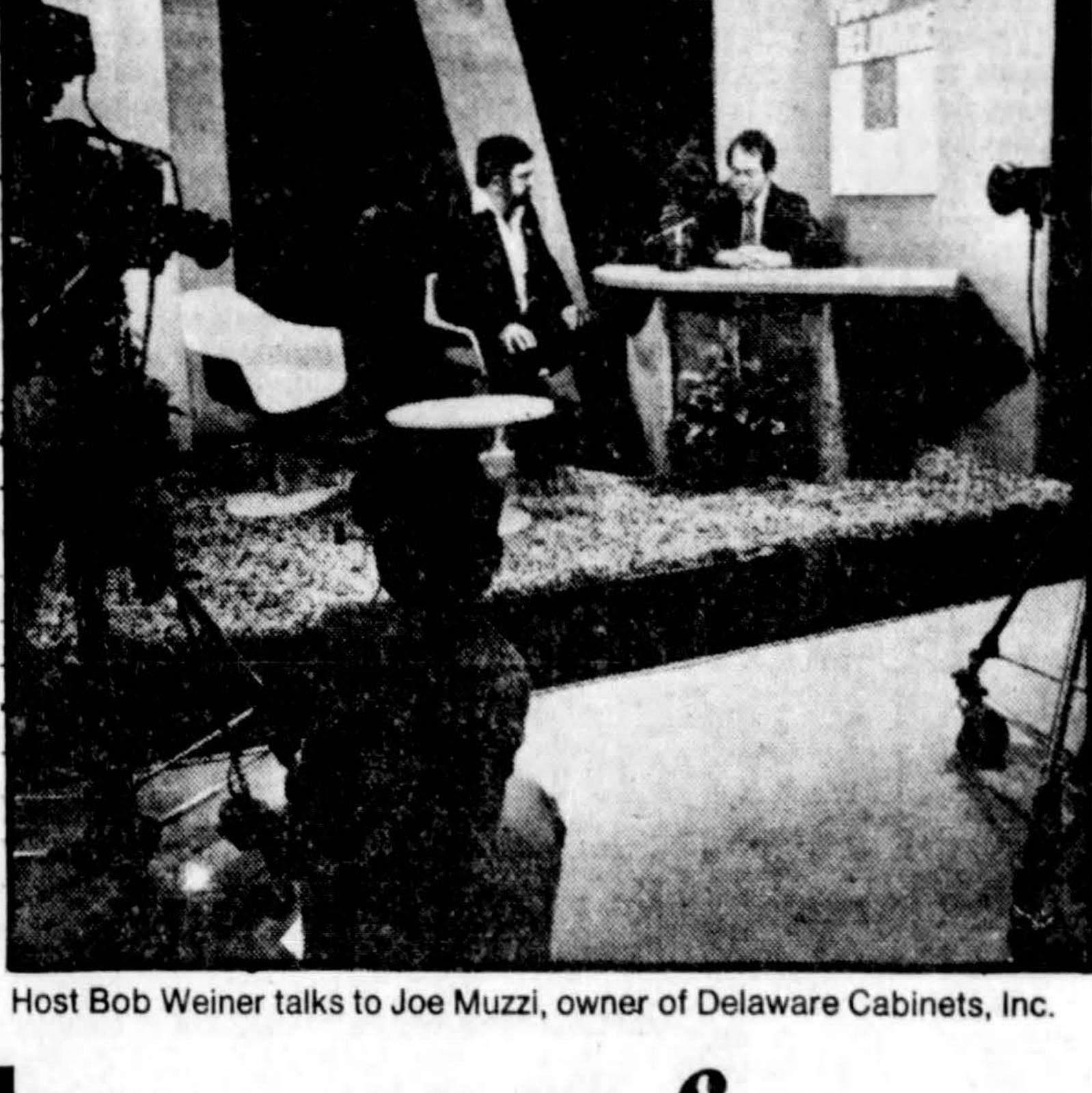
D5 Calendar D9 Comics





Staff photos by Ronald Cortes

Technical director Ed Toy studies the control board in preparation for a broadcast of "Focus Delaware" on Channel 2.



Show puts tocus on Delawareans

By Gary Soulsman

Staff writer OB WEINER CALLS himself a Delaware cheerleader. Although he doesn't wear a short skirt and jump up and down with pompoms, he does believe in promoting practically anything that has to do with his native

Actually, Robert J. Weiner is a Wilmington lawyer and a guitar-playing bar mitzvah singer who has been moonlighting for the past year as host of a television variety show. While others quietly wait for Delaware to get a successful commercial television station, the softvoiced, cherubic-faced Weiner is busy experimenting with cable TV.

Weiner is host of a 90-minute show called "Focus Delaware." It airs Thursday nights at 7:30 on Channel 2 of the Rollins Cable Vision system, which goes to about 65,000 homes in New Castle County. Recently, Focus Delaware was also picked up by Storer Cable TV of Dover.

The 31-year-old Weiner, and a staff of 15 volunteers, many of them communications majors at the University of Delaware, invite musicians - rock, classical, jazz and country - to perform live. They invite businessmen. with something to promote, be it their restaurant, sporting goods store, modeling school or state - as is the governor, who is scheduled to appear in October — to come on and say pretty much what they please.

Weiner has also interviewed a state "hero" such as Dennis Carey, the first Delawarean to swim the English channel. And he interviews writers, such as journalist Bill Frank, who told Weiner and his audience that he hopes to have a tape recorder on his tombstone when he's gone - one that will play a favorite ditty for passersby willing to insert a quarter.

Restaurant critic Otto Dekom was another of Weiner's all-time favorite guests.

"My first question to Otto was how he likes playing God," said Weiner. "He replied that it was a role he relishes greatly. He knew we were just having a little fun."

Focus Delaware is designed to be entertaining, not hard-hitting. Weiner said its purpose is

"to promote whatever Delawareans have to do or say."

The show is also an outlet for the outgoing Weiner, who admits feeling inhibited in the conservative role of an attorney. Through Focus Delaware, he says, he has also gained access to the "creme de la creme" of Delaware society.

"I enjoy people and I like being liked," said Weiner, who views the show as a form of recreation and has no intention of making it a career. "I honestly enjoy the notoriety. I like the feeling I get when people thank me for having them on.

Weiner, who has considered himself a performer since childhood, when he used to write religious plays for friends to perform, dreamed up the idea of a local variety program after appearing on the "Ziggy Gorson Show," a regular Polish extravaganza on cable

"I'm not going to comment on the quality of that variety show," Weiner said. "Let's just say that it's produced by Rollins. Anyway, I realized that the cable channel was just there waiting to be used. Nobody else was highlighting our entertainment resources so I thought I would give it a try. I didn't know enough about TV to think that it would be impossible to do this kind of thing."

Rollins' Dick Keen, a burly 35-year-Rollins' Dick Keen, a burly 35-yearold television technician-director, Weiner learned that he could stage a show for \$35 a half hour — the cost of renting the Rollins' studio.

Weiner could sometimes offset the cost by convincing local businessmen to advertise on Focus Delaware at \$350 for 10 weeks of ads. plus the \$100 necessary to produce a commercial. But since June, Rollins has waived the studio rental fee for the show. In fact, Rollins has begun to pay the staff \$100 a program, which means volunteers occasionally take home \$10 or \$15.

Weiner says that shows the confidence Rollins has in the program. But, he says, "we

See HOMESPUN - D2, col. 1



'Where else can you

come in off the street

Sure, there is always

havoc in getting a show

on the air, but the people

are great to be around.'

and work on a talk show?

Homespun cable TV show puts focus on Delawareans

Continued from D1

obviously don't do this for the money. The gratification comes through the show itself."

Most of the show comes together in an hour's time on Thursday night. Some segments are taped beforehand — the regular restaurant feature on Wednesday and perhaps one of the bands on Monday. But generally, a spirit of organized chaos precedes every live broadcast.

"The excitement is in doing this thing in an atmosphere where anything can happen," said Donna Morgan, who works at Dean Witter Reynolds Inc. as an assistant to five stockbrokers.

Ms. Morgan is one of the show's talent coordinators and writers.

Often she is in Gallucio's Restaurant on 10th Street, starting at 5 p.m. on Thursday, busily writing the questions that Weiner will use for his interviews. The writing, and contacting people to appear on Focus Delaware, give her great pleasure, particularly since it has become much easier, now that the show's name is getting around, to convince restaurant owners or musicians to appear.

Monday, Oct. 5, 1981 EVENING JOURNAL

"I don't do anything that isn't fun," said Ms. Morgan. "Where else can you come in off the street and work on a 90-minute talk show? Sure, there is always havoc in getting a show on the air but the people are great to be around. And things go pretty smoothly."

But Ms. Morgan is also looking,

for some professional benefits.

"I see us as pioneers in Delaware," she said. "If there is ever a commercial TV station here, this may help me become part of it. I'll

be in at the grassroots level." Despite the potential for a large number of viewers, Weiner doubts that very many people see Focus Delaware on a regular basis. The reason: the program and its guests are not advertised anywhere, not even in Rollins' newsletter to its subscribers. Also, among the show's competition are "Evening Magazine," "Mork & Mindy" and "M*A*S*H" reruns. Moreover. Channel 2 on the Rollins Cable has a reputation as the home of black evangelical programming, even though most of that programming was recently moved to Channel 19.

"A lot of advertisers don't want to advertise because of this reputation," Weiner said. "They seem to feel their ads wouldn't be seen on money."

no longer as hesitant about appear-

this channel. We've had a hard time selling . . . Because of that we're constantly up against the wall for But Weiner's spirits have been buoyed by the fact that guests are

ing on Focus Delaware and he is committed to keeping it on the air. "We just need to let people know we're out here," he said. "We've

designed the format so that nothing



Staff photo Ronald Cortes The staff meeting helps tie up loose ends before going on the air.

lasts longer than five minutes or so. Our philosophy is that if you don't like what's going on you should stick around because there will be

works are trying so hard to appeal to the great American mean that they're missing a lot of people on the fringes. We see ourselves as trysomething different coming right ing to appeal to that segment of the population." up. We also believe that the net-

Weiner is proud of the enthusiasm surrounding the show, which, he says, comes from the volunteers. The show offers practically anyone a chance to work in television, even without previous experience. Several college and high school students are taking advantange of the

opportunity. One of them is Steve "Turnbuckle" Turnberger of Newark, a likably brash and angular 20-yearold who wants to be a professional sportscaster. Each week Turnberger offers sports commentary on topical issues and gives the highlights of the past week's important games. Turnberger learned his technique from listening to professional sportscasters on television and from taking a tape recorder to all types of games and recording his own play-by-play. He rarely relies on notes now and seldom does his crisp, professional voice falter. though the crew often tries to make him laugh.

"He's real good," said Ms. Morgan, while watching from the wings. "A lot of us feel he's got a bright future ahead of him in broad-

casting."

Weiner agrees. "Working with the young people on this program is one of the things that makes us feel special," he said. "We're helping them get their start and that's pretty important right there."