

Kerry Healey (right), former Massachusetts lieutenant governor, with Harvard professor Kit Parker in a scene for NESN's "Shining City."

At NESN, a new game plan

Network is adding shows on lifestyle and technology to its sports lineup

By Johnny Diaz
GLOBE STAFF

New England Sports Network is best known for its broadcasts of Red Sox and Bruins games and their pre- and post-game coverage. Now the Watertown-based network is introducing a change-up to its programming.

Beginning Friday, the regional sports outlet, which is majority-owned by the Sox' parent company, will launch a "Made In New England" lifestyle programming block with new sports celebrity and technology-based shows from Linda Pizzuti Henry — wife of Red Sox owner John Henry — and Kerry Healey, the former Massachusetts lieutenant governor.

The shows, called "After the Game" and "Shining City," are an attempt by the station to reach new viewers who aren't necessarily sports fans but who may watch entertainment and science-related shows, as the network's bread-and-butter programming — baseball games — is declining. Although the network regularly has some of the most-watched programs in Boston every week, according to the Nielsen Co., its Red Sox ratings have fallen in the first half of the season, almost by

36 percent from the same period last year.

"NESN is becoming through these programs more of an entertainment channel with a sports base," said Stephen A. Greyser, a Harvard Business School professor who specializes in sports brand marketing.

Joel Feld, executive vice president of programming and executive producer at NESN, said the new programming changes aren't related to the recent Red Sox ratings slip, but rather the programming block has been in development for more than a year. He said he wants to bring more of its key viewers, adults 25 to 54, to other areas of the network's schedule where reruns of baseball and hockey game coverage typically run.

"We obviously attract a great number of baseball and hockey fans," said Feld. Five Red Sox games last week ranked among the top 10 most-watched shows in Boston. "Our goal is to expand ourselves and expand our programming."

New England Sports Ventures, which owns the

Red Sox, also owns 80 percent of NESN. The Globe's parent company, The New York Times Co., owns 16.6 percent of New England Sports Ventures.

NESN has experimented with adding lifestyle programming before. In 2007, the network introduced "Sox Appeal," a reality dating show that followed a couple on a blind date during a Red Sox game at Fenway Park. NESN canceled that show after two seasons. Last year, NESN added "Pocket Money," a quiz show that will air at 5 p.m. on Fridays this fall and questions people on the street about their sports knowledge.

But this is the first time the network has pushed so many lifestyle shows in one year. Both the new shows will join "Pocket Money" in the Friday afternoon time slot.

"Shining City," which is produced and hosted by Healey, will be on at 4:30 p.m. It will focus on science, technology, and innovations in New

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BILL BRETT FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE/FILE

"After the Game" coproducers Kelly Boulet (left) and Linda Pizzuti Henry.

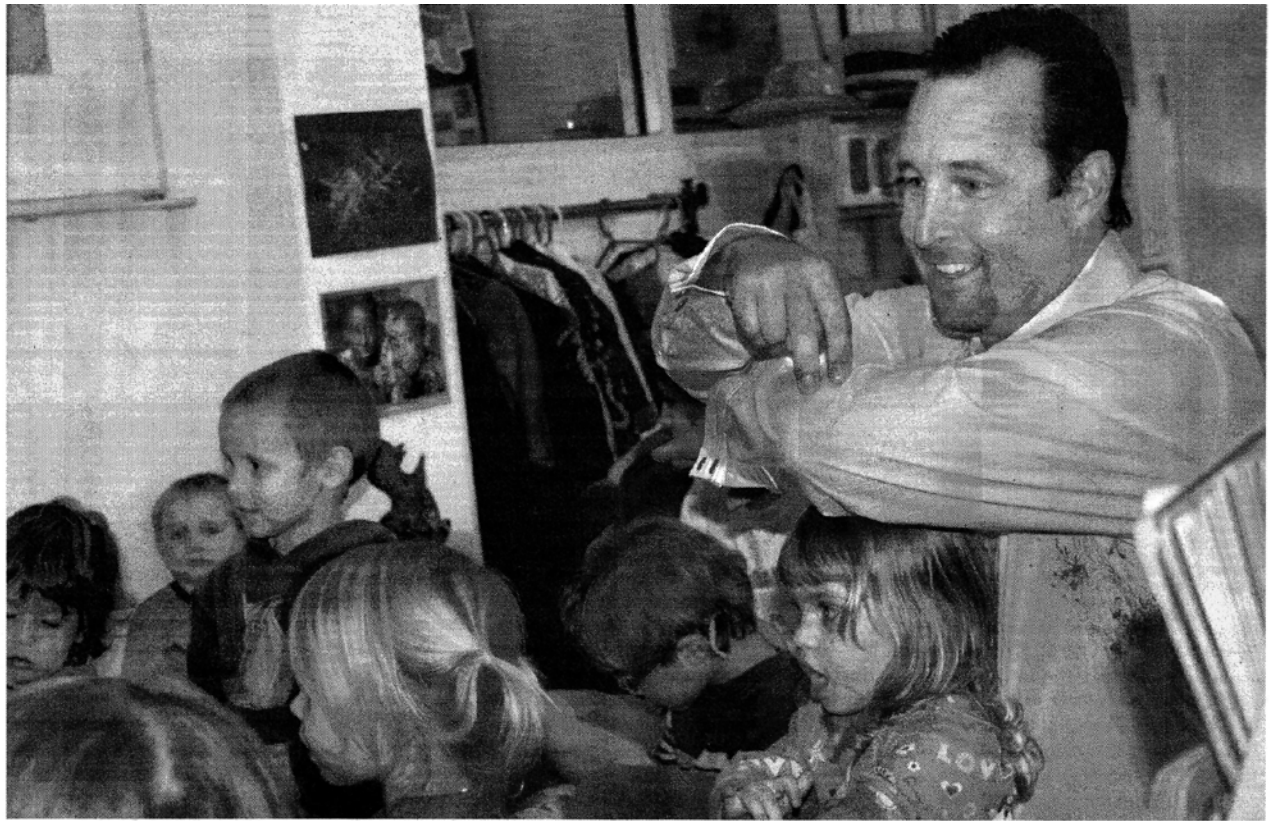
THE MOST WATCHED SHOWS IN BOSTON FOR THE WEEK OF AUG. 16- 22

	Viewers
1. WFXT: NFL/FOX Presents	365,000
2. WFXT: NFL/FOX Presents	292,000
3. WBZ: Two and A Half Men	282,000
4. NESN: Major League Baseball	276,000
5. WBZ: 60 Minutes	264,000
6. NESN: Major League Baseball	255,000
7. NESN: Major League Baseball	254,000
8. WHDH: America's Got Talent	241,000
9. WBZ: Big Brother	213,000
10. NESN: Major League Baseball	198,000



NEW ENGLAND CRIBS

Watch a preview of the new NESN show "After the Game" at www.boston.com/business.



Red Sox pitcher Tim Wakefield's work with children in Florida is the subject of a NESN "After the Game" program.

NESN pitches some alternatives to viewers

► NESN

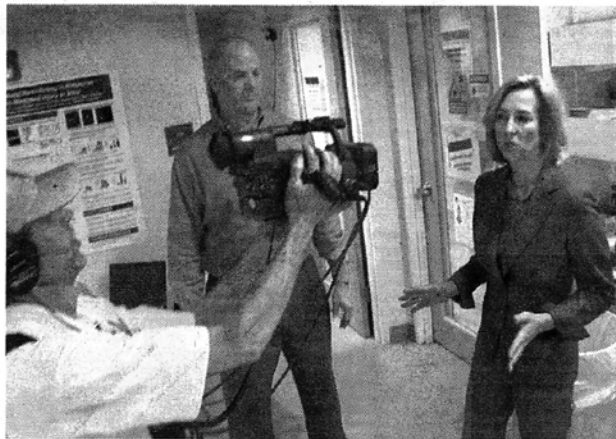
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England. Show topics range from the health benefits of bare-foot running to the concept of inhalable food. Healey said the idea for the show was born from her time as lieutenant governor, when she visited Harvard and Massachusetts Institute of Technology labs to see their ongoing projects.

"I wished that everyone can see Massachusetts and New England as the world leader in innovation," said Healey, who describes her show as "a faster-paced, New England-focused version of [CBS's] '60 Minutes.'"

The other show, "After The Game," will air at 5:30 p.m. and take viewers on a home tour of athletes with New England ties and highlight one of their charities. Pizzuti Henry, director of the Red Sox Foundation and the John W. Henry Family Foundation, and her coproducer — Kelly Boulet, who has worked as a producer for NBC and Bravo — said they want to let fans get to know players better by showing their homes and charity work.

The first episode takes viewers on a tour of Red Sox pitcher Tim Wakefield's home in Florida



Kerry Healey, seen with Harvard's Kit Parker, on a set for "Shining City." The NESN show will focus on science, technology, and innovations in New England.

and covers his work with the Space Coast Early Intervention Center. Upcoming episodes will follow Red Sox slugger David Ortiz and New Hampshire Olympic skier Bode Miller.

"It's sort of a biography meets [MTV's] 'Cribs' on [ESPN's] 'Sports Center,'" said Pizzuti Henry, who doesn't appear on camera. "It's sports-related, so we are not straying too far from the core audience."

Feld of NESN said the programs have been attracting new

advertisers to the channel, including Mazda, Panasonic, and Cambridge Trust Co. He said the shows help NESN "reach out to new advertisers who may not think that NESN is a place where they want to spend their money."

Comcast SportsNet, NESN's major local competitor, is also retooling its programming this fall. The network plans to carry the second season of a lifestyle show called "Style Boston," which already airs on New England Cable News, but with a sports segment.

RED SOX AUDIENCES

Recent Sox games ratings on NESN:

July 5	289,000
July 17	230,000
July 25	219,000
July 30	195,000
Aug. 10	264,000
Aug. 18	276,000

SOURCE: The Nielsen Co.

GLOBE STAFF

An unnamed cooking show with a sports theme is planned to debut later this winter, although Comcast declined to give details.

Still, Bill Bridgen, Comcast SportsNet executive vice president and general manager, said his station will continue to be focused solely on sports coverage.

"Compared to NESN, it's not a concerted effort to launch lifestyle programming," he said. "It's about appealing to more than just the core fan."

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