

Nickelodeon Goes After the News

CHANNELS

OCTOBER 22, 1990

THE BUSINESS OF COMMUNICATIONS

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WCVB-TV BOSTON



HEADWATERS TELEVISION /
APPALSHOP



"FROM THE KILLING FIELDS" /
PETER JENNINGS REPORTING



MACLEAN HUNTER CABLE TV



BRIAN ROSS & IRA SILVERMAN
NBC NEWS



BOB FISHMAN/CBS SPORTS



JAMES L. BROOKS



CHILDREN'S TELEVISION
WORKSHOP

EXCELLENCE

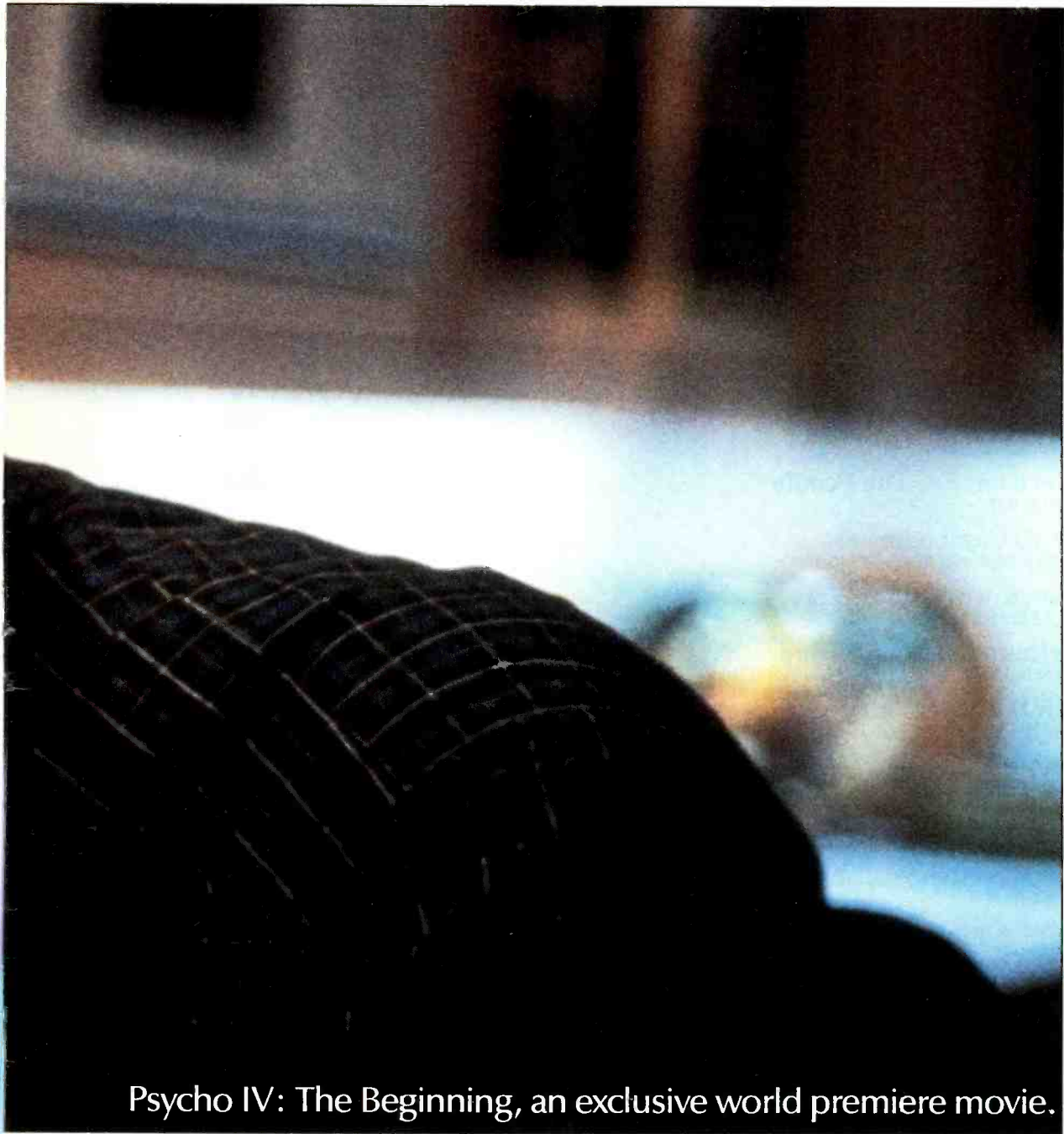
1990

A salute to the television that
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Pick up the phone and call your SHOWTIME representative before it's too late... THE BEGINNING. This psychological thriller brings back Anthony Perkins as the massive promotional and marketing support to heighten awareness for this on the edge of their seats. So if you're looking for a new line to attract subscribers,



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SHOWTIME
IT PAYS TO BE DIFFERENT™

CHANNELS

THE BUSINESS OF COMMUNICATIONS

VOLUME 10, NUMBER 15

OCTOBER 22, 1990



Excellence 1990	17
Still The Golden Years	20
WCVB/BOSTON	
Television For The People	30
APPALSHOP	
Off To Cambodia	34
PETER JENNINGS REPORTING	
Hometown Heroes	38
MACLEAN HUNTER	
Partnered Against Crime	50
BRIAN ROSS & IRA SILVERMAN/NBC NEWS	
Fish Does His Thing	54
BOB FISHMAN/CBS SPORTS	
Serious Comedy	60
JAMES L. BROOKS	
TV Learns How To Teach	64
CHILDREN'S TELEVISION WORKSHOP	
Past Excellence	68



OPERATIONS

MARKETING & PROMOTION	8
Pay Cable's Chameleon The smallest of the top-four pay services goes pay-per-view to increase penetration. BY RICHARD KATZ	
SALES	12
Packaged Vision Petry's versatile marketing idea lures ad dollars away from packaged-goods promotion budgets. BY AL JAFFE	

DEPARTMENTS

EDITOR'S NOTE	6
SOUND BITES From an interview with Nickelodeon and Nick at Nite president Gerry Laybourne.	70
RUNNING THE NUMBERS Overbuild Bills How much do consumers pay for cable when they can choose between two providers?	72

COVER ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN MEICZINGER

THERE'S ONLY ONE #1 BASIC CABLE NETWORK IN PRIME TIME.

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so satisfied, they've made USA
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Network.

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Source: NHI Cable Network Audience Composition Report, Mon.-Sun., 8-11 pm, 2nd Quarter 1990.

A M E R I C A ' S F A V O R I T E C A B L E N E T W O R K



MERYL STREEP Battles producers for better women's roles.



SAM KINISON Loud mouth comic comes clean.



MARTINA NAVRATILOVA Exclusive: She talks candidly about life on and off the court.



MARIO CUOMO Will he ever run for President?



CHRISTIAN SLATER New attitude for Hollywood's bad boy.



MADONNA She shrewdly rules a multi-million dollar media machine.



CARRIE FISHER Back on top after hitting rock bottom.



PETE SAMPRAS Will early success spoil the youngest U.S. Open Champ?



MICHAEL MILKEN Can the junk bond mastermind avoid jail?



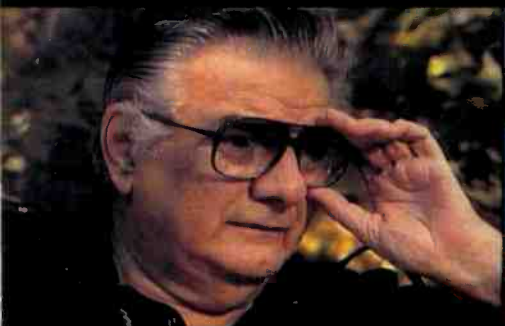
STEVEN BOCHCO Why he's TV's top risk-taker.



HELEN HUNT Exclusive: Oil heiress confronted by the burden of wealth.



GERALDINE FERRARO Fighting to get back into the game.



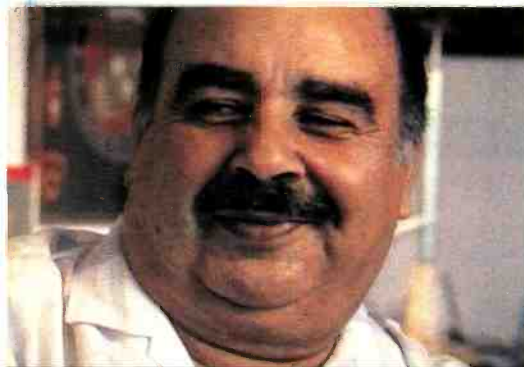
JIMMY THE GREEK He begs for a comeback after that racial slur.



JOE KENNEDY Heir apparent to America's political dynasty.



ISAAC MIZRAHI At only 28, he's fashion's hottest original.



SARKIS SOGHANALIAN Arms dealing profiteer or pro-American patriot?



MALCOLM FORBES, JR. Taking on responsibility for the Forbes empire.



KEENAN IVORY WAYANS Comedy genius behind today's hippest television show.



DAVID RABHAN Exclusive: Iranian hostage rebuilds his life after 11 years of terror.



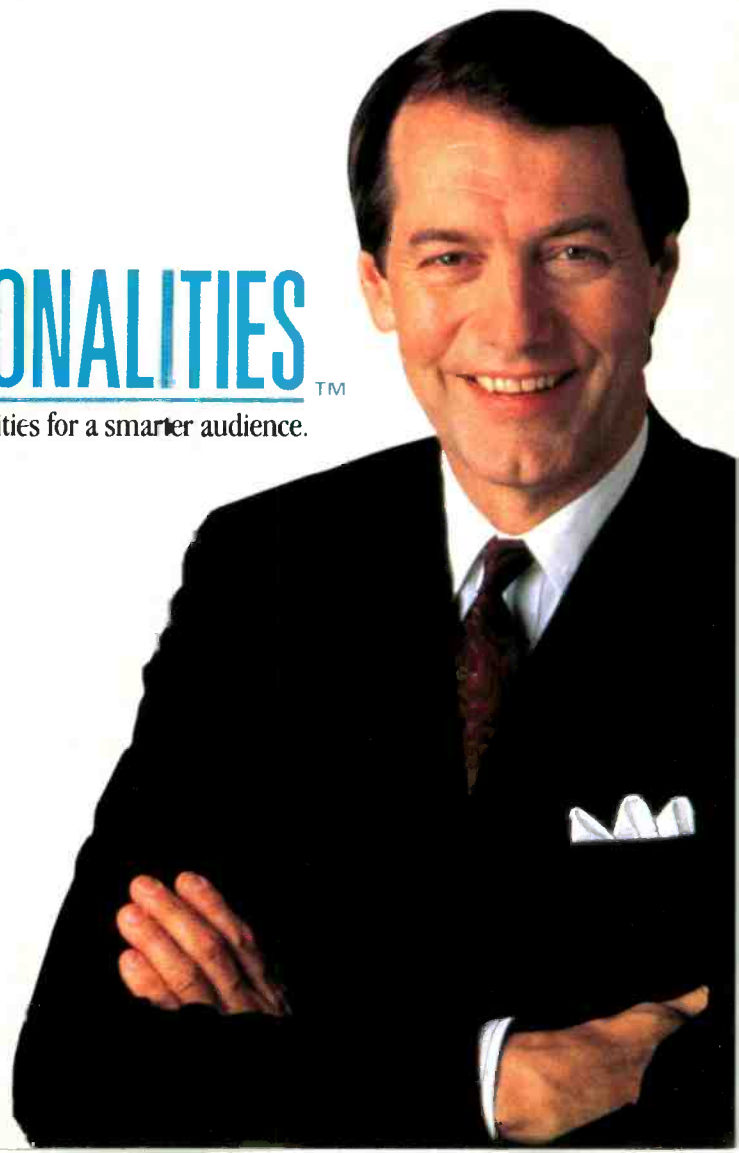
BILL COSBY Exclusive: He takes on his greatest challenge yet - Bart Simpson.

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CHANNELS
THE BUSINESS OF COMMUNICATIONS

The Business Magazine for
 Television Professionals

What Excellence Is

For a long time now, one of the broadcast networks has used the promotional slogan, "Television Worth Watching." The irony was that very few viewers agreed. This fall the network, PBS, relegated its slogan to only occasional use. But viewers seemed finally to get the message, and Ken Burns' well-crafted documentary on the Civil War pulled in record ratings for public television.

The lesson? Quality television will find an audience. And in this special issue of *Channels*, you'll find eight stories about people making television of the absolute highest quality.

In choosing the subjects for our annual salute to excellence in television, we strive to acknowledge the inherent differences in resources, mandates and objectives among sectors of the television business. That's why our 1990 honorees include such stylistic opposites as Jim Brooks, master of the slick Hollywood sitcom, and cable operator Maclean Hunter, home of such local-origination fare as *Suburban High School Sports* and *Reggae Rhythms*. Each in its own way is at the top of its form.

In "Excellence 1990" we hope to introduce you to some unknown sources of extraordinary television, in addition to giving you insight into people and companies you may already know something about. Our lead story, on WCVB-TV in Boston, is from the latter category. With general manager Jim Coppersmith at the helm since 1982, WCVB has built a reputation on local programming and community service. Those are easy phrases to bandy about, but WCVB has stuck to them, made them profitable, and consistently raised the standards of what a broadcast station can do.

Next is a tale that's bound to be less well-known: the story of Appalshop, a Kentucky cultural cooperative that's using TV to empower the people of Appalachia. With its uncluttered, documentary style, Appalshop's *Headwaters* public-television series highlights the concerns, issues and cultural richness of the Southern Highlands.

Our other honorees include ABC's Peter Jennings Reporting series of news specials, and specifically its recent hour-long effort on Cambodia, *From the Killing Fields*; the NBC News investigative team of correspondent Brian Ross and producer Ira Silverman; Bob Fishman, a director at CBS Sports who's brought stylistic and technical innovation to TV sports coverage; and Children's Television Workshop.

Each one is a unique and fascinating story, offering real insight into the challenges of creating television that rises above the mean.



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September 1990

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Pay Cable's Chameleon

The Movie Channel now comes in PPV for subs who want a cheaper premium network.

BY RICHARD KATZ

Saddled with the smallest penetration of the four major services in a pay-cable industry struggling with flat growth, The Movie Channel has instigated an innovative marketing tactic—it's gone pay-per-view.

"The problem we had was that The Movie Channel was still getting high satisfaction ratings from its sub base, but operators had basically stopped marketing it," says Nora Ryan, senior vice president, consumer marketing of Showtime Networks, which owns TMC. So Ryan and the TMC marketing team have been traveling around the country since late last year to encourage sufficiently addressable affiliates to offer a "sample" version of the service at a PPV price. Subscribers can order a week-night of The Movie Channel for \$3.95 or an entire weekend—Friday night through Sunday night—for \$4.95. (Operators pay about \$4 per TMC monthly sub and charge subs \$9-10.)

The Movie Channel's idea is to draw subs into the service with the sampler and then convince them to sign on full time. "The notion is that it's ultimately an upgrade program," says TMC's Ryan, who would like systems to offer sampler buyers a half-price first month to further entice them.

Several dozen systems nationwide have begun using the TMC sampler, while others are still working out the bugs in their technology and will offer it soon. Data showing who's buying the sampler and whether they're upgrading to full-time TMC service is limited, but operators love the concept and seem happy with results so far.

"We're now looking back to see how many people upgrade to The Movie

Channel and how many are just going to use it as a supplement for renting movies," says Dennis Holzmeier, director of sales and marketing of Warner Cable in Houston. Holzmeier started the sampler, dubbed "30 movies for \$3.95," in mid-July, and has been averaging 400 buys every weekend (he's not offering it for weeknights) with peaks up to 800. In addition, Holzmeier says 30 percent of the buys are made by subs who've never ordered PPV before.

Holzmeier reports 3,100 TMC up-



Is TMC's pay-per-view sampler of movies like *The Glenn Miller Story* a sign of a hybrid future for pay cable?

grades in July and August, 30 to 35 percent above normal. He attributes a portion of those to grazers landing on TMC interstitials, which are unscrambled from the headend and plug upcoming movies to all of Warner's addressable homes. TMC will install the unscrambling technology free of charge. The

equipment also activates a character generator that promotes the sampler and urges viewers to upgrade to TMC.

Bob Sebbly, marketing manager of Cox Cable in Omaha, Neb., has been running the sampler for a year with only moderate success. But he still likes it because it generates additional money without much effort or cost and especially because it offers subs an option. "The best thing is it's given our customers a choice between whether they want to buy a glass of milk or the whole gallon," says Sebbly. "I don't know if this is the future of [pay cable], but it's something that a certain number of people like."

At Times Mirror Cable in Orange County, Calif., Dave Limebrook, manager of sales and marketing, is still figuring out how to adapt his billing system to the TMC sampler but is very bullish on the concept. "We're 100 percent behind it," says Limebrook. "The pay-per-night or pay-per-weekend is another way to get people to sample and actually make money at the same time."

Operators don't seem to care too much about the upgrade portion of the sampler promotion. "I know the main goal for TMC is to drive monthly subs," says Holzmeier, "but a large percentage of the population will take it strictly as a pay-per-view option. Everybody makes money both ways."

But in its incarnation as a pay-per-view service, does TMC cut into the other PPV channels? Operators say no, and Sebbly says his regular PPV

channels drive his TMC sampler business, thanks to TMC plugs on his barker channel. "When there's a blockbuster movie [on PPV] we get more TMC buys because more people are going to the barker channel to look up the times of the blockbusters and see [TMC] advertised."

Times Mirror's Limebrook says he has no fear of The Movie Channel cannibalizing his other PPV channels. "It's possible it will [cut into PPV business], but I'm not sure I care," he says, pointing out that

he'll be able to keep about 60 percent of the revenues, compared to the 50/50 split for PPV. "It's really a better value because they get it for a whole evening or a whole weekend for the same price as one movie on PPV. If they want to do that, we actually make more money on it because the margins are better." ●

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Get Roseanne.

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Packaged Vision

Petry carves station ad dollars out of packaged-good promotion budgets.

BY AL JAFFE

The Petry Marketing Group, says William Wiehe, has spent a year and a half and "several hundred thousand dollars" figuring out how TV stations can win shares of the large promotion budgets that typify packaged-goods marketing. According to Wiehe, such riches are not only a tempting prize, they're a challenge to TV stations, which have been hemorrhaging revenue to packaged-goods promotional efforts "forced" on manufacturers by the growing clout of retail chains.

Wiehe, a Petry vice president and head of the rep's four-person marketing department, estimates that packaged-goods manufacturers now spend two-thirds of their marketing budgets on trade and consumer promotion and only one-third on media. A decade ago the ratio was reversed.

In their efforts to understand the engine that powers promotional spending, Petry people talked to experts, hired consultants and travelled around the U.S. Out of their research has come a device designed to funnel promotion money into TV by offering manufacturers more control over in-store promotional efforts. Petry calls the device Rotovision.

The concept is simple enough. Rotovision is an adaptable printed piece—a free-standing insert (FSI), for example—devoted to the brands of a particular advertiser. Its first use last June

shows how a simple idea can be a powerful sales tool and win money away from a promotion budget at the same time.

Fishing for someone to test the Rotovision concept, Petry caught Quaker Oats, which needed to bolster sales for some of its brands in the Columbus, Ohio, market. The fisherman was Phil Como, an expert in coupon marketing hired late last year to pitch Rotovision. Quaker came into the picture in March and a plan was put together in less than

thirds of the area, which includes Toledo.

For Petry, the point was revenue for client station WSYX. The Columbus ABC affiliate got the lion's share of the trade-promotion money for the one-week campaign, or about 70 percent of 350 rating points spread across daytime, early fringe, local news and late fringe.

When Petry sells the Rotovision concept, it hopes to tie in multiple brands. But that's not easy. "Each packaged-goods brand is an individual business," Wiehe points out. Quaker, however, was willing. For Quaker, the attraction was that its brands were not buried under the scores of other products listed in most supermarket circulars or FSIs. Budgets from six brands fueled the promotion—three cereals, Cap'n Crunch, Life and Oh's; Chewy Granola Bars and two Aunt Jemima brands, pancake mix and Lite syrup.

In this instance, Rotovision took the form of a four-page, four-color stand-alone FSI, complete with coupons and sale prices. In all there were 26 brands in the FSI, all but three of them owned by Quaker. Jazzing up the piece was a tie-in with the movie *Dick Tracy*, for which Kroger had promotion rights. Kroger distributed Rotovision along with its other printed pieces. In Columbus itself the bulk of the distribution was by "door hangers."

Concrete results can be expressed two ways—sell-in, or Quaker sales to Kroger, and sell-through, or Kroger's consumer sales. The sell-in was 55 percent higher in dollars than any previous sale by Quaker in that Kroger division, reports Wiehe. As for sell-through, in a two-week period in June—the week of the promotion plus a week's spillover—49 percent of the cases ordered were sold, a remarkable ratio, says Wiehe, considering that this was a quarterly delivery by Quaker. In addition, because of the high sell-through, Kroger had to reorder, adding about 50 percent of the

Kroger's free-standing Rotovision insert touted 26 Quaker Oats brands.

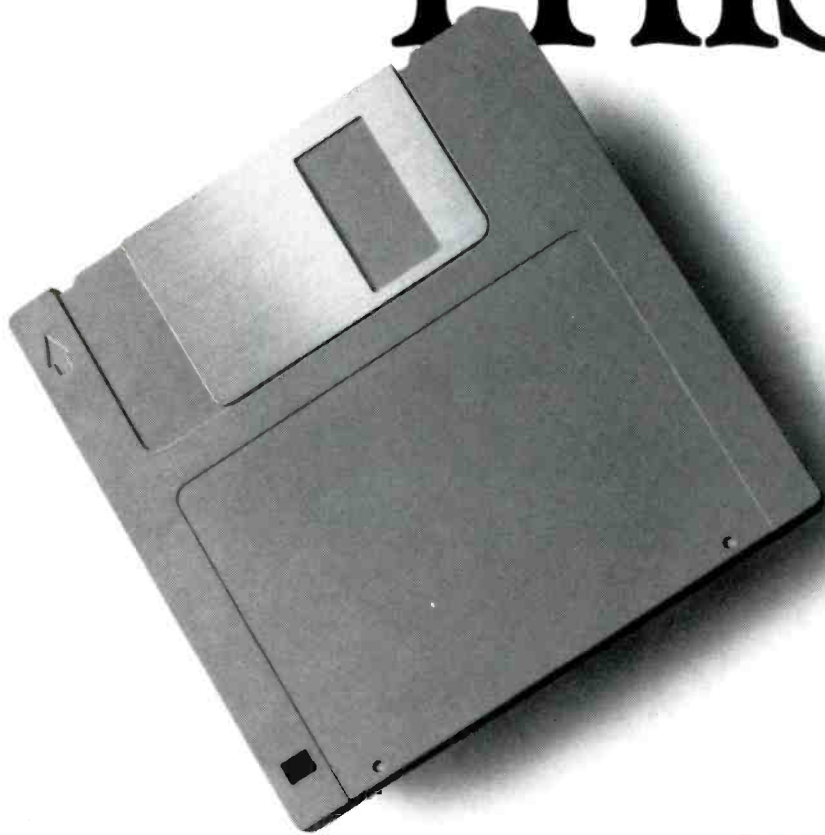
two months.

Petry and Quaker, in turn, signed up Kroger, one of the two biggest grocery-store chains in the Columbus area. The chain liked the Rotovision concept, the feature pricing and the heavy TV support. Kroger's Columbus (central Ohio) division comprises about 100 stores, with the Columbus ADI accounting for two-

original order.

Petry obviously has great hopes for Rotovision. "This is not a hard-and-fast product," says Wiehe. "It has built-in flexibility. It's a concept, not a piece of hardware." Rotovision may bend, but, as Wiehe notes, it won't break: Stations can depend on the inclusion of a high-frequency TV schedule. ●

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Classic comedy. It works once a week on the network. And come Fall '92, it'll work five times a week for you.

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A Shukovsky/English Production

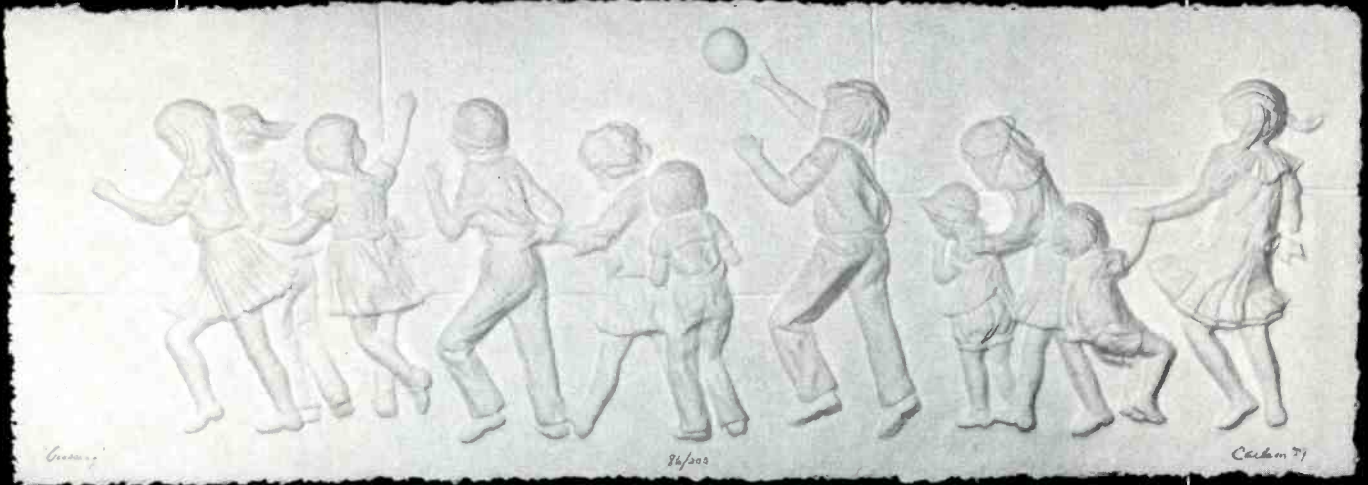
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In Conjunction with the National Association of Broadcasters



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BIC/NAB Certificates of Achievement were also presented to WSMV-TV, Nashville, Tennessee, and WTWO-TV, Terre Haute, Indiana.

Bonneville congratulates WHDH-TV... and all stations which focus creative talent and other resources on upgrading programming for young audiences.



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A Values-driven Company

EXCELLENCE 1990

Our seventh annual salute to the best in television.

WCVB-TV BOSTON



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IRA SILVERMAN /
NBC NEWS



BOB FISHMAN /
CBS SPORTS



JAMES L. BROOKS



CHILDREN'S
TELEVISION WORKSHOP



ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN MEICZINGER



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alzhemlers

NORTH TRIAL

FIRES

FIRES

MIA

UAW

Kodak

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1980 World Series

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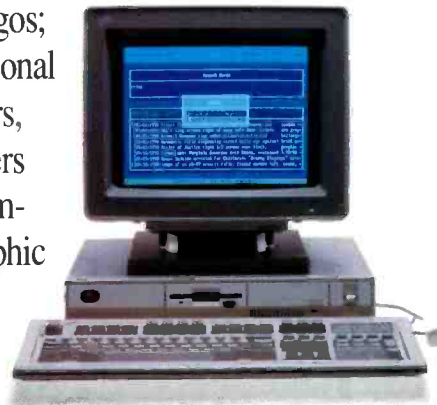
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WCVB's Coppersmith (l.), Rooney and La Camera in front of the Maurice J. Tobin school, inspiration for the station's *A Matter of Principal* drama.



Still The Golden Days

WCVB Boston pours its money into local programming—news, specials, community affairs. Call it profitable philanthropy.

By Lou Prato

The 60-second promotional announcement—featuring a rapid visual montage of news stories and community events involving WCVB-TV's long-time anchor team of Natalie Jacobson and Chet Curtis—eases into a commercial break of the top-rated *Donahue* show. It's about 4:30 on the Tuesday after Labor Day, and the slickly produced promo is not just typical TV station hype.

This is a fresh reminder of everything the innovative television has personified since it went on the air in March 1972.

"... Two decades of experience . . . bringing a world of news to New England," the narrator says as the myriad scenes flash by: news coverage from the '70s and '80s, school bussing protests, a papal visit, Gorbachev and Mandela, reporters in Rome and England, live broadcasts of the acclaimed Boston Symphony Orchestra and the Boston Marathon, a younger Natalie anchoring the noon news in 1972, Chet hosting WCVB's highly praised nightly news magazine *Chronicle* in 1982, Chet and Natalie anchoring live from the political conventions in 1984 and 1988, Chet and Natalie hosting the Jerry Lewis Muscular Dystrophy telethon . . .

"Natalie Jacobson and Chet Curtis. Nobody brings you closer," the announcer intones.

Probably few of the station's some 350 employees pay any attention to the promo as it airs on monitors scattered throughout the unpretentious, nondescript old warehouse in suburban Needham, Mass., 16 miles from downtown Boston. In the hectic, windowless newsroom in the center of the building, news director Emily Rooney and assistant news

director Charlie Kravetz are discussing the possibility of sending a news team to Saudi Arabia to cover the Massachusetts airmen dispatched there from nearby Westover Air Force Base; Natalie and Chet are at their desks in the core of the newsroom, typing out scripts on their Newspro computers. Jan Blair, senior producer of the market's number one hour-long 6 P.M. newscast, is on the telephone to Washington bureau chief Gary Griffith, talking about a possible satellite feed on a Bush cabinet meeting or a Pentagon briefing.

Across the hall, in the offices of the station's unique, daily 30-minute news magazine, *Chronicle*, producer Chris Stirling and hosts Mary Richardson and Peter Mehegan are reviewing a final script of that night's live 7:30 broadcast on how Massachusetts residents are coping with the state's economic dilemma. Upstairs, in the quieter executive offices, v.p. and station manager Paul La Camera takes a call from Mark Mills, executive v.p. of specials, special programs and *Chronicle*. Mills has a logistical problem with his show *Teacher*, a half-hour original drama about the daily pressures teachers face, that is scheduled to air at 9:30 P.M. the following Tuesday, September 11.

And a few doors away, station president and general manager Jim Coppersmith is telling a visitor about the meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir that he and news director Rooney had recently in Tel Aviv. They were there as part of two small groups of Boston media and political leaders, including congressman Ed Markey, traveling throughout Israel under the auspices of the city's Anti-Defamation League.

"We worked with the ADL on our last major public-service

Multimedia Entertainment

Honors

WCVB-TV, Boston

For

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Our congratulations to the staff and
management on a well-deserved award.



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Together the best.

campaign, called 'World of Difference,' which was meant to combat racial and religious prejudice," the genial Coppersmith explains. "That campaign is now running in 27 other markets thanks to the ADL."

But the cooperative venture is far from unique for WCVB. "This station has a public responsibility to be involved totally with this community, and we work at it every day of the year," Coppersmith says.

The commitment shows through the same way—every day. "While most of our industry is retrenching, this station continues to operate like the golden days of television," says La Camera. "We are an anomaly in that we produce a tremendous amount of quality local programming and make money doing it."

La Camera, a Boston native who joined WCVB-TV as public-affairs director when the station went on the air and now oversees all programming except news, eagerly summarizes the enterprises that have made WCVB one of the premier local stations in the country. It's more than the 21 hours of newscasts aired weekly, starting daily at 5:30 A.M., or the periodic half-hour news specials and the live continuous coverage when people such as President Bush or Nelson Mandela are in town; it's more than the award-winning in-depth reporting on the 1988 presidential election campaign, masterminded by former news director Phil Balboni, which is considered the archetype for local-station campaign coverage.

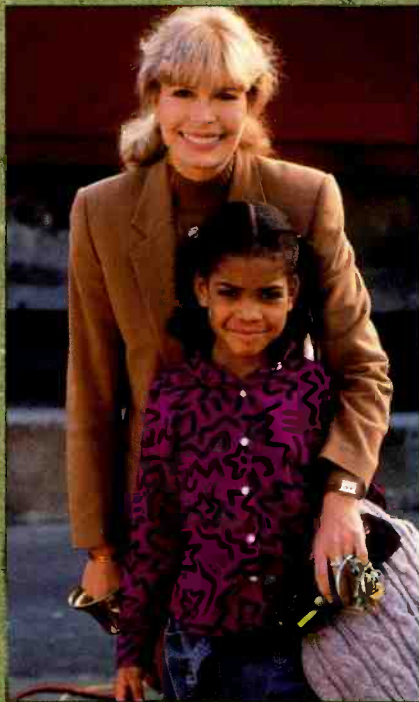
Chronicle, with its own full-time staff of 25, rates a competitive second in the access period at 7:30 P.M. The show focuses on issues ranging from world politics to life in rural Massachusetts farms and towns. Cable's Arts & Entertainment network is now running dozens of the original *Chronicle* episodes nightly at 6:30.

A separate station documentary and specials unit of ten staff, not counting technicians, generates 40 specials a year, mostly aired in prime time, an occasional hour-long dramatic show and no less than five major telethons.

The station's public-service campaigns frequently use and tie in with the original documentaries and fictional dramas. That is the case with the current effort on education, "Great Expectations," which has featured an original hour drama called *A Matter of Principal*, starring actress Loretta Swit, and another, *The Cheats*, which also aired as an ABC network "Afterschool Special" last year. "Great Expectations" has now been syndicated to over 40 markets covering about 50 percent of the nation's viewers. The next campaign, to begin in January, already has a national sponsor and also will be sold into syndication, in 1992.

"For 18 1/2 years the hallmark of this station has been local programming and local service," La Camera boasts. "I don't believe there is another station in the country that has done what we have done in that time."

And La Camera, 47, has been in the middle of it all. He's a



Top: Loretta Swit and Bethany Anderson from the WCVB original production *A Matter of Principal*, part of the station's "Great Expectations" public-service campaign. Bottom: *Chronicle* hosts Meghan and Richardson.



onetime newspaper reporter and public-relations specialist who had no experience in broadcasting when he joined the station. Colleagues now call him "the conscience of Channel 5" because his personal commitment to social issues has helped mold the character of the station. It is La Camera—who holds master's degrees in journalism, urban studies and business administration—who initiates many of WCVB's projects and is the person most people turn to when something is faltering or needs re-energizing. His thoughtful, deliberate style is a good balance to the slam-bang, extroverted manner of his boss.

Coppersmith, 57, has the vibrant personality of a salesman—which is what he started as, in radio, fresh out of the University of Pittsburgh with a degree in journalism. He has been general manager of WCVB-TV since 1982, but earlier, from 1973-76, he was g.m. at the CBS competitor, then known as WNEV-TV (now WHDH). For years Coppersmith worked in the shadow of the challenging and ebullient Bob Bennett, WCVB's first general manager and the individual most responsible for thrusting it into its current, formidable position. But Coppersmith has put his own stamp on the station.

"He is an intelligent man with a sophisticated sense of humor, and he sizes up a problem better than anyone," says one station executive. "Sure, there was early comparison to Bennett, but Jim is certainly his equal. And he's had a more difficult job considering it is a far more competitive time in the industry now than when Bennett was here."

Part of what makes Coppersmith's situation more competitive is a Boston rival, Westinghouse's WBZ-TV, that is more powerful now than it was a decade ago. Then there's

the problem throughout the broadcast industry of economic stagnation and diminishing returns.

"The challenge will be a little different in the '90s than the '80s," Coppersmith says, "because the days of double-digit increases in broadcasting are over. But I've learned a simple technique, that the television station which best serves the public will become the most profitable."

Neither Coppersmith nor the privately held Hearst Corp., which owns the station, will disclose the station's profit. But with an annual budget estimated at about \$60 million, some industry analysts believe WCVB-TV's net revenue last year was about \$110 million.

Hearst purchased the station in 1986 for a then-record \$450 million when it was spun off in the Metromedia-Fox deal. Coppersmith admits there was some initial apprehension among some employees about Hearst's commitment.

"But my sole charge from Hearst," says Coppersmith, "was to improve the station as a local broadcaster and leader, make it a benchmark of what a local TV station should be in news and local programming and do what it takes to maintain the quality of the product and the ratings." And Coppersmith

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argues that Hearst's multi-faceted corporate organization, and its money, have allowed the station more flexibility to do what it has been doing since 1972. "The phrase I've heard the most from my bosses, [corporate president] Frank Bennack [Jr.] and John Conomikes [vice president of Hearst Broadcasting]," says Coppersmith, "has been, 'pursue excellence and whenever possible catch it.'"

At the heart of it all, says Coppersmith, has been and will continue to be WCVB's people, about one-fourth of whom have been at the station since it started in 1972.

"When promotions or openings come up we try to get the best people available. And, frankly, with major positions all we have to do is look at our own staff," he says. "When I picked Emily [Rooney] as news director in January I never looked outside because we had two equally qualified people right in our own newsroom."

"This station is so good that once people land a job here, they seem to stay for life," says Rooney, who started at WCVB as a producer in 1979 and is only the fourth news director in the station's 20-year history.

They also tend to fall in love. Like Emily, who is married to one of her high profile reporters, Kirby Perkins. Like her assistant news director, Charlie Kravetz, married to the general sales manager, Deborah Sinay. And like Chet and Natalie, who are married to each other.

Chet Curtis and Natalie Jacobson have co-anchored the prime 6 and 11 P.M. newscasts since 1982. Chet was working as a reporter when Natalie started reporting in 1972 and for a few months they co-anchored the noon newscast. They were married in 1975 and reunited on the air in 1980 when Chet joined Natalie and Tom Ellis on the 6 P.M. show.

"We have a very strict policy against nepotism in our hiring policy," says public-relations director Burt Peretsky, adding with a laugh, "but if they're already employed and nature takes its course . . ."

Rooney and Sinay also are examples of the station's noteworthy opportunities for women. Nine of WCVB's 22 major department heads are women and 39 percent of the station's managers and supervisors are females. In the 105-person newsroom alone, both executive show producers and all but one of the six line producers as well as most of the associate producers are women.

It's Coppersmith's loyal staff that also keeps the station profitable by helping to maximize revenues. Sinay, v.p. and general sales manager since 1984, and her 11 salespeople sell everything in sight. Almost all the specials make a profit and sponsors sometimes stand in line to associate with WCVB.

When the station decided four years ago to be the first in the country to completely close-caption a newscast (and *Chronicle*), the sales department found a corporate sponsorship to help WCVB and public station WGBH-TV's caption center to pay for developing the system.

And when the news department recently followed a group of local high-school students to Kenya on an environmental expedition, it amortized some of the cost by developing a special series for syndication through the Conus news cooperative.

"We're very interested in forming alliances that will help us share costs or provide the station with some income," says news director Rooney. "That's one way for us to get control of the bottom line."

When it all began nearly 20 years ago, few Bostonians and even fewer broadcast industry gurus could have prophesied what WCVB has accomplished. That's because the station's current roots grew in the ashes of scandal.

In 1972, the U.S. Supreme Court ordered the Boston Herald-Traveler Corporation, which owned a newspaper and radio and TV stations, to forfeit the license it held to operate station WHDH-TV on the channel 5 frequency. It was a landmark case in which Herald-Traveler executives were cited for making a series of illegal contacts with the FCC in an attempt to retain the license.

Among the competitors for the vacant license was a group of local businessmen, academics and community leaders headed by Leo Beranek, owner of a high-tech acoustical engineering company. Beranek's group, called Boston Broadcasters Inc. (BBI), was granted the license by the FCC on promises that it would be "truly local" and would produce more local original programming than any other television station in history—in Boston or elsewhere. Much of the TV industry snickered at the pledge.

In one of his first moves, Beranek hired an erudite young print reporter without any broadcasting experience for the position of editorial director. During the interview, Beranek gave the reporter a sheet of paper that outlined ten principles that were to guide BBI and its employees.

"I'll never forget those ten founding principles," recalls Phil Balboni, now in New York as a special presidential assistant in the Hearst Corp. "They were very high minded, and at the top of the list was 'commitment to the community.' This is what we stood for, and during my 18 years there I always tried to be loyal to those principles."



To run the station, Beranek turned to an up-and-coming 42-year-old executive from the Metromedia station group named Bob Bennett. "Bob was the type of boss who encouraged us to challenge ourselves," says Balboni. "There was an enormous amount of creative energy and enthusiasm in those early years, and we believed there was nothing that we couldn't do."

The station also began accumulating its long list of honors, which today encompasses almost all major awards starting with six Peabodys and twelve Gabriels.

When Metromedia bought the station from Beranek's group in 1982 (for a then-record \$220 million), Bennett was promoted to head the corporation's broadcasting entity. He moved Metromedia's broadcasting headquarters to Boston and engineered a \$5 million building renovation that added a new 5,400 square-foot studio, considered the largest commercial TV studio in the Northeast.

Bennett's stimulating management style and his innovative programming instincts helped foster the program that current station executives continue to be most proud of, *Chronicle*, the brainchild of Balboni when he was head of the public-affairs department in the early 1980s.

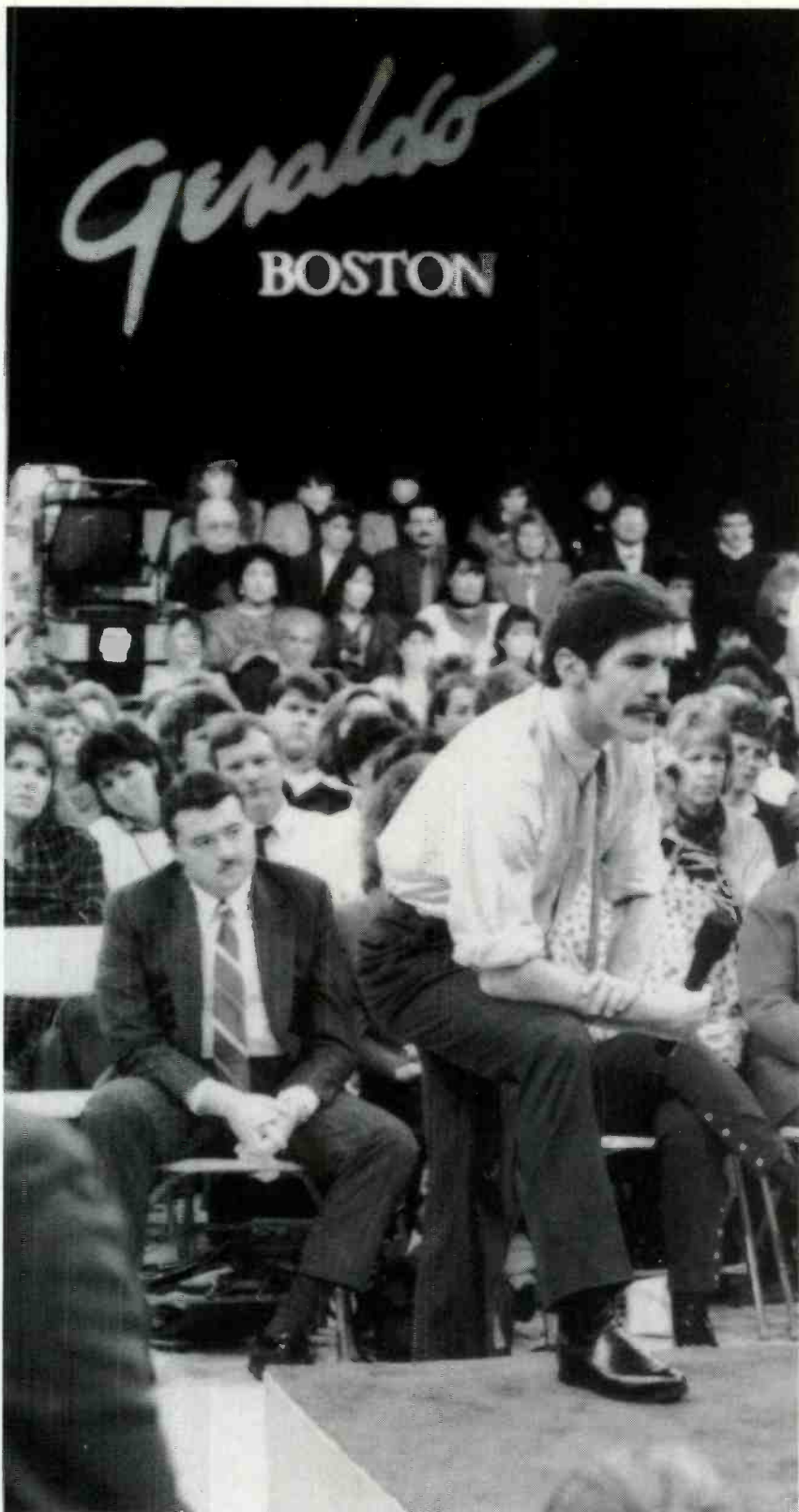
"It's the child of my heart," says Coppersmith. "Just think, every night we produce a completely local news magazine at 7:30 when all over the country stations are jamming the air with game shows and entertainment programs. And we have a program that is not only of high quality but successful in the ratings and profitable."

Chronicle airs about 210 fresh shows annually and repeats about 50. "We do a breaking story about twice a month, a show in the style of *Nightline*, like we did when the Challenger exploded and with Congress' investigation on Barney Frank's ethics," says La Camera. "But most of the shows take a lot of time and preparation. We cover a single issue each night, hard news and features. We've been to Italy, Great Britain, France, China, Russia and all over this state. And every show has a strong local connection."

If *Chronicle* is the standard to which WCVB holds its local programming, then news anchors Chet Curtis and Natalie Jacobson are the visual reminders of the benchmark. And it was all there for Boston to see the day after Labor Day in a fast-moving 60-second promotional announcement running during *Donahue*.

"This is a parochial station in the best sense of the word," La Camera exclaims when the promo is mentioned to him. "This is Boston." ●

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Lou Prato is associate professor of journalism at Northwestern University.



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For your
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clarification,
amplification,
illumination,
imagination,
innovation,
determination,
revelation,
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perspiration...
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Geraldo



Television For The People

... by the people of Appalshop.
A Kentucky TV cooperative lets mountain
people tell their own story.

By James Nold Jr.

The white-haired, red-faced man had been barred from setting foot onto his own property. The land was in the hands of a coal company; according to Kentucky state courts, a decades-old contract called the broad-form deed gave them the right to destroy its surface to retrieve the coal underneath.

Former Kentucky state representative Everett Akers' face fills the screen, and his eyes fix the lens unnervingly as he shouts, "They have taken our rights! They have taken our freedom! When you own and control land, you're a free man; when you own land and can't control it, you can't control yourself. You're a slave!

"And I'm gonna ask you strippers this: Who gave you permission to steal the land? To kill the land? . . . Shame on you! Shame on the courts of Kentucky!"

The clip stops there. "Now who in hell could narrate that?" asks Charles "Buck" Maggard of Whitesburg, Ky.'s Appalshop, which produced this show—"On Our Own Land"—for its public television series, *Headwaters*.

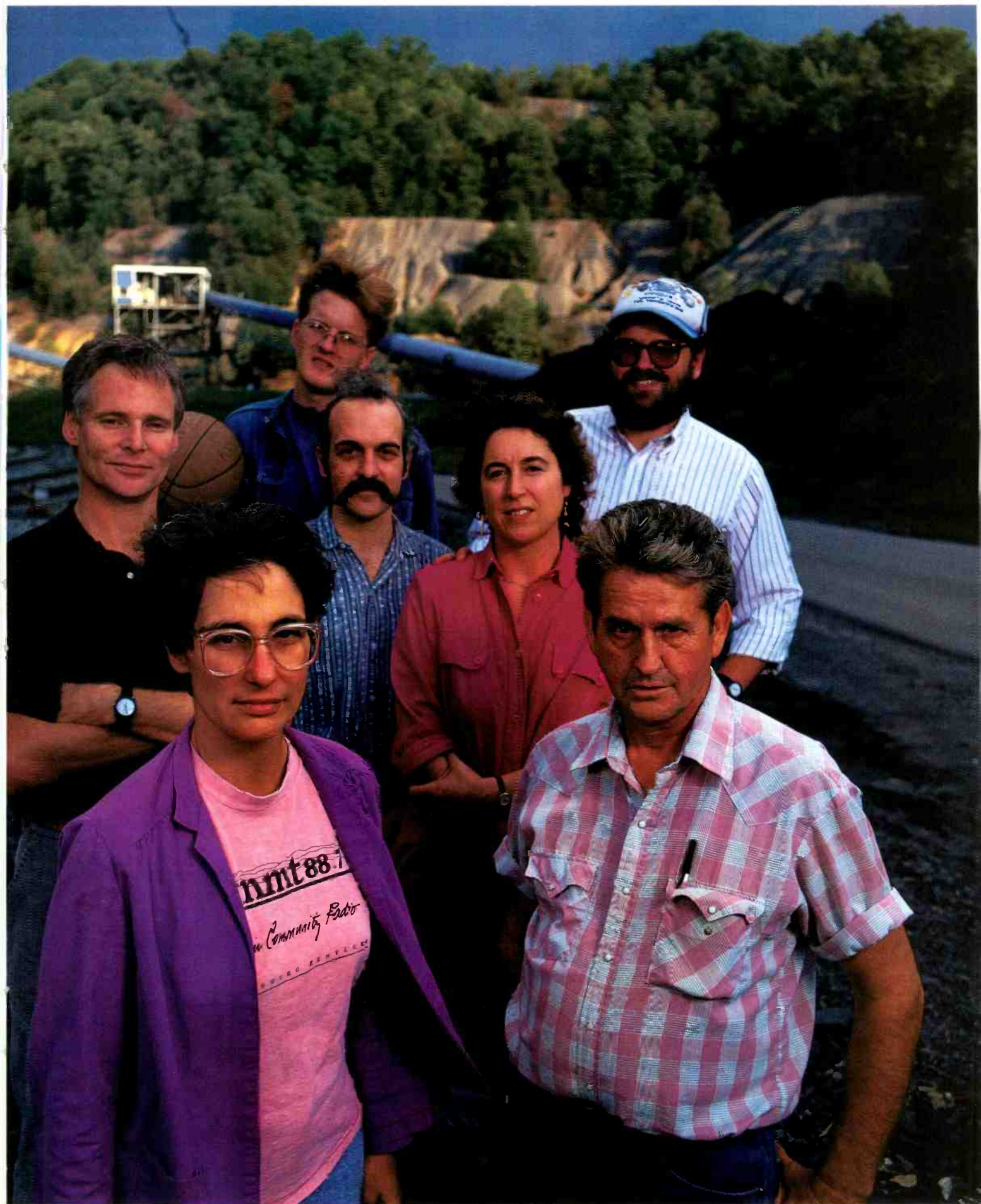
"All of a sudden that camera to him became that damn strip miner forcing him off his land. He was feeling power: 'People are going to see this and I'm going to tell them exactly what I think.' That's *Headwaters*—that's really *Headwaters* right there."

That's not to say that *Headwaters* is a show of shouting heads—Morton Downey in the Appalachians. It has also taken its viewers on the 6 A.M. bus ride of rural children attending a consolidated school. It's celebrated the work of Sarah Ogan Gunning, the doleful Kentucky singer who wrote "I Hate the Capitalist System" out of a blood grudge that originated when her children starved to death during a strike. It's opened the door into the workshop of Minnie Black, an elderly woman who creates gryphons, two-headed mules and mutant frogs from dried gourds.



At Appalshop's core:
(front row, left to right)
Headwaters director
Anne Johnson,
community liaison
Buck Maggard; (middle)
photographer Andy
Garrison, film & video-
maker Herb E. Smith,
film & videomaker Mimi
Pickering; (rear)
distribution director
Robert Gipe, executive
producer Dee Davis.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DAVID MURRAY



Executive producer Dee Davis, a native of nearby Hazard, Ky., describes *Headwaters* as an attempt to create "television that makes sense for here," that takes its pace and style from the way people in Appalachia express themselves.

Appalshop's work isn't artless, but the art they practice is a patient, collaborative one. It invites participation from the people being interviewed—letting them consider how their story should be told as carefully as the producers do—as well as the audience at home, which has to follow the story without such amenities as a narrator constantly at its collective elbow. (Appalshop films use narration only as a last resort, preferring to tell the story by quilting together interviews.) *Headwaters* can be difficult for people used to the normal conventions of television, but that's their loss: It offers a persuasive, complex and surprising look into a part of the country that doesn't often find itself on screen.

"They look at the problems of the region with a clarity that can only come from being there and being a part of it," says Virginia G. Fox, a Flemingsburg, Ky., native who is the executive vice president of the Kentucky Educational Television Foundation and sits on the board of the Independent Televi-

of the Appalachians take the image-making machinery into their own hands and find the power that comes from getting onto television.

Appalshop was formed in 1969 as the Community Film Workshop of Appalachia, funded by an Office of Economic Opportunity grant. Over the past 21 years the War on Poverty program has grown into a full-fledged media center, with a 35-person staff that operates a theater company, a record label, art galleries and the best radio station in the state of Kentucky.

It's run as a collective, with an active aversion to hierarchies of any kind. "I guess the management style is a throwback to our '60s beginning, but it seems to work okay," says Davis. For purposes of dealing with the outside world, he's executive producer of Appalshop Films, but Davis—an astute, bearish 39-year-old with a world-class deadpan—prefers to call himself a "freelance bureaucrat," saying, "We're not big on bosses around here."

The shop operates out of a Whitesburg warehouse renovated by Bill Richardson, the Yale architecture student who first obtained the OEO grant. It's bright and airy in the hallways, comfortably cluttered in the offices. The atmosphere is informal, early '70s collegiate—most people wear blue jeans, and hair that looks to have stayed long since the first time long hair was in fashion—but enthusiastically hard-working. To a visitor, it seems like a great place to come to work every day.

From the beginning, Appalshop has struggled to find a way for people in Appalachia to see its films. "It was terrible that people in New York had seen more Appalshop films than people in Eastern Kentucky," says *Headwaters* director Anne Lewis Johnson. In the early '70s, members considered rigging a flatbed truck with a projector and driving up into the hollers. Then they turned their attention to television. In 1974 Appalshop did some local-access programming on Whitesburg's tiny cable system; in 1977, New York's WNET produced a 90-minute selection of Appalshop films (it had the luck to air nationally against the sixth night of *Roots*).

Then in 1979 Appalshop received an NEA grant to begin a television series broadcast on WKYH, a small NBC affiliate in Hazard. *Headwaters*, a combination of Appalshop films, live studio interviews and original video pieces, was a hit, generating more response than anything else on the station, and considerably raising Appalshop's community profile. They paid \$100 weekly for a half hour of commercial-free airtime, making them such a valued customer that the station preempted the Republican and Democratic national conventions to run *Headwaters*. (The title, suggested by Hazard writer Gurney Norman, is a cultural metaphor inspired by the many rivers that originate in these mountains.)

The rigors of a 26-show schedule were wearing for the small staff, however, and in 1983 Appalshop decided to refocus its efforts. It turned *Headwaters* into a seven-show series for public television. Johnson, who had come aboard in 1982, was its director. (Other Appalshop filmmakers also direct *Headwaters* installments, and nearly every Appalshop film or video ends up on television in some fashion, but Johnson directs the majority of *Headwaters*' shows.) A dark, intense woman given to sudden, powerful bursts of laughter, Johnson is an Easterner who grew up in Washington, D.C., and worked in a variety of film jobs in New York. She came to Kentucky in 1973, as associate director of the Academy Award-winning documentary *Harlan County U.S.A.*, and stayed to marry Jerry Johnson, one of the miners portrayed in that film.

Whitesburg is a 1,500-person town a good three hours from the nearest big city, the seat of a county that according to the preliminary 1990 census lost more than 12 percent of its population over the last decade. To Johnson, a filmmaker or television producer couldn't ask for a better place to work—the material is so rich. "Everybody thinks of the mountains as being isolated, but I see it as being right at the center of what



From "On Our Own Land," exposing the injustices of the broad-form deed.

sion Service. "Their work is not condescending, it's not making fun, it's not worshipful—there's a refreshing reality to it."

"Appalshop is on the top of the list when we go looking for film and video," says Rob Shuman, president and COO of The Learning Channel and executive producer of its series *The Independents*, which has run several Appalshop films. *The Independents* has included films by Spike Lee, Martin Scorsese and Jonathan Demme. Appalshop's work "stands up against the best of them," Shuman says.

By and large, television has not done well by mountain people. "It's not so much *The Beverly Hillbillies* as it was news footage," says Davis. "There was this insensitivity to local people, and I think that all of us who grew up here felt the power of that outside national television when it came in and took its obligatory poverty shot." In their search for destitution, the networks missed everything else; they didn't even seem to hear what their interviewees were telling them.

When television wasn't patronizing the Appalachians, it ignored them—with equally powerful effects. "So much of the stuff that comes down the network lines is stuff that for people here feels very distant," says Herb E. Smith, a Whitesburg native whose 1984 Appalshop movie *Strangers and Kin* examined the hillbilly stereotype. "For young people growing up, there's often the sense that the real stuff is what you see on television, and you get this sense that the daily life in your community isn't real. It's bizarre: There's this kind of validity that television gives you and your people—if you can get on it." That's what *Headwaters* is really about: letting the people

is going on," she says, running through a long list of issues—industrialization, unemployment, labor, the environment, occupational diseases, the role of women, education, poverty—that are being worked out firsthand in Appalachia. "It's all right here."

Like most independent producers, Appalshop lives on an unreliable combination of private and public grants; broadcast and videotape income covers distribution costs. The yearly budget for *Headwaters* is about \$100,000, or roughly what Bill Cosby gets paid to blink. In the past, lean fund-raising times have forced crews to work without salary.

But if Appalshop isn't financially flush, it has its own luxuries. Its approach allows it to follow a story for years, long after the networks have come, gone and returned for their "whatever happened to?" piece. *Headwaters* first went to Institute, W.Va.—site of a Union Carbide plant that manufactures MIC, the chemical released in the Bhopal accident—weeks after the 1984 disaster in India. This fall, almost six years later, Johnson and Mimi Pickering are doing the final edit on "Chemical Valley," a terrifying examination of the chemical industry in the Kanawha Valley that evaluates the possibilities of an American Bhopal.

Appalshop makes no bones about using its show to make statements. While they're scrupulous about letting the other side state its case, they're not interested in on-one-hand, on-the-other-hand, equal-time journalism. "We're definitely not trying to be the final word; we're not out to use video to chisel *veritas* on everybody's television," says Davis. They want to start discussion, not wrap it up in 30 minutes.

Not surprisingly, this approach raises hackles. "On Our Own Land" includes a scary sequence where a supervisor for Hazard coal broker L.D. Gorman physically attacks the film crew for shooting a strip-mined site. A man once threatened harm to KET's studios (staff feared a bomb attempt) if it broadcast "Mine War on Blackberry Creek," a 1986 *Headwaters* about a bitter coal strike. Davis talked to the man on the phone and told him, "Look, watch the show. You might not like it, but we're going to be here. We're not gonna be running anywhere."

Appalshop views itself as a sort of "loyal opposition," but it's no less rooted in the community because it chooses that role. It takes special pains to keep good relations with its subjects and audience. Producer Buck Maggard, a native of nearby Perry County, spends much of his time meeting with the show's subjects before they're taped, researching their stories and making sure they know what to expect when the camera comes.

Headwaters shoots its interviews with a small crew, in comfortable and familiar surroundings of the subject's choice—trying to break down, or at least mitigate, the barriers video and film technology can create. "The idea is to reduce the distance between yourselves and those people talking, so that the people you're interviewing can be as close as possible to the people who are consuming the final story," says Davis.

What results from that closeness can be as weird as Minnie Black explaining how to use real chicken feet as the base of a gourd sculpture (cut them off, put them in a plastic bag in the freezer, then soak them in "disinfect" and nail them to a board). Often there's a sort of "found poetry," as Davis calls it. In Pickering's "Dreadful Memories," singer Sarah Gunning's sister-in-law, Hazel Garland, is sitting on a friend's porch, finishing an anecdote for the camera, when a wind blows up and swirls yellow leaves around her.

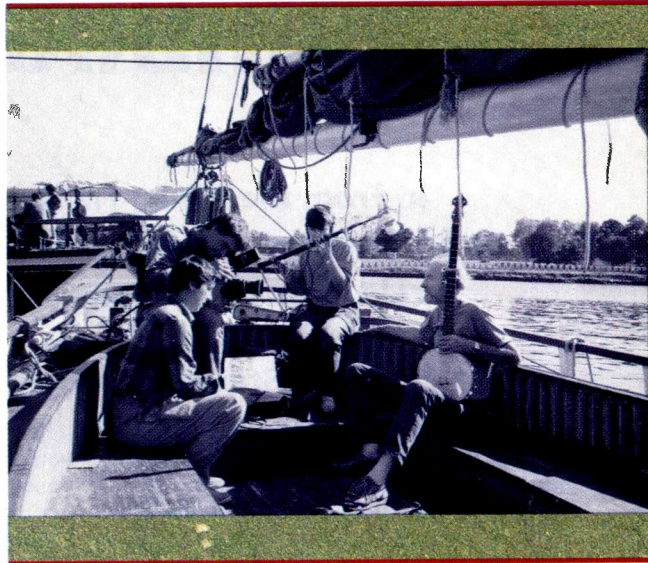
Headwaters has addressed few issues more controversial than the broad-form deed. The documents, signed by hundreds of Eastern Kentucky families from about 1900 on, sold mineral rights but retained control of the land's surface. Strip mining was unknown at the time, but coal companies have since used the deeds to confiscate and utterly destroy land without the owners' consent.

"On Our Own Land," a powerful attack on the practice, was ready for broadcast in spring 1988. But KET delayed the series until the fall, making the special's new broadcast date election eve—the night before Kentuckians were to vote on a constitutional amendment restricting the deed.

The network didn't realize the coincidence until early October, when they decided to pull the program, arguing that coal companies didn't have time to prepare an equally powerful piece in response. After protests from Appalshop and a public outcry, the network put the matter before an independent board of Kentucky journalists. They decided "On Our Own Land" should run before the election, balanced by a piece from the coal companies, and a phone-in discussion.

The misunderstanding temporarily strained relations between the collective and the network that is its primary broadcast outlet (in addition to *Headwaters*, KET airs a series called *Appalshop Presents*, which shows Whitesburg's greatest hits). But the rift doesn't look to be lasting. They joined forces this year and successfully lobbied the Kentucky legislature to grant an unprecedented \$600,000 for independent producers—a bill that may ease some of the financial burdens on *Headwaters* (it earmarks at least \$100,000 for eastern Kentucky productions).

After all the controversy about its initial showing, "On Our Own Land" has been vindicated more than once. In January it won the Alfred I. DuPont-Columbia Silver Baton for inde-



Taping Pete Seeger for Appalshop's "Dreadful Memories."

pendent production; the citation called it "an excellent example of responsible advocacy journalism." Another vindication was even sweeter: The voters of Kentucky passed the broad-form deed amendment by a margin of 4 to 1.

But there's a deeper purpose to Appalshop's work even than affecting the outcome of elections. Davis points to Elizabeth Wooten, a woman in "On Our Own Land" who refused to sell the land where her husband is buried. "Sure, I could use the money. But I get by," she says softly.

"You see a kind of power and nobility and strength there that's contagious," says Davis. "People around here have lived through some hard times, and they haven't just survived. They've been able to succeed, they've been able to make things of beauty, they've been able to live a life of integrity and dignity.

"Those things are important for people around the country to understand. There are lessons that can be learned here that other people can share." ●

James Nold is a freelance writer and lead singer for the Babylon Dance Band, based in Louisville, Ky.



Off To Cambodia

In From the Killing Fields and the Peter Jennings Reporting series, making television with a long shelf life.

By Steven Beschloss

Within a few hours Peter Jennings would be propped up in the anchor's seat, recounting the day's movements in the Middle East, but for now he's slouched down in his West 66th Street office, his red tie loosened, savoring a moment 25 years ago. "One thing is certain," says Jennings, reading from a clip that quotes a report he filed long ago from Vietnam, "the war will last much longer than most people think or care to admit."

Jennings smiles. He was 27 then and still green. "That was in September of 1965. We were hardly even in the war at that time." He folds the clip, recently sent to him. "I'm going to keep that," he says.

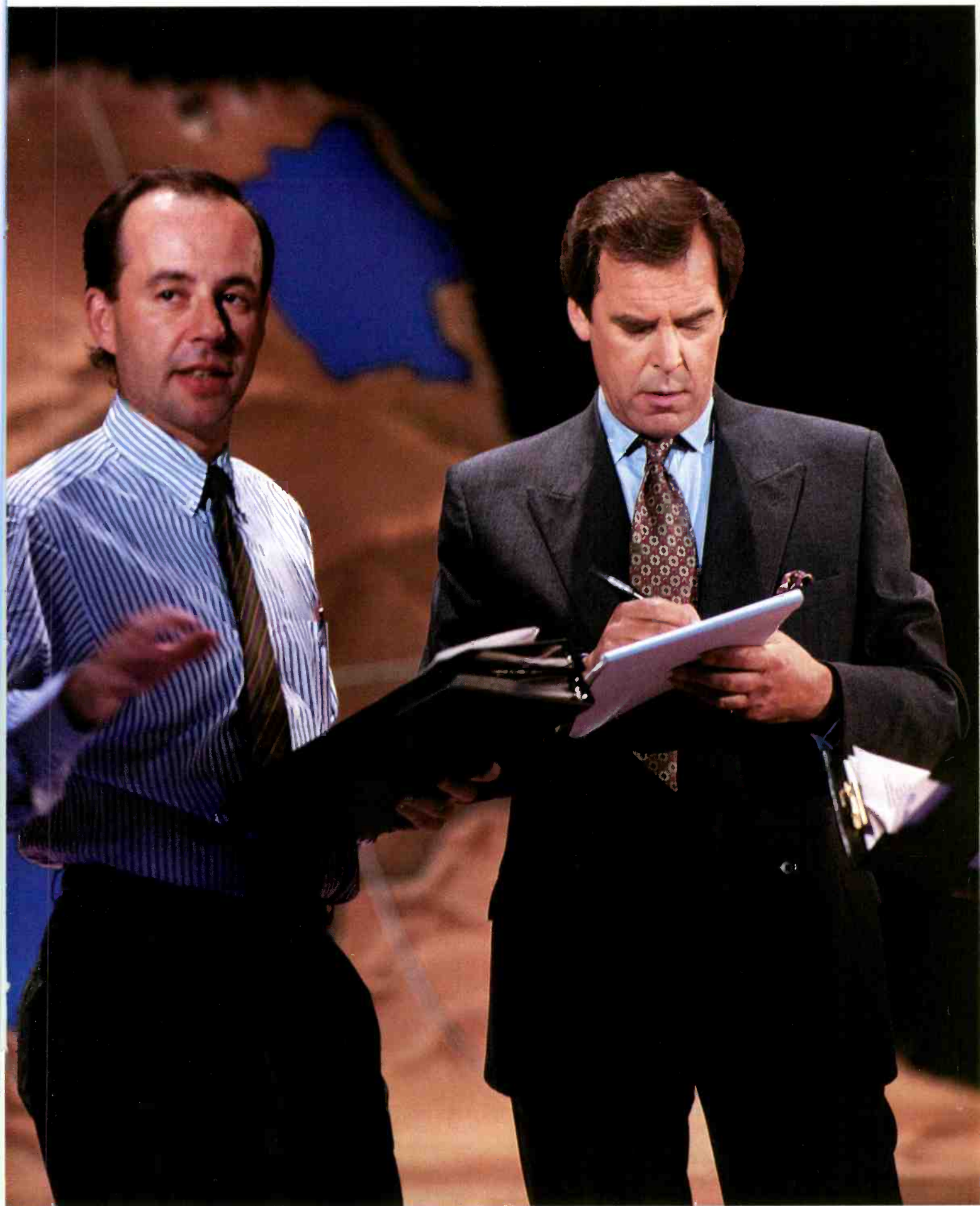
Earlier this year Jennings marked the silver anniversary of that three-week assignment by returning to Southeast Asia. For a week he gathered material on Cambodia and the Khmer Rouge, traveling from Thailand to Vietnam and Cambodia. He journeyed on the ground, not by chartered plane as he originally imagined, better to see the continuing state of conflict. He eschewed the usual star treatment, sleeping in fleabag hotels and taking makeshift showers with bottled water. It was, he recalls, "the best week I had all year—without question, without question. Nobody knew where I was."

Jennings had convinced Roone Arledge, ABC News president, that he needed to do a week of field reporting on Cambodia, despite his boss' doubts about the story and questions about letting him leave the country when President Bush would deliver the State of the Union address. "We all decided that, yeah, the State of the Union sure as hell could live without me," Jennings laughs.

So the anchor was unshackled to roam a country with only two phones, one owned by the Thai military and the other in the prime minister's residence. But he could not roam for long. He would soon return to New York, back to the daily demands and the media frenzy that sometimes seems like a circus.

PHOTOGRAPH BY SHONNA VALESKA

Peter Jennings Reporting
executive producer Tom Yellin
(l.) and Peter Jennings: In
preparation for prime time.



In the following months, his executive producer Tom Yellin and producer Leslie Cockburn would continue gathering footage, trying to nail down interviews with U.S. government officials and editing the hour-long program. Two weeks before the airdate, the State Department finally served up Richard H. Solomon, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, for Jennings' grilling.

The result, *From the Killing Fields*, the second offspring of the *Peter Jennings Reporting* series, was a tough-minded documentary that fingered the U.S. government for backing the non-communist insurgents and, at least indirectly, providing arms to the murderous Khmer Rouge. Bits and pieces of this story had appeared elsewhere, but Jennings, Yellin and Cockburn constructed a clearly spoken program for network television that compellingly told how continuing U.S. opposition to the Vietnamese Communists had led to support of a coalition of non-communists and Khmer Rouge. Convinced that the months of reporting obliged them to draw conclusions, Jennings and his associates did not recoil from examining the moral underpinnings of U.S. policy and expressing outrage. Rarely satisfied with his own words, Jennings chose

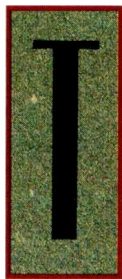


Killing Fields: ABC said most U.S. aid to the non-communists was secret.

these with particular care.

"A decade ago, they were driven out of Cambodia by the Vietnamese," Jennings stated in the show's opening. "But what the Khmer Rouge had done to their fellow Cambodians was so unspeakably cruel, it is almost impossible to imagine that the world, especially the United States, would ever tolerate them in power again. This hour is about the return of the Khmer Rouge—and American tolerance."

Aired this past April on the 15th anniversary of the U.S. withdrawal from Indochina, the prime-time special generated criticism from the Bush administration, inspired a double-barreled attack on Jennings in *The Wall Street Journal* that dubbed him a "flack for Hanoi," spawned widespread debate about U.S. involvement in Cambodia and spurred a reversal of U.S. policy several months later. At a time when the other networks have been dishing up glistening docu-packages on *Sex, Buys and Advertising* from Deborah Norville or *Girls Behind Bars* from Connie Chung that cynically measure impact by ratings, the response was gratifying to its creators. Clearly, the impact exceeded their best expectations: "I remember the day that it was the lead editorial in *The [New York] Times* and *The [Washington] Post*," Cockburn says from her home in Washington, D.C. "This is the kind of reaction that one doesn't normally get from television. I was very surprised."



he top-rated anchor on the top-rated nightly newscast rarely gets the chance to leave the cocoon and do original reporting. Yet this is the work by which Jennings informed his judgment, quieted the detractors who called him the "James Bond of broadcasting," earned his spurs. "Reporting is his first love," says Paul Friedman, executive producer of ABC's *World News Tonight*. "After a couple of months of not being anywhere, he starts to get really antsy." Says Jennings of his anchor post, "It's the hardest job I've ever had, in part because it's containing."

That was in his mind when he started talking in late 1988 with Tom Yellin, then senior producer of CBS' *West 57th Street*, about retuning to ABC. They had met in London in 1980, Yellin a producer for *Nightline* and Jennings the ABC London bureau chief. They became close friends, as did their wives. Yellin remembers Jennings' frustration in filing a 60- or 90-second story for the nightly news and then watching a seven-minute report Yellin produced on the same subject for *Nightline*. "His reporting, his process, was never a part of his television," says Yellin, who began his network career in 1976 as a 23-year-old associate producer for *CBS Reports*. "I just thought there was a tremendous wasted opportunity with him."

Later, in the mid-'80s, when Jennings had taken over as the sole anchor of *World News Tonight* and Yellin was the newscast's senior producer, the two would create opportunities to work together, typically hitting the road Friday night and returning Monday afternoon. Flying to London in 1985, they met Elie Wiesel in Krakow and drove with him to Auschwitz for the 40th anniversary of the death camp's liberation. They prepared a six-minute piece that aired on the Monday-night broadcast.

They also traveled to Managua in Nicaragua, prepping with seminars and books to report on a place they had never visited. They headed to Central America for a weekend, unsure of exactly what they were after. "We decided we're gonna just shoot everything and figure it out afterwards," Yellin recalls.

Arriving at the main market in downtown Managua, Yellin wired Jennings for sound. "Just do your thing and we'll catch up with you," Yellin told him. In the following 45 minutes, Jennings gathered color from street vendors and interviewed a man who approached him, eager to detail his contact with the Sandinistas. The experience was something of a revelation for Yellin. The articulate Harvard graduate struggles to find the words to recount the day: "We got all this wonderful stuff talking to people. . . . Then you put that on the air and you have, you have *stuff*. It's hard to describe. Reporting, a lot of times, particularly foreign reporting, doesn't have that quality, that texture. What I realized then is that I have the opportunity with Peter that I don't have with almost any other correspondent I've ever worked with—to do it and get away with it."

Four years later Yellin, then at CBS, vividly remembered Managua. He and Jennings had talked about what he might do next, since the days of CBS' *West 57th Street* seemed numbered. Jennings suggested returning to ABC to produce hour-long documentaries with him. At first, the idea of doing documentaries seemed like a journey to no-man's-land, a place where the best people didn't go anymore. But then Yellin began to picture the possibilities. Lying in bed before a back operation, he got excited by the prospect.

The next step, after batting around their ideas for the series, was to sell Roone Arledge. In April of last year Jennings and Yellin took Arledge to lunch at a Mexican restaurant near ABC's offices. Jennings told his boss he had been approached by the Museum of Broadcasting for a day representing his work, Yellin recalls. But Jennings said that he didn't think it was such a good idea, that he didn't have enduring work that he wanted to show.

"Roone said, 'You've got this whole body of work that you can look back on over all these years,'" Jennings recalls. "I said, 'Yes, but . . . ' and he said, 'Yes, I know. You haven't done *Harvest of Shame*.' He knew precisely that the reason we wanted to try this—and I think we're only beginning—was so we would leave something to pull off the shelf."

From the beginning, Yellin wanted to be sure that Jennings and ABC management were committed to doing serious shows. "After 15 years of doing network television, I've seen the pressures not to do it," he says. The trick was to find subjects that are both timely and not easily jettisoned by changing events. "If you are doing hours," notes Jennings, "it's very hard with the rapidity of communication today to stay ahead of the curve." If everyone else is ticketed for Eastern Europe, they reasoned, then they have to journey elsewhere.

From the Killing Fields was the second of four programs scheduled this year. First was *Guns*, an examination of gun control and homicide through the lens of Stockton, Calif., where five school children were killed and thirty others injured by a lone gunman last year. Soon, *Peter Jennings Reporting* will present a show on abortion that primarily focuses on local politics, and the last special this year concerns the Dance Theater of Harlem.

The usual impulse may be to pursue subjects with a clear hook before the reporters leave the newsroom, but Yellin and Jennings were open to seeing where the story took them. By keeping the story selection and decision-making core small, they also hoped to avoid diluting the work for the sake of reaching consensus. It was an unusual strategy for network television; indeed, a luxury to some observers. "When we started," Jennings says, "People would ask, 'Well, what's it going to be about? What are you going to get? How's it going to look?' I mean, that's the way people talk in the news business these days. Well, the answer was we didn't know. . . . It's not easy getting people to accept that kind of concept nowadays."

When producer Cockburn met Jennings and Yellin in Bangkok last January, she still wasn't sure whether her partners or the ABC brass believed that the story was worth a full week of Jennings' time. They had agreed on Cambodia in the late summer of 1989—Jennings wanted one of the first four to be a foreign story—and by year's end, Cockburn had already spent months researching it and begun shooting. The skeptics remained, however, including Arledge and Paul Friedman, who doubted whether they could make a clear case for U.S. involvement. Besides, this was not exactly 1990's sexiest topic. "One person told me, 'It's the kind of story that appears on page five of *The New York Times*, and it probably appears on page five for a reason,'" recalls Yellin. "That was unnerving."

Yet the first interview in Southeast Asia would quickly deepen his resolve. He and Jennings had traveled some 38 hours, including a four-hour drive to Aranyaprathet along the Thai-Cambodian border to interview Susan Walker, an American relief worker. It was close to midnight when the crew readied the lights in the jungle. With the cameras running, Walker insisted that the international community was significantly underestimating the strength of the Khmer Rouge. Yellin, who had intellectually, but not viscerally, comprehended the depth of the Khmer Rouge's crimes, was spooked. "I thought, 'Maybe I'm just tired or jet-lagged or something, but that's scary.' It gave me shivers." At 4 A.M. they would cross the border into Cambodia and witness the war zone. And in the following days they would hear Walker's assessment repeated again and again. This, they confirmed, was a story deserving their commitment—and particularly because it had slipped from the United States' political and diplomatic consciousness.

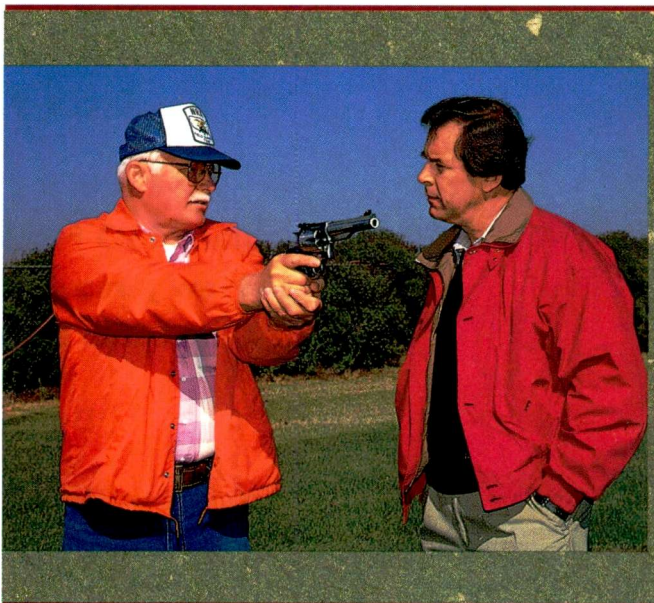
"It was once again clear to me, as it has been clear to me in so many parts of the world on so many occasions," Jennings says from the comfort of his New York office, "that we so

often make decisions without even turning over the carpet and seeing what's underneath it." In his estimation, Cambodia was ignored because it was deemed to be part of the Vietnam package. That made him angry. The final product reflects its creators' sense of outrage and their understanding of the story's moral dimension.

Jennings had hoped the week's reporting would turn up an unassailable smoking gun linking the United States and the Khmer Rouge. At one point, they got word that Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot was living on land owned by the U.S. military. Scrutiny of land records revealed otherwise, yet there was no question of at least indirect funneling of support by the United States.

Jennings is often criticized for detachment beyond the call of duty, but *From the Killing Fields* displays his willingness to assert himself when the reporting has been fully digested and the facts are evident. "It really isn't so complicated after all," Jennings concluded in the show's final moments. "Cambodia, in danger of being plunged into darkness again. The United States, in danger of being on the wrong side of history."

In a quiet moment months later, Jennings reflects on those words. He acknowledges that he had to be pushed to use them. "I'm very conscious of the fact that in Cambodia we made some very clear and declarative editorial statements



Jennings traveled to Stockton, Calif., to conduct interviews for *Guns*.

about whether or not this is a role that you, i.e. the audience, wish your government to be playing. I do not step out of my centrist's role very easily."

Over the last two years Jennings has taken on additional projects besides *Peter Jennings Reporting* that expand his role, including narrating *The AIDS Quarterly* for PBS and moderating a series of exchanges between senior Soviet officials and members of Congress. The experience has been instructive, he says, but it has a price. *World News Tonight* is his first responsibility. "This program works best if he sits down and concentrates on nothing but this broadcast from about 3:30 on," says Paul Friedman. "There have been periods where he gets involved in all these other things and he doesn't do that. And I don't think the program feels as good; it doesn't work as well."

Jennings understands Friedman's concern, but he tries not to pay too much attention. After all, it's only TV, and even an anchor needs a break from the frenzy. Sometimes he'd like to just go read a good book. Or better. "I should get a plaque and put it on the door," he laughs. "I'm going to Cambodia." ●



Hometown Heroes

**Canadian MSO Maclean Hunter's U.S. systems
in New Jersey, Michigan and Florida may
be cable's best-loved operators.**

By Michael Burgi

Tim Carry, director of programming for Maclean Hunter Cable TV's Michigan systems, was having trouble finishing his lunch. He was sitting in a small restaurant outside Detroit with a local judge who had done some public-service announcements, called "That's the Law," for Carry's Downriver cable system. Out of about 30 people in the restaurant, at least five had come to Carry's table, nodded to him and proudly blurted to the judge, "Hey Judge, that's the law!"

Cable fame strikes again.

In Garden City, home to another of Maclean Hunter's three wholly owned systems in Michigan, *Mr. Project* features a retired insurance salesman who is handy with a toolbox and some wood and felt. The weekly half-hour handicrafts show can be seen on Garden City's TV-3 local origination channel, and is taped in the workroom/studio behind the host's home. *Mr. Project* exemplifies hyper-local TV doing what it does best: taking a homespun talent and making him a star in his own community. "He can't go anywhere without being recognized," explains Carry. "They're always telling him, 'I loved the whirligig,' or asking, 'When are you going to make more antique toys?' It's the best way for us to gauge our impact in the community."

Maclean Hunter Cable TV can be held responsible for a growing number of local celebrities in the communities its cable systems serve. The Canadian-owned, 1.2 million-sub MSO places an extremely high value on producing local programming (either locally originated or publicly available

through public- or leased-access channels) that reflects the community's own interests and particularities. Its commitment stems in part from Maclean Hunter Cable's Canadian operations, which are required to produce and provide many hours of "community programming" as part of the industry's regulation by the Canadian Radio and Television Commission. But it's also simply a part of the company's management philosophy, and all of Maclean Hunter's U.S. systems—in New Jersey, Michigan and Florida—cultivate a strong identity in their communities through local programming.

The eight systems are geographically and demographically diverse: Suburban Cablevision and Cable TV of Jersey City in New Jersey; Selkirk Communications serving Fort Lauderdale and Hallandale, Fla.; Maclean Hunter Cablevision in East Detroit, Maclean Hunter Cable TV in Garden City and Downriver Cable TV in Taylor, all outlying areas around Detroit, Mich.; and Barden Cablevision, which is 49 percent-owned by Maclean Hunter, serving the city of Detroit. While quite distinct from each other in terms of the makeup of the communities they serve, from bleak inner city to wealthy suburbs, all the systems have excellent facilities and modern technology. But aside from the hardware, the systems have the freedom to reflect the community the way *they* feel is right. Programming decisions are made at the system level, not regionally or at headquarters. There is very little input from the corporate level.

In fact, the corporate staff for Maclean Hunter's U.S. operations really involves only four executives: J. Barry Gage, presi-



Maclean Hunter Cable TV's corporate triumvirate: senior v.p. Phil Patterson, community programming guru Merle Zoerb and president/CEO J. Barry Gage.

dent/CEO; Philip Patterson, senior vice president, U.S. operations; John Haugey, vice president of finance; and R. Merle Zoerb, vice president of community programming. These four oversee operations and approve budgets. That's about all they do, but it's all they need to do. Everything else is handled at a lower level in the company. "Our management approach is to push the responsibility as far down the line as we can. We find it's the most successful way to run our business," explains the 52-year-old Gage about the hands-off approach. "Our U.S. managers have a great deal of autonomy because that's how we think they'll take ownership of what's going on."

Maclean Hunter Cable TV lies at the core of a diversified media and communications company, Maclean Hunter Ltd., based in Toronto, Ontario. The company breaks out its opera-

tions into periodicals, printing, newspapers, cable TV (serving close to 630,000 subs in Canada and 600,000 in the U.S.), broadcasting and communication services. The parent company realized \$1.426 billion (in Canadian dollars) in revenues and a net income of \$92.2 million in fiscal 1989.

Throughout the 1980s, the cable division fueled the parent company's growth, thanks to the success of both Canadian and U.S. operations. For example, last year the cable division contributed \$256 million in revenues, about 18 percent of company-wide revenues. In operating income, Maclean Hunter Cable's \$87 million comprised nearly half the \$189 million reported by Maclean Hunter Ltd. "From a financial point of view, we're the rock-solid foundations of Maclean Hunter Ltd.'s earnings," says Gage, who started with the

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102-year-old parent company in 1969 as an accountant for the publishing division. He sees future growth potential in Maclean Hunter's recent foray into cable in the U.K. through six majority-owned franchises. But the U.S. cable holdings have provided the lion's share of growth to date, according to Patterson. "Revenue per sub and system values overall are much higher in the States than in Canada," he explains, having worked at Suburban Cablevision from 1981 to 1988 and eventually run it for exactly that reason: growth potential. He cites average revenue per sub in the U.S. at between \$35 and \$40, whereas Canadian subs garner at best \$20.

Not a profit center, community programming the Maclean Hunter way actually requires a considerable outlay of cash at each of the systems. All the systems have at least one studio, mobile trucks (at \$150,000 to \$500,000 apiece), several portable camera packs for people producing for public access, and they provide lots of training to use the sophisticated equipment. Maclean Hunter Cable's 1990 U.S. programming and capital budget is \$3.6 million. Regardless of cost, local programming is what Maclean Hunter emphasized when penetrating the U.S. market, citing the local programming success at its first franchise, Suburban, when pursuing others. Phil Patterson explains the rationale: "We thought that local programming, because of our success [in Canada] and interest in it, could do a lot in terms of driving cable in the U.S. market." Local programming—or community programming, as Zoerb likes to say—remains the backbone and rallying cry of Maclean Hunter Cable TV. And the one yelling loudest is Merle Zoerb.

Zoerb is the point man for Maclean Hunter's aggressive community programming effort in each of its localities. Born in 1937 and raised on the prairies of Saskatchewan, Zoerb now spends a great deal of his time traveling among the Canadian and American properties. "I am the company consultant resource person for programming," he explains, always seeking to downplay his or the head office's importance in day-to-day operations. Zoerb is a convert to the importance of serving the community through cable. Following high school, Zoerb began his career with a 17-year stint in broadcasting, which took him from rinky-dink TV stations in Saskatchewan to an operations job at CTV, a Canadian network. "Although my job was very secure, my frustration was that I wasn't working with people—I felt stymied," an enthusiastic Zoerb explains. Then, in 1969, "I shed my broadcaster's skin and saw the light," he says with a smile.

That was when an old broadcasting buddy offered him the chance to run a community channel (basically a public-access channel) at a tiny 3,000-sub system in Mississauga, just outside of Toronto. "At first I said to myself, 'What on Earth have I done?'" recalls Zoerb of when he laid eyes on the ancient black-and-white cameras in a 20-by-30 foot access studio. "But it turned me and made me realize [after four months] that this is what broadcasters used to do way back when and they're not doing now." Zoerb remembers the day he first realized he had stumbled onto something very powerful and gratifying: "We had some guy in the studio tickling the ivories and I told the host of the show, 'Why don't you ask for requests?' So he asked the viewers if there were any birthdays out there. I couldn't believe the response. It was about 8 P.M. and he was still playing after 10:30. And this was in May on a hot evening."

Shortly after Zoerb's experience that night, Maclean Hunter took him on as director of programming and moved him up the ladder to his present position. Now he travels to his systems, spreading the community programming word like a bee spreads pollen.

It was around the same time that Maclean Hunter took its first plunge into U.S. cable in East Orange, N.J., home of Suburban Cablevision, a 220,000-sub system sprawled over 42 communities in the center of the state. Zoerb describes Suburban as the "gem" of the U.S. systems, partly because it's profitable, but mostly because it excels at local programming. The look of the

programs, if not always at the level of a major-market broadcast station, is above average for locally produced cable TV.

Winner of more local ACE awards than any other cable system in the country (28 in the 13 years ACEs have been around), Suburban has run an l.o. channel, TV-3, since its beginnings and a public-access channel, TV-32, since '84. The system has 30 local-access channels organized by hub area and run by either the town government, high school or library. Suburban's reputation for local programming was built on its abundance of local sports coverage, which makes up about 60 percent of TV-3's content. *TV-3 Sports* airs the games and *Eye On Sports* provides some analysis and reportage. Excellent graphics and equipment like two mobile production trucks and a slo-mo machine lend a professional polish to the programs.

Suburban's best-produced and most successful show is *Suburban High School Sports Report*, which gives high-school sports fans a roundup of scores and performances in basketball, football, hockey (field and ice), baseball, volleyball and more. The show looks almost as smooth and slick as ESPN, replete with impressive stats on high-school teams and interviews with players and coaches from 42 towns. Football season, which is now in full swing, takes up the staff's weekends from September to December. Suburban's sports director, Matt Loughlin, says he doesn't mind the extra hours: "Truth is, I would be at a game anyway."



t TV-32, the public-access channel, Sue Toia, the community access supervisor, helps to produce about ten programs in-house with two other full-time staff and volunteer production people, and airs about 60 hours a week of outside-produced programs. The show that Toia really wants to see succeed is *Missing*, produced in cooperation with the New Jersey State Police, which reports on missing children in the state. The show debuted last February, but no missing children profiled on the show have been found so far.

Sandwiched between Suburban's territory and New York City, Cable TV of Jersey City faces similar urban problems. The 80 percent-owned system has roughly 27,000 subs after three years in operation, just 35 percent penetration. But the community programming, headed up by v.p. of programming and marketing Arnold McKinnon (who is also one of two partners that own 20 percent of the system), has made headlines. The showcase program, *Jersey City's Most Wanted*, is exactly what it sounds like. And it's yielded results on par with the Fox show so far, attracting even the attention of George Bush, who wrote McKinnon commending him for "making a difference in the life of your community." The show itself has modest production values—although, as at every other Maclean Hunter system, there's no lack of equipment—and moves slowly, but it catches criminals, which is what the community cares about most. The security guard outside the system's offices is a constant reminder of the need for such a program.

That shows like Suburban's *Missing* and *Jersey City's Most Wanted* are being produced in New Jersey is testament to those systems' proximity to a large urban market, whose problems overflow into the areas the systems serve. Maclean Hunter's wholly owned systems in Michigan—Garden City (7,000 subs), Downriver (48,000 subs) and East Detroit (just under 10,000 subs)—also surround a big-city market. Yet the l.o. and access programming at these systems is more upbeat, partly a reflection of regional programming director Tim Carry, who works out of and mainly with the Downriver system in Taylor. Carry acts as the Merle Zoerb of the Michigan systems, flitting around between the studios, checking up on shows and budgets, passing on ideas from one operation to another, making sure things are running smoothly without interfering.

Carry speaks with pride about each of the systems he oversees, but Garden City, the operation where he spent four

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years as program director, remains closest to his heart. Even though a relatively tiny system, Garden City boasts excellent facilities including a remote truck, separate editing room and a sizable studio. One of its most impressive programs is *Burger Talks*, a biweekly show produced and hosted by a group of autistic teenagers from the Burger Center in Garden City. *Burger Talks* provides a good example of how the Michigan systems address the communities they serve. The show gets the teenagers out of their institutional home and provides a rare opportunity for them to show their creativity. Carry remembers when the kids first came into the studio. "They couldn't pick up a spoon and put it in a bowl, much less speak in full sentences," he says. "But we put them in front of the camera and they came to life. Now these guys are so animated and alive."

Maclean Hunter Cable's presence can also be felt right in the heart of the city. The company made a shrewd investment in a local entrepreneur and veteran Detroit broadcaster by the name of Don Barden, who had sealed up the franchise for the entire city of Detroit in 1983. He had been looking at a number of MSOs for an investor, but settled on Maclean Hunter. Barden Cablevision, as the venture is called, is 49 percent-owned by Maclean Hunter, and when complete (the city is 80 percent-wired) is expected to be the largest urban system in America; the system presently stands at about 100,000 subs. Barden expects to be done wiring the city by April 1991.

Just as the city of Detroit is 70 percent black, so is the staff at Barden. Correspondingly, almost every I.O. or public-access program is produced with black talent and with a black audience in mind. From *Heat Wave*, a remote-broadcast dance show shot in Detroit's dance clubs to coverage of Nelson Mandela's visit to Detroit earlier this year, these are Detroit shows for a Detroit audience. Facilities at Barden surpass those of a mid-market TV station: Two full-service studios, two huge \$800,000 mobile trucks and an abundance of on-line editing suites sprinkled throughout Barden's sprawling offices. Wade Briggs, Barden's vice president of programming, says the payoff is a great response from the community. "We get phone calls all day long from people trying to find out when a program will be repeated," says Briggs. "You can't go to a social gathering without people telling you about the various programs they've been watching."

Maclean Hunter's most recent venture, last year's acquisition of Canadian-owned MSO Selkirk Communications, was a departure from the parent company's style. Most of its systems were built from the ground up with the company's hands-off mind-set in place. Selkirk, on the other hand, had been operating its Ft. Lauderdale and Hallandale, Fla., systems



Maclean Hunter's systems produce a potpourri of shows that reflect community interests: Suburban's *Suburban High School Sports Report*, Barden Cablevision's dance show *Heat Wave*, Selkirk's nod to Jamaica, *Reggae Rhythms*, Garden City's *Burger Talks*.

(about 80,000 subs) for a decade. The tough part has been to absorb so many subs into the laissez-faire management style without losing touch with its problems and needs. "Integrating [Selkirk] into our organization has been a challenge that will continue into the '90s," Patterson says, a wry smile revealing his understatement. The first hurdle to overcome is getting more air-time for the systems' I.O. and public-access channels. Even though Selkirk's community programming matches that of Maclean Hunter's best—like its *Town Meeting on Drugs*, which was hosted by U.S. Congressman E. Clay Shaw and drew 1,000 attendees—pre-acquisition Selkirk kept reducing the amount of time those channels were on the air. Zoerb and Patterson want that trend reversed, and are working with Selkirk management to map out a rebuild to alleviate the present channel crunch.

The system's best-looking show is *Reggae Rhythms*, a reggae music program with excellent production values and crisp sound. South Florida has a sizable Jamaican community. Other Selkirk efforts have included *Thanksgiving Day Story*, an annual event that is shot at a Ft. Lauderdale elementary school, where a contest is held for the best story written about Thanksgiving Day.

To inspire its systems toward shows such as *Missing* and *Burger Talks*, plus special projects such as *Thanksgiving Day Story*, Maclean Hunter runs an annual program management meeting, when the Tim Carryrs and Arnold McKinnons get together to discuss each other's local programming concepts, failed and successful. For example, Suburban's community programming manager, Barbara Vorrius, who is looking for more non-sports programming ideas for the I.O. channel, wants to try something like *Thanksgiving* in East Orange. It's also a chance for Merle Zoerb to encourage innovative programming without jamming one system's idea down another's throat. He provides a

setting for the programming managers to hash out new projects amongst themselves. Zoerb may watch over their implementation of an idea, but he won't interfere.

But another reason to get the programmers together is to thank them for carrying out at the local level what Maclean Hunter believes in at the top. Zoerb puts together the "Recognition Awards" for the I.O. and public-access programming, where a representative panel of programming staff—not managers—vote on the best shows in a variety of categories: sports, entertainment, special audience, potpourri, promotion and current affairs. "We've got these programming departments out there doing a fantastic job in their community," explains Zoerb, who loves pointing out his favorite shows on the compilation tape put together and sent to all the systems. "We should be recognizing that—and this is how we do it." ●

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miserable for the bad guys.**

By Janet Stilson

The hijacked plane had been sealed off from the world for three days. The air inside was so intensely heated that when the door opened for the papal nuncio, the blast of 90-degree fresh air gave Brian Ross the chills.

Through the light drizzle of rain falling on the airport in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, the NBC correspondent could see a bank of TV cameras trained on the plane and two Lear jets from his network on the tarmac. He knew his producer, Ira Silverman, had flown in and was anxiously watching from the control tower, because when the Pope's representative passed his seat, he dropped messages from the producer. At one point Ross was even able to give the papal nuncio a roll of film to pass back to Silverman.

Ransom for the hostages, including more than a dozen Americans, had been whittled down to a ridiculously low \$50,000, but still no deal was reached with the rebel leader, a short, wiry man with a red cap emblazoned with the Coke slogan, "Coca Es Esa." From time to time, his subordinates, three young leftists trained in Cuba, began to cry.

As the hijackers began to run cables for dynamite down the aisle of the plane, Ross played one last desperate card. "You know those are my *compadres* out there in the jets," he told the leader. "Release everybody but me. Take me with you to Cuba. They'll give you the ransom money in Cuba where it's legal. And if they don't come, you can shoot me."

The rebels had already shot three holes in the floor of the plane; it couldn't fly. But miraculously, they went into the cockpit to talk over the plan.

Ross and his companions knew it was time to escape. The emergency exit doors came off with amazing ease. Ross dove headfirst, down 12 feet to the pavement, and stumbled through a spray of bullets to a Honduran troop post.

.....
Terror, tedious waiting games, around-the-globe-in-sevendays chases, sensational breakthroughs. It could be the makings of a John Le Carré novel or a prime-time drama. But this is the real world for Brian Ross and producer Ira Silverman, the only long-standing investigative reporter/producer team on the network evening-news circuit.

Prime time is definitely the place for them, NBC has determined. The network is betting that their hard-hitting reports belong in a TV magazine, and it's likely to transform their periodic *Exposé* specials into a weekly series, probably as a midseason replacement.

Since they first became partnered against crime 14 years ago, the sheer volume and variety of Ross and Silverman's work has brought them a treasure trove of journalistic honors. Consider some of their many exclusives: A few months before Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, they doggedly pursued an Iraqi arms smuggling operation in a London suburb, secretly photographing the ringleaders. When U.S. and British agents moved in, Ross and Silverman caught on tape the loading at the Los Angeles airport of nuclear trigger parts destined for Iraqi hands, and waited days in Heathrow for the Iraqi spies to make the moves that led to their arrests.

Back in 1980, Ross and Silverman exposed the Abscam



Fidel Castro and Saddam Hussein are among the world leaders who've been angered by the work of Ira Silverman (l.) and Brian Ross (r.).

story, complete with video of FBI agents posing as Arab sheiks to make payoffs to corrupt congressmen. They also broke exclusive reports on the fall of Manuel Noriega, including the U.S. government's indictment of the Panamanian dictator in early 1989. And as detailed in Fredric Dannen's recently released book on the music industry, *Hit Men*, the pair uncovered the so-called "new payola scam" in the record industry in 1986, exposing the tactics of independent promoters hired by the major record labels.

Ross and Silverman's journalistic competition has learned to expect much from the pair. "They're the best in the business," comments *60 Minutes* executive producer Don Hewitt. "I tried to hire them."

"I sense that these two are old gumshoe reporters working quietly and in tandem," adds CBS veteran Mike Wallace. "They have sources that some of the rest of us have not gotten."

Sources aside, what impresses those who have worked with Ross and Silverman—or felt the bite of their journalistic fervor—is their departure from the stereotypical personality of the brash investigative reporter. Ross, a slight, brown-haired 42-year-old, prompted Wayne Newton to dub him "Mr. Wimp" after the pair aired a series of reports on the singer's association with organized crime figures in Las Vegas. Silverman, 55, a balding, quietly friendly man with a Brooklyn accent, has recommended that NBC News hire people to meet news talent in the airport baggage-claim areas and welcome them with a hug.

"You wouldn't imagine these people as partners," comments Les Crystal, currently executive producer of the *MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour*, and a former NBC News president. "Brian is this diminutive person, and yet a very tough reporter. And Ira at times gives the appearance of being this rough-cut diamond out of the New York milieu. It masks a very sophisticated perspective on world affairs."

What they do hold in common is an innate ability to make the vast array of characters they've encountered trust them, notes Don Browne, NBC News' executive vice president. "People may not like having them around, but they respect what they're doing. These guys are really pure," he says.

Browne points to the hijacking, in April 1982, as a good indication of Ross's decisiveness and bravery. Silverman, too, "has wonderful instincts," Browne adds.

At no time were those instincts more crucial than during the duo's pursuit of the fugitive American financier, Robert Vesco, in the early 1980s. Vesco drew international attention in 1974 after he skipped the country with about \$250 million entrusted to him by foreign clients for stock investments. Exactly where Vesco had gone remained a mystery until Ross and Silverman received reports from sources claiming Vesco was running a drug smuggling operation in the Bahamas.

They set up shop in some hotel rooms on the island for "days on end," developing their sources undercover. The effort failed to unearth Vesco, but Ross and Silverman were

able to file a series of reports on the flamboyant, violent drug boss Carlos Lehder, who had taken over a Caribbean island, and on drug corruption within the Bahamian government.

Finally, Ross hit some Vesco pay dirt: A source slipped him a "treasure map" that pinpointed the financier's hideout in Cuba. That was particularly intriguing because Fidel Castro had publicly denied that he was harboring the fugitive.

The first problem, how to get into Cuba, was solved by Castro himself, who was allowing foreign journalists into the country to cover a conference in Havana concerning Latin debt. But any hopes of snooping around the island were dashed when Ross and Silverman were greeted by their assigned "keeper," a formidable goon named Israel.

"Whenever we left the hotel, there was Israel," recalls Silverman. "So we decided we'd have to persuade him that we were good-for-nothings." Daiquiris, big cigars and shopping expeditions became their main preoccupations until, late one drunken night, they sensed they could make their move. They told Israel they weren't getting up in the morning—no need to come by before noon.

By 5 A.M., the treasure map had led them to a large field. Ross dropped off Silverman and their camera crew, and the three men began crawling across the field, which was infested with lizards that inflated their huge red throats at the sight of them. Off in the distance Silverman could see Vesco's heavily guarded house. They trained their camera on the house, growing concerned that the rising sun would make it increas-



Undercover video of Iraqi smuggler Ali Daghir was a major scoop for the pair.

ingly difficult to remain hidden.

Suddenly, the soundman tapped Silverman on the shoulder and he turned around to see a man with a "12th-century, inscrutable Indian face" staring down at them. "What should I tell him?" asked the soundman, the only one of the three who could speak Spanish. Words came out of Silverman's mouth before he knew what he was thinking. "Tell him we're shooting birds and flowers for National Geographic," he said. The cameraman swung his camera around to the lizards as the soundman turned back to the stranger. The man walked away.

By noon, the team had captured several minutes of footage as the reptile they were really after left the house for his car. And the following night their report led the *NBC Nightly News*.

"Castro went berserk," NBC's Don Browne recalls. "He was caught in a lie. And that's caused us some very uncomfortable situations."

Nor is it the only such instance. Browne says NBC News lost ten days getting into Iraq after that country invaded Kuwait because the Iraqi government was retaliating for Ross and Silverman's nuclear-trigger stories. "They acknowledged

we were the first ones to ask for entry into the country," Browne says. "But we got no response until we wrote a statement saying it was obvious we were being punished." NBC News and all NBC affiliates are also banned from entering the Bahamas because of the reports of government drug corruption, Browne says. The nation's prime minister sued the investigative team in Canada, but the case was later dropped.

Beyond its legal and political entanglements, Ross and Silverman's operation—including Ross's office in New York, Silverman's in Washington, a researcher and a Miami-based field producer—is extremely costly, particularly because of the amount of time their investigations generally take. (Last year, the pair generated about 25 reports based on about a half-dozen fruitful investigations.) Ross and Silverman's freshly inked four-year contracts earn them each about \$400,000 annually, according to sources. And that ranks them as two of the highest-paid correspondent and producer talents at NBC. But the salaries come at great personal expense. Not only do they lead dangerous lives, but their workload is tremendous: The upcoming series has them simultaneously juggling 19 stories in various stages of development. Recently, Ross hopped from New York to San Diego to New York to London to Miami and back to New York again in about a week's time—a not unusual schedule.

Without baggage-claim huggers to rely on, they're saved from burnout by having a steady partner—someone to keep things in perspective when dealing with secretive and at times dangerous sources. Some contacts can "swallow you up," Silverman says. "It can be like a freak show, trying to relate to people."

Silverman says he got his big break as an investigative journalist from a source named Vinny the Cat, a professional snitch for the IRS. In the late '60s, when Silverman was a producer at WNBC, covering school strikes and campus riots, Vinny let it be known that the recently formed Knapp Commission, investigating corruption within the New York City police narcotics division, needed someone to do some undercover film work. Silverman negotiated a deal with the commission to supply the filming in exchange for exclusive rights to the footage. From WNBC, Silverman moved to NBC News, where he worked for several documentary-unit "fiefdoms" before becoming a producer for the *NBC Nightly News* some 15 years ago.

It was Silverman's years of work probing the "dark side of the moon" that made the NBC News executives see the possibilities of teaming him with Brian Ross, whose series of stories on racketeering in the Teamsters union while at the NBC-owned Cleveland station, WKYC-TV, had garnered an Alfred I. Dupont-Columbia Journalism award.

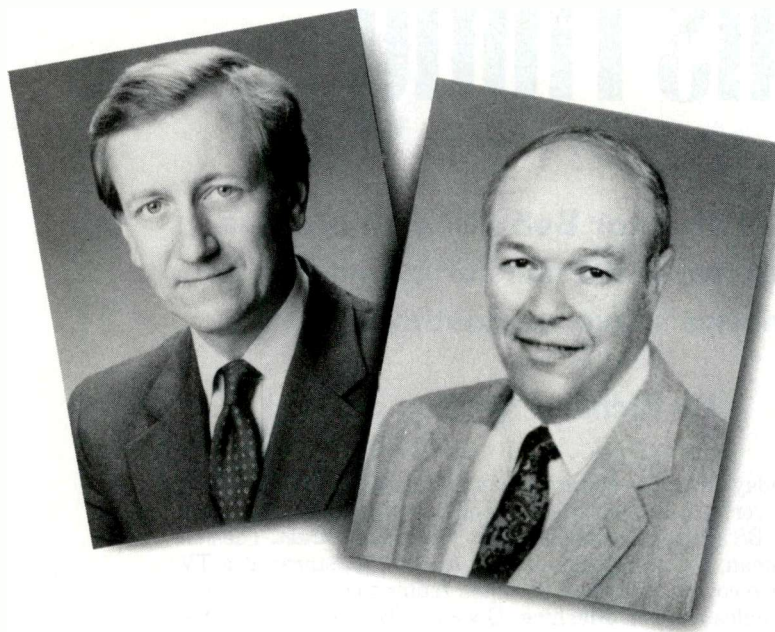
Both men trace their journalistic roots back to high school, where they edited their respective school newspapers. Silverman grew up in Brooklyn and attended Columbia University, where he became news editor of the *Spectator*; Ross was raised in the affluent Chicago suburb of Highland Park.

By the age of 14, Ross was working at local WEEF-AM-FM as an engineer, sports announcer and disc jockey. By 18, he had become the commercial stations' news director. Even then his investigative inclination was obvious. "I remember Brian insisting that I hide in the bushes outside a city councilman's house because he was convinced he was up to no good," says his fellow WEEF staffer Graham Spanier, now provost and v.p. of academic affairs at Oregon State University. Stints at two NBC affiliates—KWWL-TV in Waterloo, Iowa, and then WCKT-TV Miami (now independent WSVN)—led Ross to WKYC.

Over the years, Ross and Silverman may have solved many mysteries, but a formidable one looms ahead: Will the insatiable demands of a prime-time series stymie their ability to do consistently hard-hitting reporting? "This will not be a celebrity or interview-driven show," Ross emphasizes. "It will be very hard, an expansion of what we do now."

The challenges of creating such a program are not lost on Silverman. "I feel like someone's talked us into enrolling in skydiving class," he says. Then again, what's a little prime-time free-fall after drug lords and hijackings? ●

Two hot leads to follow.



Congratulations to Brian Ross and Ira Silverman
on their 1990 Excellence In Media citations. 



Fish Does His Thing

CBS Sports director Bob Fishman brings a fan's enthusiasm and a flair for innovation to America's favorite pastimes.

By Richard Katz

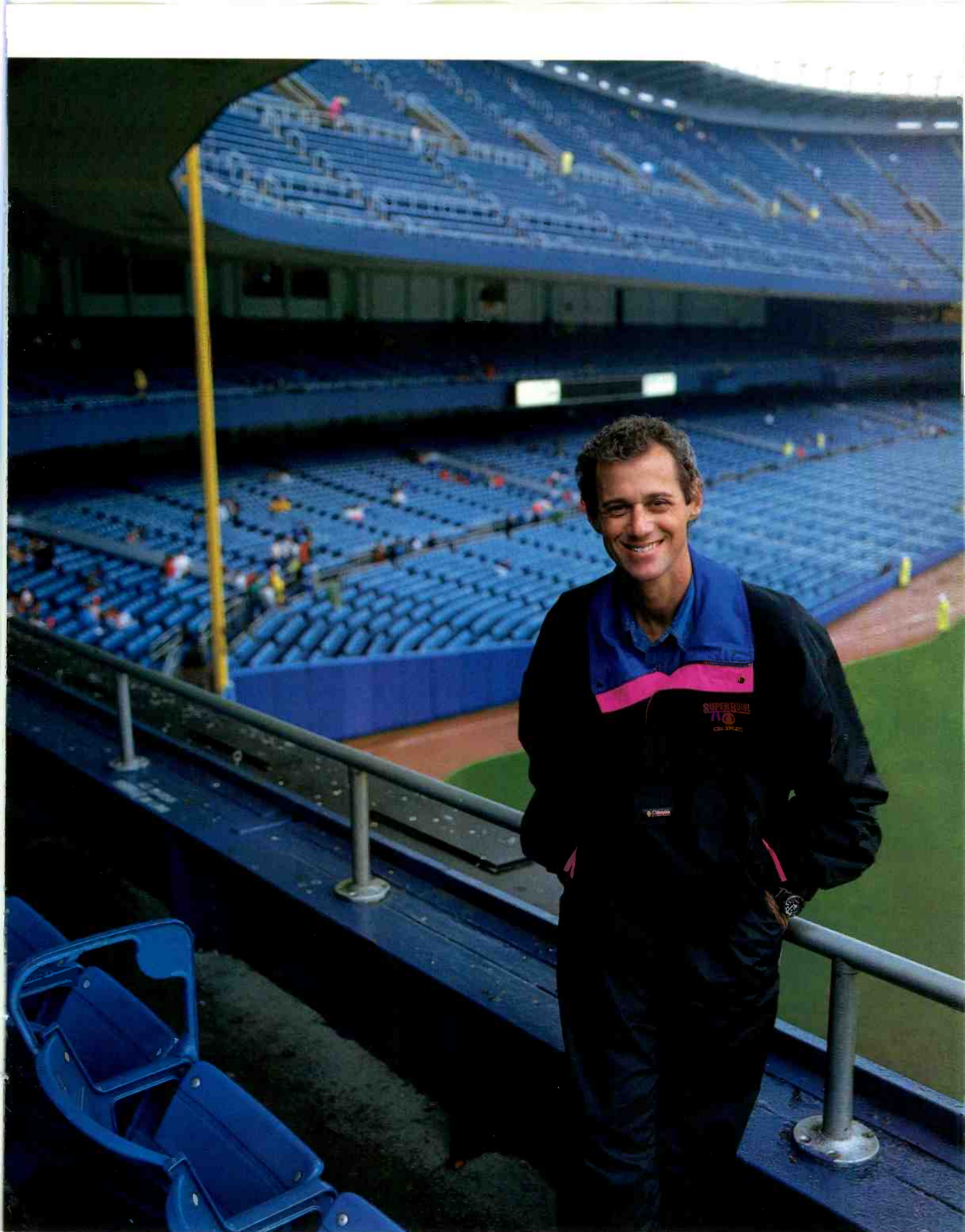
It's a beautiful Friday afternoon toward the end of August, and Bob Fishman, who rarely works at a desk, sits in an office on the 30th floor—the sports floor—of CBS's Black Rock building on West 52nd Street. The sun shines in as Fishman, a CBS Sports director since 1976, stares at a TV tuned to CBS's live coverage of the U.S. Open tennis tournament taking place only a few miles away in Flushing, Queens. Fishman says quietly, almost to himself, "God, I wish I was doing that."

Fishman is usually CBS's lead director for the Open, but this year he had to take time off in the face of a life-threatening illness. Last September Fishman was diagnosed as having lymphoma, a malignant growth in his chest. But after a year of hell, Fishman, a youthful-looking 42, has beaten the cancer. The toll of a year's worth of chemotherapy breaking down his immune system, however, and bone marrow transplants to treat his immune system, left him with a case of painful stomach shingles this summer. Throughout the illness, and the uncertainty of whether or not he had finally beaten cancer, Fishman's pain seems to have been intensified by having to be replaced on the events he loves to direct.

It's been an emotional year for Fishman, a man known for bringing passion and human drama to sports telecasts. When he wasn't thinking about cancer, he was ecstatic about getting his first chance to direct baseball under CBS's four-year Major League Baseball contract. Fishman's been a baseball fanatic since he began listening to games via short-wave radio from his childhood home in the Virgin Islands at age five; it's no wonder he describes CBS's billion-dollar MLB contract as a personal "godsend."

So despite the illness that kept him away from the Open, he wasn't going to miss his first crack at baseball. To get through a Saturday baseball broadcast in the middle of August, Fishman directed the whole game with a heating pad on his stomach. "He didn't miss a beat," says Bob Dekas, a CBS pro-

PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL WEINSTEIN

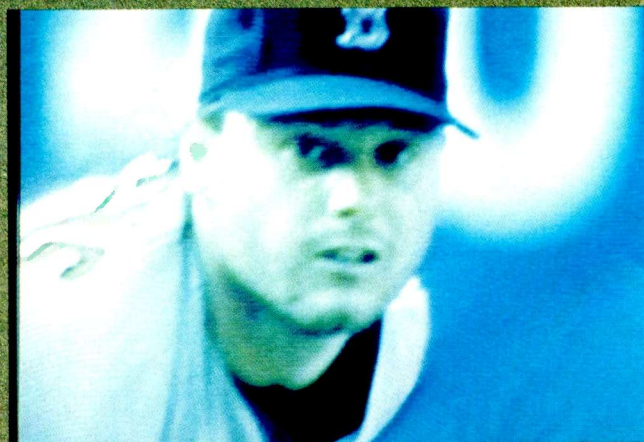


ducer who worked the game and has teamed with Fishman frequently over the years. "He's a competitor. He's like a pitcher who wants to be handed the ball every fifth day and [be told], 'Hey, go out to the mound and win one for us.' He cares so much about baseball and wants to be in the chair."

Fishman combines this passion for sports with his talents as a director. "If you had to take a career, Bob has probably been the best director in sports television," says Rudy Martzke, the sports TV critic for *USA Today*.

"Usually sports directors will be either good television directors or people who know sports," says CBS sportscaster Dick Stockton. "The thing that impressed me about Bob is that he can do both." Says Phil Mushnick, *The New York Post's* usually acerbic sports media columnist, "He's the best friend sports fans don't know they have."

"Bobby's as versatile a director as you can find," says Brent Musburger, the longtime CBS broadcaster who joined ABC this year, referring to the many sports Fishman has tackled. He won the 1987 Directors Guild of America award and an Emmy in '82 and '88 for his NCAA basketball coverage, the D.G.A. award in '89 for the U.S. Open Tennis Championships



Red Sox pitcher Roger Clemens: Fishman gives the cameramen room to move.

and Emmies in '77 and '78 for *The NFL Today*. In addition, Fishman has also directed pro basketball, pro football and auto racing, and he's doing figure skating to get ready for the '92 Olympics.

No matter what the sport, Fishman's trademark is his uncluttered presentation of the game. "Live action is sacred to him," says Dekas about a credo that is far less common among directors than one might think.

"Most [directors] will give you a close-up of the guy's face who just scored, then will go to a cheerleader's crotch, then to the coach," says the *Post's* Mushnick about TV basketball. "When you get back to the action, you see there's been a turnover and the team's just scored. The vast majority of directors do that. Fishman's not going to give you those asinine shots when the ball's in play."

Not surprisingly, one of Fishman's few complaints with CBS is the net's occasional interference in the action. About his first season of baseball, Fishman says, "The only time we've missed a pitch this year is because of our huge commercial load. It's obscene that we come back sometimes and it's strike one already. We paid so much money for this damn thing, they seem to be adding more and more commercials."

Aside from setting the standards for shooting live sports ("He should write a pamphlet for basketball directors," says Mushnick), Fishman has brought technological innovation to

two sports in particular. One is auto racing. Although he takes no credit for installing the miniature remote-controlled in-car cameras that give viewers the dramatic perspective of the driver, he was the first director in North America to use them, in 1981. "Our in-board cameras revolutionized coverage of auto racing," says Fishman. "I'm proud to have been involved in the single achievement in terms of technology that vaulted auto racing to the major sports status it now has." The CBS auto-racing production team won the Emmy for outstanding live sports special in 1986 for the Daytona 500.

In thoroughbred race coverage, for which he's won the prestigious Eclipse Award, Fishman was the first to use a hand-held camera at the starting gate. A big horse-racing fan—in 1983 Fishman and CBS producer Mike Pearl co-owned and raced a horse named Remanded, and plan to race a horse again this spring—Fishman felt that the close-up excitement of the jockeys getting into the starting gate was missing from television. "Traditionally, racing was covered initially on a wide shot of the gate and all the horses would pop out," says Fishman. "But you never saw closeups of the horses going into the gate, you never saw the jockeys fidgeting around, standing in their saddles, adjusting their goggles." In 1979 Fishman and Pearl got permission to put a hand-held camera on the wheels of the mobile starting gate, just inches away from the outside horse. The shot is now standard for horse-race coverage.

In 1985 CBS lost the Belmont Stakes, which was its only part of the Triple Crown, to ABC, and Fishman took it almost personally. "It was a very traumatic thing to lose horse racing," he says "I was devastated. It took a long time to get over that." To compound the loss, Mike Pearl jumped over to ABC and went on doing horse racing without him. "When CBS didn't renew horse racing," says Mushnick, "he really hurt. Not because he was the lead director on it, but because he really likes horse racing. It was fun."

These things matter because Fishman lets himself get caught up in the action. *USA Today's* Martzke remembers being in the truck with Fishman during the second half of Villanova's unbelievable upset of Georgetown in the NCAA finals in 1985. Villanova was clinging to a small lead. "They went to a break," says Martzke, "and he just yelled out, 'Hey, this is the most exciting time I've ever had! I can't believe this is happening!' He just loved the moment."

Without sacrificing the live action, Fishman translates his excitement to the TV screen by capturing a game's emotional peaks. "It's the ability to tell a story with pictures," says Ted Shaker, executive producer of CBS Sports. "He has a great sense of the moment," says Mushnick. "Only a sports fan can know the moment, the secondary story line." Fishman's ability to capture the underlying tensions can raise a sports telecast from well-done entertainment to poignant drama.

Such was the NCAA basketball Final Four tournament in 1982. North Carolina State beat Georgetown by a point when Georgetown guard Fred Brown threw the ball away, costing the team its last shot at victory. It was CBS's first Final Four, and Fishman went to a shot of Georgetown coach John Thompson consoling the bawling Brown on the sideline.

Cut to the Final Four 1984. Georgetown is beating up on the University of Houston and Thompson pulls Fred Brown out of the game in the closing seconds. Fishman goes to a shot of Thompson wrapping Brown in a bear hug. "As soon as Brown came out of the game, I said, 'Get me a shot of Thompson on the sideline,'" explains Fishman, "because I *knew*, thinking back two years earlier when this kid threw the ball away . . . And here he was a senior and Thompson picks him up and hugs him. It was kind of like saying, 'Remember two years ago? Now look where you are!' It was a very human moment—one of those things that transcends sports."

Fishman's had some 26 years to hone his sports instincts. He grew up in St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands, where his

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grandfather had built a hotel in the early '50s. His dad ran the business for many years, but the young Fishman, who still calls the Islands home, didn't have any interest in following in his father's and grandfather's footsteps. As a teenager his passions were firmly rooted in sports and the electronic media. At 16, Fishman was doing sports reporting on local TV channel 10. "I had a start in this business way before anybody could ever dream about in the continental United States," he muses.

After earning a broadcasting and film degree from Boston University in 1969, Fishman still wanted to get into sports television, but settled for a more realistic entry point as a news stagehand at WCAU-TV in Philadelphia, a CBS O&O. "Back in those days sports was a very closed door," says Fishman, "and it was not highly thought of at the network. It was kind of a necessary evil to cover some games."

Six months later, Fishman joined CBS in the commercial coordinating department, where he met Bob Wussler, then executive producer of special events for CBS News. Wussler hired him into special events and took Fishman with him when he became head of sports in 1975. "He was a nice, engaging man," remembers Wussler, now the chairman of ComSat. "That doesn't mean anybody's going to have talent, but I had a gut instinct about him."

The NFL Today was Fishman's first sports directing assignment in 1976. His most recent big event: directing the American League Championship Series, for which he controlled 13 cameras. (A regular CBS baseball game uses eight or nine.) "What I love about baseball is that it's new," says Fishman. "You get stale doing the same sports. How different is one basketball game creatively from the other? It's not." Fishman also loves the challenge of baseball's unpredictability. "I've watched hundreds of games," says Fishman, "but the first time you sit there and there are runners on first and third and the batter hits a double up the gap, you go, 'Holy shit!' It's a brand-new experience. I'm still learning."

Unlike sports announcers, who become media stars in their own right, directors stay hidden behind the scenes. Fishman says he doesn't mind the low profile, but he qualifies it: "I guess it bothers some of us only because we provide so many hours of programming and we're doing it live, which is tough. It's tough to be good at working with so many cameras."

It's made harder by a circumstance most viewers probably never recognize: The man calling the TV shots isn't even in the stands or on the sidelines, where the action could unfold in front of him. He's directing from a truck parked outside the stadium. He has to rely on the wall of monitors in front of him, the chaotic verbal cues from the producer and associate producer sitting next to him and the jumble of cameramen and tape technicians' voices being piped into the truck. Since Fishman doesn't have a view of the field of play, he fosters dialogue and creativity with his technical and camera people to get the optimum shots to tell the story. His sincere demeanor has made him one of the few directors who mixes well in tech circles.

"He always makes me feel welcome," says George Rothweiler, a CBS cameraman. Pete Silverman, vice president/executive producer of MSG, says, "People want to work for him."

Fishman encourages his camerapeople to experiment, upping the chances that one will hit on that shot viewers remember long after the game. During a Toronto Blue Jays-Boston Red Sox game this year, Rothweiler chose a riveting close-up shot on the eyes of Boston pitcher Roger Clemens (both the Red Sox and Clemens' family requested a copy of the broadcast). It was a 1-0 game in the bottom of the eighth and Rothweiler, working the low home camera, had been shooting through plexiglass, which causes blur on extreme close-ups, behind the plate in Toronto. Taking a chance, he wheeled his camera over to shoot through a one-inch gap in the plexiglass and zoomed in for an extreme close-up showing

the intensity and snarl in Clemens' face.

"Some directors would have said, 'No, no, no!'" says Rothweiler, "because I didn't have much room to pan. He had to fall perfectly [off the mound] and I had to follow him to get that great reaction on his face."

"You've got to give him the freedom to do it," explains Fishman. "If you yell, 'That's too tight! That's too tight!' he backs off and he's wide all day."

Fishman's producers give him the same kinds of freedom. Near the end of NCAA basketball tournament games, producer Dekas will say, "Fish, do your thing." The phrase is a little joke, but when the announcers hear it they know to be silent and let Fishman tell the story with 30 seconds of pure visuals. "If you've never been to a Final Four, it really is extraordinary with whole fan sections with seas of color and everybody waving pom-poms," says Fishman. When CBS doesn't go to a commercial break during a time out, Fishman does his thing.

"I think there are times where you can really set an emotional tone to the finish of a game by doing those wide pans and dissolving to a close-up of a kid's face on the bench," says Fishman. He reels off eight or ten shots of: the crowd going crazy, the player running off the court pumping his fist, the coach jumping up and down, a cheerleader crying. "If you do those in quick succession, it gives people a sense of 'God,



From Fishman's *Dolphins, Whales and Us*: an antidote to sports overload.

there are all these things going on there," he says. "I think I can manipulate your emotions during the end of a game."

At this stage in his career, what keeps Fishman going is entering uncharted territory. But in ten years, Fishman says, he may well be burned out on sports. With that day in mind, and to keep his sports work fresh, he did a documentary this year for CBS called *Dolphins, Whales and Us*. The environmentally conscious special ran in prime time on April 20 and has since been awarded CINE Golden Eagle and Monitor awards. The dolphin segment of the special inspired Starkist to shoot its first dolphin-safe tuna ad, which aired at the end of the program.

While Fishman says he has received two offers from ABC to jump ship, being able to do non-sports shows—he has strong interests in the ocean and the environment—is one of the reasons he stays at CBS. Another is CBS's continued aggressiveness in pursuing sports franchises, which gives Fishman a stream of new events to try on. "I love anything new where you have to go to an arena and decide where to put the cameras because it's never been done there before," he says. "That's exciting." ●

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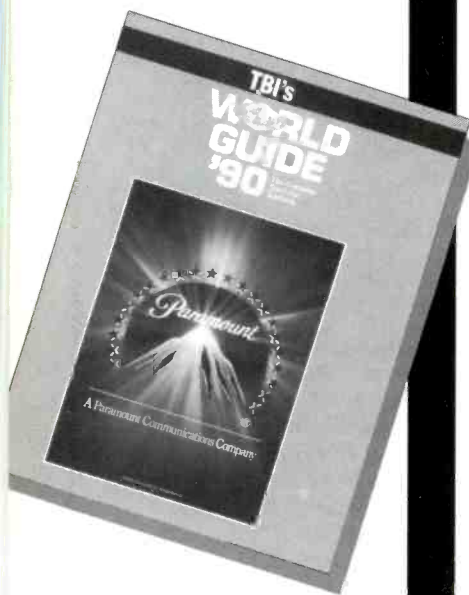
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Serious



James Brooks brings a relentless passion for perfection to some of the best comedy ever seen on TV.



About 20 years ago, as Allan Burns recalls, James L. Brooks, his partner in creating *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, then in its first season, whisked Burns to the basement banquet room of a Jewish delicatessen in the Fairfax section of Los Angeles. There, Brooks threw Burns a surprise ceremony, complete with gifts, including a tallis. "He gave me a bar mitzvah," says Burns, "because I hadn't been suffering enough. He felt a guy writing comedy couldn't be all WASP, that there had to be some Jew in him. Also he wanted me to share his pain."

"Jim finds *everything* painful," says Burns, "and he laughs about it."

Fueling the work of Brooks is, say friends and colleagues, an uneasy perfectionism, a refusal to settle for anything in his work, or that of others, that is less than it can be. "Whatever he pollinates, whatever he touches," says former boss Grant Tinker, "it's just the best. It's a combination of not just being intelligent, but of also not settling. There is an awful lot of agony in it for him."

Brooks deals with his discomfort, friends say, by spotting the humor of it all. Recalls actress Valerie Harper, who portrayed Rhoda Morgenstern in *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and *Rhoda*: "Once I said to him, 'Jim, don't you want to do the serious stuff?' And he looked at me and said, 'Valerie, comedy *is* the serious stuff.' What he was after," says Harper, "was the humor of life, not the humor of jokes strung together."

To television, Brooks has brought a sensibility for sophisticated ensemble comedy laced with constant surprises and

notably lacking in the easy jokes that are the medium's currency. Brooks has created, co-created, directed, written or produced the series *Room 222*, *Mary Tyler Moore*, *Rhoda*, *Phyllis*, *Lou Grant*, *Paul Sands in Friends and Lovers*, *Taxi*, *The Associates*, *The Tracey Ullman Show* and *The Simpsons*. In addition, his theatrical films include *Terms of Endearment*, *Broadcast News*, *Big*, *War of the Roses*, *Say Anything* and *Starting Over*.

Along the way, he has developed a pattern of nurturing the talent of others. Brooks also maintains an extensive network of friends, often through early-morning phone calls, making use of the extra time created by his insomnia. He has also built a web of personal and professional contacts whose opinions he regularly seeks and to whom, these people say, he has remained available and loyal over many years. And, though an exacting critic, many consider him the best appreciator of their work. "He's always calling you to give you the benefit of his critiques of what you've done," says Burns, and "he talks it up" publicly. Says long-time friend Ed. Weinberger, another of TV's most sought-after writer-producers, "His talent for friendship is as impressive as his talent for writing, producing and directing."

Colleagues also remark on the intensity of Brooks' focus. "He's just so damned attentive," says Tinker. "All of his nerves are kind of exposed all the time. He picks up everything." But no one would discuss what keeps Brooks so on edge. Though Brooks himself declined to be interviewed for this article, his drive seems to bear some relation to his early life.

FOX

SALUTES

JAMES L. BROOKS

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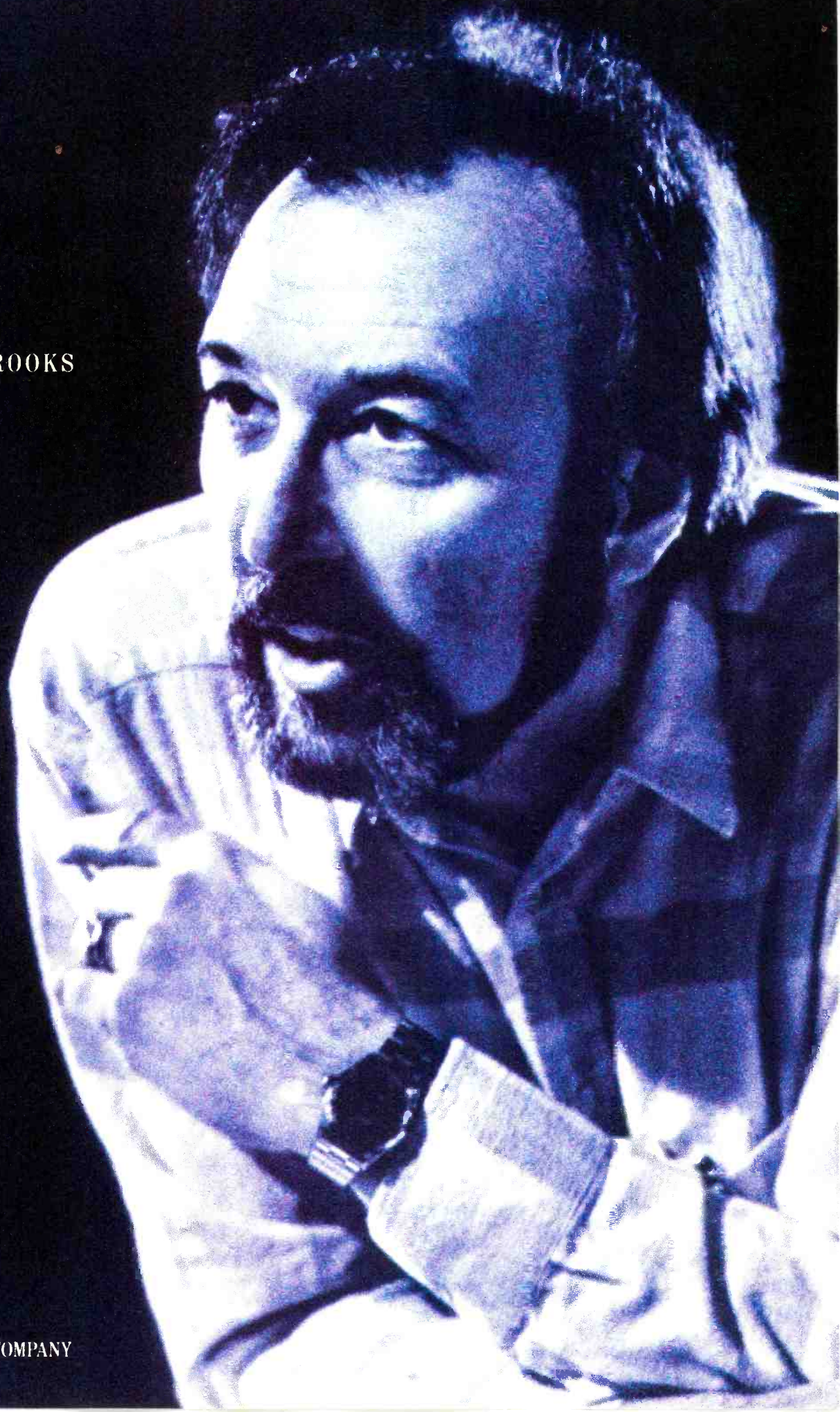
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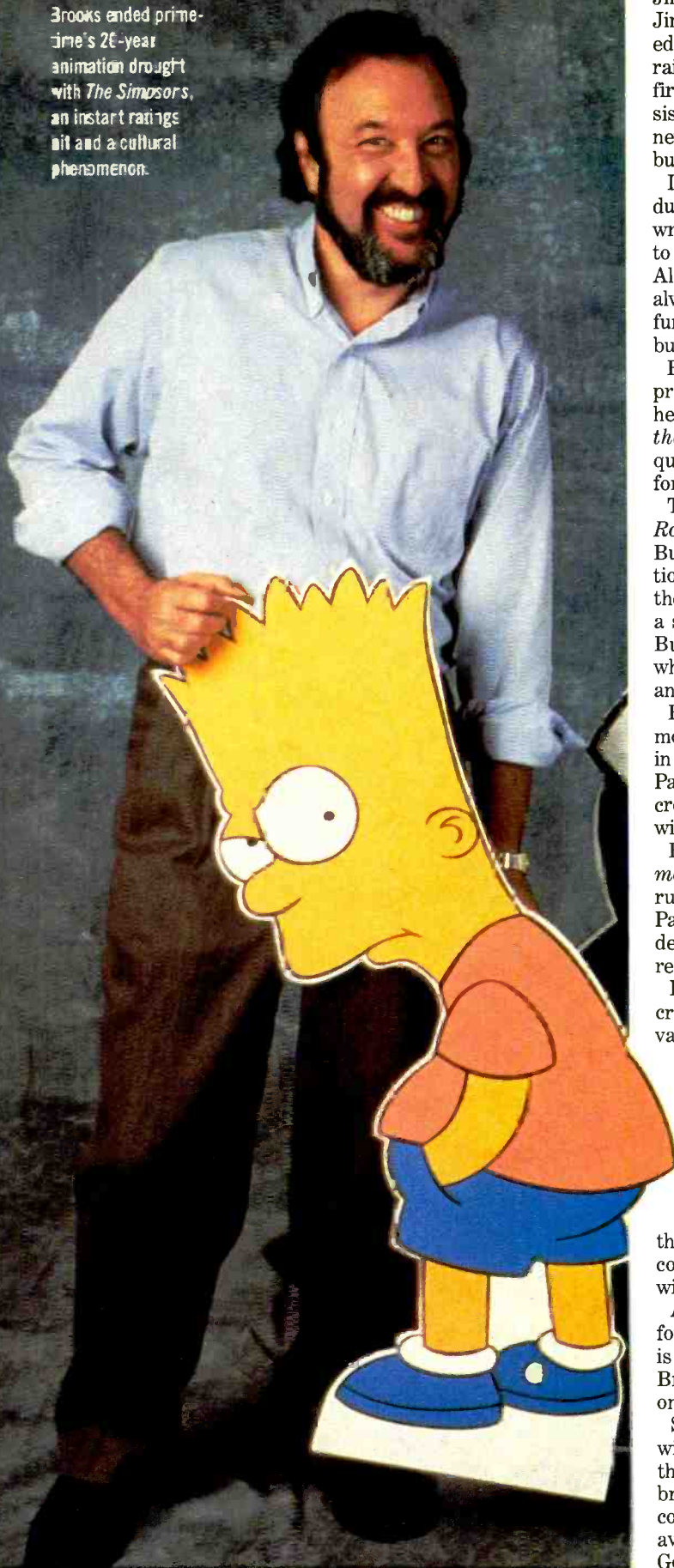
EXCELLENCE.



FOX BROADCASTING COMPANY



Brooks ended prime-time's 26-year animation drought with *The Simpsons*, an instant ratings hit and a cultural phenomenon.



Brooks's father reportedly left the family many times, the first on hearing his wife was pregnant with Jim, the last when Jim was 12. This left the family in severe financial trouble. Jim's mother, a saleswoman, died when she was 57, reportedly while waiting on a customer. Jim, born in Brooklyn and raised in New Jersey, was 22. He dropped out of N.Y.U. his first year and failed at a couple of factory jobs. Through older sister Diane he landed at CBS as a page, later becoming a newsroom copy boy, then a newswriter. Those jobs paid bills, but Brooks wanted more.

In 1966, he moved to L.A. to work for documentary producer David Wolper. While working for Wolper, Brooks also wrote scripts on speculation and prowled parties for contacts to break into comedy. One writer he kept buttonholing was Allan Burns, whose credits included *Get Smart*. "He was always pumping me," says Burns. "I thought he was far too funny to be writing documentaries. We were both very shy, but I was attracted to his intelligence and his wit."

Burns soon introduced Brooks to David Davis, already a TV producer, who was so impressed with Brooks' work that he helped Brooks sell his first script, an episode of *My Mother the Car*. Brooks soon quit Wolper to freelance full time, quickly gaining recognition through a Writer's Guild award for his work on *That Girl*.

The first show he created, along with Gene Reynolds, was *Room 222*, at Twentieth Century Fox. Brooks eventually lured Burns to write for the show, and the pair attracted the attention of Grant Tinker, then in charge of network programs for the studio, who had just received a commitment from CBS for a sitcom featuring his then-wife. Tinker talked Brooks and Burns into working together to create, write and produce what became *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. It debuted in 1970 and became the basis of what is today MTM Enterprises.

But looking for bigger bucks and the opportunity to make movies, Brooks and three MTM colleagues left for Paramount in 1978. While the larger ownership rights they obtained from Paramount in the shows they would create paid off with the creation of *Taxi*, the studio never backed its movie promises with enough money and the group drifted apart.

Brooks spent several years trying to get *Terms of Endearment* made and eventually moved in the mid-'80s to Fox, then run by Barry Diller—who had previously brought him to Paramount—and a personal friend, Larry Gordon, then president and COO. At Fox, Brooks turned out more movies and returned to television, taking all sorts of creative risks.

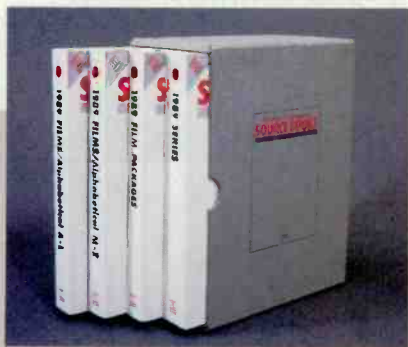
For the new Fox network, which was desperately in need of credibility, he and colleagues made the critically acclaimed variety program, *The Tracey Ullman Show*, at a time when variety series seemed dead. Then, though network programmers had essentially banned animated series from prime time for about 20 years, they produced an *Ullman* spinoff, *The Simpsons*, which became a critical, popular and merchandising success after just 13 episodes.

Brooks also gets high marks as a businessman who takes part in cutting his deals. And now, the 50-year-old Brooks has what some sources claim is an unequalled deal that is allowing him to pursue his dream of a writer-driven company. At his Gracie Films, Brooks has surrounded himself with writers with whom he wants to work.

ABC has agreed to pay Brooks and his Gracie colleagues for first crack at their next three series. But there reportedly is no set timetable for delivery. The shows are to come when Brooks and colleagues feel they're ready. Says Tinker, "No one at a network should be telling Jim Brooks what to do."

Simultaneously, Brooks has an extremely lucrative deal with Columbia Pictures Television that will provide him with the wherewithal to make more movies and, purportedly, to branch out into theater and a film musical. The fact that the conventional wisdom holds neither to be financially promising avenues today doesn't seem to hinder Brooks. Says friend Gordon, "It's another thing to conquer."

PHOTOGRAPH BY BONNIE SCHIFFMAN / ONYX



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TV Learns How to Teach

**Children's Television Workshop melds fun
and education so seamlessly, most kids never
know what helped them.**

By Cheryl Heuton

Kids have changed in the 22 years since the debut of a modestly conceived educational project called *Sesame Street*, and the kindergarten curriculum has had to change with them. The nation's children now enter school able to recognize letters, numbers and simple words; they can count, name colors and shapes and comprehend basic social values. No matter what follows during the often troubled educational process, kids start off better today, thanks largely to the efforts of the Children's Television Workshop.

Sesame Street started in 1969 as an experiment to prove that television could teach numbers and letters to preschool-age children. It was a bigger success than anyone expected. "I knew the show would be well received," says co-founder Joan Ganz Cooney. "But I could not have believed the wild success that followed. When Big Bird hit the cover of *Time*, I knew we had something that would last forever."

It has at least lasted two decades, and is going stronger than ever. *Sesame Street* is on more than 300 PBS stations and in more than 100 countries, in either the English version or in foreign-language coproductions. People who watched as kids now watch with their own children. Big Bird is a celebrity recognized in places as far away as Japan and Australia. "I think if you asked people to say the first words that come to mind when they hear 'public television,' they would say, '*Sesame Street*,'" says Mary Sceiford, associate director for children's programs at the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Outside praise has been heaped upon the effort: Cooney has won the

1990 Founders Award from the International Council of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, the first Ralph Lowell Medal for Service to Public Television and a special Daytime Emmy for Lifetime Achievement. This year, Cooney was inducted in the Television Academy Hall of Fame.

CTW's success has endured despite changes in curriculum and society, despite reduced funding for public television, and despite the deaths of key contributors, notably puppeteer Jim Henson. Another transition takes place this month, as Cooney steps down as chairman and chief executive officer to serve as chairman of CTW's board of trustees. Cooney says she wants to switch from managing the business side to concentrate on *Sesame Street*. David Britt assumes the title of chief executive officer.

The show itself, however, has been changing all along. "The emphasis was originally on cognitive skills, and it has been demonstrated that *Sesame Street* does teach those," says Aimee Door, professor of education at the University of California at Los Angeles. "What we have found is that it can also have a positive effect on attitudes toward other racial groups and toward the disabled; it improves children's social knowledge. This effort has come as an addition to early goals. The cast is multiracial; one is deaf. Yet everyone gets along well and cooperates."

The academic goals have changed as the show's researchers learned how much preschoolers can comprehend. Initially, the show taught children to count from one to ten. "Now we teach counting from one to 40," says Dulce Singer, executive



Joan Ganz Cooney, chairman and cofounder, and David Britt, newly named CEO, say *Sesame Street's* mission to educate preschoolers remains CTW's main goal.

producer. Comedy and an edge of sophistication have always been part of the show, she points out, because parents and older siblings control the TV dial. "It is very difficult to find comedy writers who can write on those two levels, and also incorporate the academics." To keep all ages involved, the show features popular music, slang and visual styles. The current season features visits from Robin Williams, Whoopi Goldberg, Bo Jackson, Tyne Daley and Ray Charles.

These efforts to maintain a hip, current feel have helped *Sesame Street* continue to reach its target viewers, low-income children ages two to five. A study conducted this year showed that *Sesame Street* reaches 92 percent of preschool children in low-income homes. Nearly 80 percent watch at least once a week and 57 percent watch daily, according to the research firm of Yankelovich, Skelly and White/Clancy, Shulman.

The Workshop has expanded over the years with shows that introduce academic topics to older children. *Electric Company*, now defunct, focused on reading for kids aged 7 to 10; *3-2-1 Contact* and *3-2-1 Contact "Extras"* were designed to

present science to children 8 to 12; *Square One TV* presents mathematics to that same age group. Still, "*Sesame Street* is the jewel in our crown," says Cooney.

And it remains unique. "There are programs that are partially equivalent," says Dr. John Wright, co-director of the Center for Research on the Influences of Television on Children at the University of Kansas. "Some of the social agenda of *Sesame Street* is addressed by *Mr. Roger's Neighborhood*. The speed and action and other interest-maintaining features are part of *Pee-wee's Playhouse*. Some of the trans-cultural messages have been carried by Spanish-language programming. *Sesame Street* is the only program that puts them all together." For CTW director and creative consultant Jon Stone, "that is the maddening part, that no one else does this. No one else tries to use research and curriculum in building a show, and it's easier to do it this way because it offers a framework, and it is such smart counter-programming."

The *Sesame Street* model was conceived in 1966. Cooney, a public affairs producer at New York's WNET, worked with

CTW cofounder Lloyd Morrisett, then at the Carnegie Corporation of New York, on a study to determine whether television could augment education. That yielded an \$8 million two-year project, partially funded by Carnegie, to put together a children's show. Cooney was sure TV could teach. "It was obvious TV *was* teaching," she says. "Children were singing beer commercials. The question was content."

To help translate her ideas, Cooney sought out people with experience in children's television. Stone, a veteran of *Captain Kangaroo*, was responsible for creating much of *Sesame Street*'s look and feel. He brought in puppeteer Jim Henson and composer Joe Raposo, and hired movie set designer Charlie Rosen to create the street set.

Yet early test shows simply didn't work. Following researchers' advice, the producers had decided to keep fantasy and reality strictly separate on the show. The street segments were real; fantasy was limited to puppet and animation sequences. The attention of young test audiences wandered during the reality segments. "We decided to put Big Bird and Oscar on the street, and to hell with separation," Stone says. Generally, though, the researchers and the producers work well together. "It never really was a struggle," says David Connell, the original executive producer. "Research is invaluable. It's the one element that sets the show apart," adds Stone. Dr. Keith Mielke, CTW vice president for research, explains that the goals and curriculum are set by advisory panels made up of educators. In-house researchers devise the teaching methods and track their effectiveness.

Before the first show was aired, Evelyn Payne Davis, vice president of community education services, launched a national operation to tell parents and child-care professionals about the program. Outreach involved such basics as getting televisions to child-care and community centers so poor kids could watch. Training for parents was arranged through community groups and other services. "By helping organizations with donated equipment and curriculum, we were able to institutionalize the use of the show," Davis says.

As people saw that CTW's methods worked, many sought its help. The community education staff took the show into prisons as a means of keeping kids busy while custodial parents visited incarcerated parents. The staff established child-care training for migrant farm labor families, because the show helps migrant workers learn English and provides their children with a consistent educational experience. Other projects teach tutoring skills to parents and teens in after-school centers. CTW has prepared videos and instructional guides on integrating disabled children into activities with the non-disabled. The workshop designed a fire safety course, complete with a video program and live instruction, and it is working on a series of videos to help children understand and prepare for natural disasters.

The current emphasis for the community outreach program is to make *Sesame Street* a regular resource in child-care centers. "That's where our target audience is now found," says Davis. A pilot project in Dallas will, by next April, be in 1,000 centers attended by 10,000 kids.

Despite constant success at reaching the audience and teaching, financing has not always been easy for CTW. During the Reagan administration, funding for public television was slashed year after year. Early on, CTW formed a product



3-2-1 Contact uses current events to expose kids to science; Stars like Bo Jackson appeal to parents of *Sesame Street*'s target viewers.

licensing division, but "it was rocky getting started," Cooney admits. "One year that effort lost \$200,000. Things were very tight at times. We invested in computer software, and lost a fortune when Atari went under. There were some very bad moments." In 1974, CTW hired William F. Whaley from Western Publishing to organize its products division. "Under Bill Whaley, things were starting to turn around," Cooney says, "and then a toy came along called Talking Big Bird, and it was a runaway success." The licensing division is now profitable, and Whaley says CTW has more than 2,800 products and more than 500 book titles on the market in 24 countries. It fields four live touring shows, is a partner in a theme park and operates retail stores. CTW's publishing division, also profitable, owns four magazines with a combined circulation of more than 2 million, says Nina Link, senior vice president and publisher for the magazine group.

This financial security gives CTW the resources for such projects as a literacy series, now being developed for children 8 to 12 years of age. "The goal is to get kids reading and writing with comprehension," says Franklin Getchell, vice president for production. "It will be a half-hour weekly show, a dramatic mystery serial, involving lots of print on the screen." Davis' community outreach division

plans to support the literacy project with an effort to establish after-school reading clubs based around the show.

That, and other projects, will be done under the guidance of David Britt, CTW's new president. Britt, who joined CTW in 1971, says things will change, "but in the direction Joan would have taken." *Sesame Street* will continue to be the main mission. However, increasing competition in the children's programming arena has prompted CTW into productions intended for commercial television, cable and home video. It has done non-PBS productions before, notably the *Encyclopedia* series for HBO. "It was not strictly based on an education formula, like *Sesame Street*'s," Britt says, "but it did provide useful information and helped build vocabulary. We would expect to be doing more projects along those lines."

Cooney says that she is, essentially, returning to the job she first took on when CTW started: overseeing the creative side, and concentrating on *Sesame Street*, particularly on making it part of child-care activities. "I'll do as much public relations as David wants, but I hope to spend more time on the substance, and less on the ceremonial."

The tragic loss of Jim Henson has hurt the staff of CTW on a personal level, but impact on production is minimal, because CTW has a backlog of Muppet tapes and a puppeteer is working to take over Henson's characters. "We'll continue working with the Henson organization," Cooney says. "There are lots of talented people there who worked closely with him, and his five children are all bright and capable. But personally, we are still distraught. We adored him. It's hard to imagine creative life without him."

Perhaps the only thing that hasn't changed at CTW is the audience's taste. Preschoolers are a remarkably predictable, steady group, according to researchers. "The kids have not changed. Times have changed around the kids," says Stone. *Sesame Street* goes on, each year bringing in an audience for whom its characters and humor are fresh and new. And it continues to prove that creating successful TV need not entail a choice between the entertaining and educational. ●

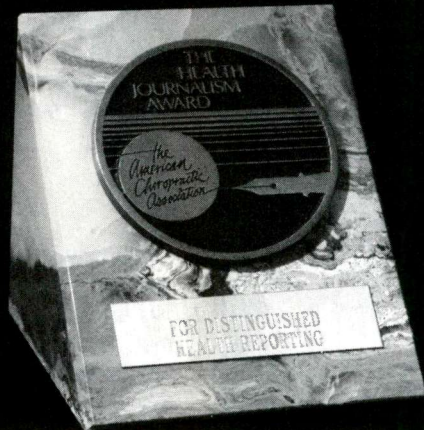
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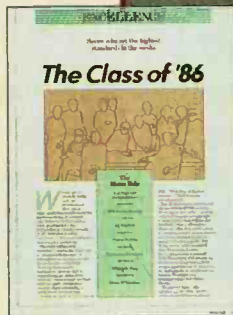
1984

C-SPAN
GRANADA TELEVISION
WCCO-TV
WFMT RADIO
THE Z CHANNEL



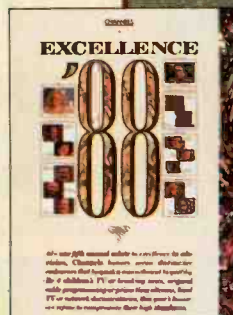
1986

CAGNEY & LACEY
CBS SUNDAY MORNING
CONTINENTAL CABLE
GROUP W TELEVISION
AMERICAN PUBLIC RADIO'S BILL KLING
THE LETTERMAN GANG
JAY SANDRICH



1988

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JAMES BURROWS
PAUL FINE AND HOLLY FINE
RICHARD KAPLAN
BRIDGET POTTER
RACE FOR THE DOUBLE HELIX
READING RAINBOW
WBRZ-TV



1985

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CBC JOURNAL
THE GRAND OLE OPRY
KIND-TV
MEDIA AND SOCIETY
SEMINAR
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BRANDON TARTIKOFF



1987

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The News Is Good For Gerry's Kids

After ten years, Nickelodeon president Gerry Laybourne looks ahead to kids' news, in-house production and slop-less shows.

Gerry Laybourne got into children's television because she was interested in children, not television. She began her career as an educator in a New England prep school, later moving to New York, where she worked at non-profit agencies and contributed to books about media education. Ten years after she accepted a position as program manager at the network, the president of Nickelodeon and Nick at Nite is overseeing newly opened Nickelodeon studios in Florida and plans for kids' news programming. She recently spoke with Channels editor-in-chief John Flinn and senior editor Janet Stilson.

How Kids See Ads

They want the straight dope. They don't want to be condescended to. They want information about products. They do not like being over-promised. In fact, that's been our major claim to fame with kids. We started underselling ourselves to kids, letting kids themselves discover what was great about the new product. In the early days we did just what every other advertiser did. We told kids how much fun we were. Once we stopped doing that, and just put on these really wacky, silly promos, kids started to think we were funny, because we weren't promising them anything.

The Impossible Dream

Nobody has ever figured out a business plan for how to support children's television without having commerce connected to it. Public television has had a stop-and-start emphasis on behalf of kids. I mean, the only consistent efforts have been *Sesame Street* and *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. And every time public

television gets a winner on their hands, they lose their funding base.

We made our peace about advertising a long time ago, back in 1984, when we began taking it. Because prior to taking advertising, we didn't have enough of a financial base to support the programming that kids would watch. It made us feel a lot better to have a good, solid economic base where we know Nickelodeon can continue from now on and deliver some good stuff for kids.

Most of the networks in their Saturday mornings, all of the networks in their Saturday mornings have very good commercial standards. They make sure that there's fairness in the way products are depicted. They don't allow for unrealistic commercials. We share those same guidelines.

Local broadcasters, however, in the spot market, have no commercial guidelines. They'll take anything. So that's where you see the commercials that are outlandish and unrealistic. They've also gotten to the point where they have so many commercials . . . 25 percent of their programming time is showing kids commercials. Kids are seeing 12 1/2, 14, 16 minutes [per hour]. It's a big issue. It's certainly an issue that gets addressed at Nickelodeon. We have 7 minutes of national commercials, so we are way, way below what's happening in the industry. And we do have similar guidelines to the networks, so that we clear all of our commercials. We don't take toys and turn them into animation and run commercials for the toys on the shows.

Don't Try This at Home

There have been some instances where the operator, on a local basis, has put

900 numbers on Nickelodeon. But I've written to all the operators, explaining why we believe that 900 numbers are [unacceptable]. And I really haven't heard of any operators that have been abusing them.

Clean-up Time

Our newer game show, *Make The Grade*, is slop-less. We put lightning in a bottle with *Double Dare*. We created this magnificent show that got kids excited about television. When I entered this business, my biggest problem in children's television was that it all looked the same to me. I grew up in a very rich children's television environment, with a lot of pioneering stuff. Cheaply produced, but rich writing. *Captain Video*, *Flicka*—just a whole rich landscape of things. And what I saw for my kids was either *Sesame Street* or Saturday morning. It was all limited animation and all looked exactly the same—same view, same characters, same stories, the same soundtracks.

What we set out to do with *Double Dare* was create something kids could root for, get excited about, that would tap into their fantasies in a very basic way. We then had a number of successes after it, where we got the game shows together that were exciting to kids and interesting. Each one got less messy.

And now they want new things. We've gotten them used to Nickelodeon being different and offering different things. Now we've got to feed them the type of thing that those kids expect from us. They get impatient in the focus groups. They say, "What have you done for me lately?" It's like, "Okay, well, you had *Make The Grade* last month. What

about this month?" And it's wonderful, because what we thought first was, "Hey, don't show me anything new about Saturday morning. That's what I'm comfortable with—I don't want anything new." Now it's quite the opposite. "Okay, so what's the next new thing?" So we've got a monster to feed, internally and externally.

Did Operators Stifle Nick's Syndication?

Not at all. I think that they understood that it was good for their business. We were able to take the additional revenues from *Double Dare* and basically ratchet ourselves up to a whole new level where we're doing *Eureka's Castle* and *Hey Dude* and . . . a level of production that we never were able to do. Which then turned into our basic core business with advertisers.

Why News for Kids?

Nobody has ever figured out how to make the news interesting to kids. Nobody. Not on the networks. There have been some efforts at soft news programming, like *In The News* or those things. But we're trying to do a daily new program. So, number one, it's a tough assignment. We've gone through a lot of research, we've gone through our first pilot stage. We got some things right and we got some things way off.

The most difficult thing is figuring out a credible anchor for the show . . . somebody that kids are going to listen to and respect and believe. It's also hard to figure out the economic justification of setting up this operation. Because going from being a kids' cable network to actually having a news operation is a big leap. But I think we have figured out that we don't need to be a news-breaking organization. We need to be a news-explaining organization. What kids have told us is that they feel left out by the news. They watch the network news, and the story always starts in the middle. They never feel like they can catch up. They can never get into the story, unless it's like an earthquake and they happen to be there right in the beginning.

We also want to try to empower kids. They told us two key things. One is that they feel sort of left out, and the other is that they feel hopeless. That generally, the news is oriented to make them feel like everything is out of control, and it's a disaster and getting worse. And their feeling about Nickelodeon is that we would put it into a context for them to make them feel like life is still worth living. And that's a real important ingredient for us. So you'll see on our news show a lot of environmental stuff, [for example]. We found an example of a group in New Jersey that has mobilized

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10,000 kids to change their school lunch programs, so that they aren't using Styrofoam. Things that kids can actually do we'll highlight.

No Squares Allowed

I don't play with squares, you know what I mean? A lot of network presidents play with their [scheduling] squares, and they are often panicky about losing. We don't have to play with squares, because we have the inventory to reach kids. And although we do try to maximize our schedule, there just isn't that kind of panic.

Black Holes in the Universal Theme Park

We were up and we were working and we were successful on day one, and we've gotten a lot of good press for the operational problems that [Universal has] had. And they have caused us some problems. Because when we had a studio audience, people would go through the park and they were frustrated because they waited on line for E.T. and then it closed. We have some problems in the audience where somebody may not be in the best mood. But we have some great warm-up people who probably should get masters in psychology [for their work].

My feeling is that in the long run, we'll look back at the Universal opening and think that it's amazing that a park that is as innovative and fantastic as it is had such an easy opening. When Disneyland opened 30 years ago, I'm sure that the scope of their problems far surpassed Universal's. Nobody remembers that. Universal set out to do the most cutting-edge theme park in America. And they were free-falling with all of them, all at once. It would be like us starting Nickelodeon with all original programming that was of the highest level of difficulty.

Florida does a lot for us. Florida is a marketing vehicle. Florida is a research site. Florida is a production laboratory. It changed the way to do business. We are able to tackle really ambitious projects that we would never have been able to tackle if we didn't have our own studio. Our on-air promotion group is benefiting from the studio, because we're out there taping kids all day.

The Laybourne Decade

[I've been here] for ten years. Ten years, 11 days and I started at 9 A.M., so that's . . . I am thrilled that we've made a lot of mistakes along the way. Because we learned more from those mistakes than we did from our successes. So I'm a person who really likes to replay mistakes ad nauseam. I'm sure some people on the staff don't get quite the joy out of a mistake that I do! ●

RUNNING THE NUMBERS

Overbuild Bills

There are more than 9,000 cable franchises in the U.S. and virtually all operate without direct competition. Depending on who's counting, there are between 25 and 50 markets where operators must vie with each other for subscribers (*Channels* found 31). Is life any different under overbuilds? According to survey results published by *Consumers' Research* in May 1990, monthly basic-cable rates were 18 percent higher in non-competitive markets than in overbuilt markets—subscriber bills averaged \$17.31 in non-competitive markets versus \$14.13 in overbuilt areas. *Consumers' Research* also found that, in areas served by only one system, operators tended to provide fewer channels, an average of 33 compared to 40 in competitive markets. Based on the fees charged by 52 members of the American Public Power Association in January, in those towns served by city-owned cable systems, some of which are also overbuilds, basic rates average \$10.29. While the low prices they charge may be due to the small size of their hometowns, *Consumers' Research* was comparing prices in comparably sized markets.



Is Local Advertising Becoming an Issue After Issue?

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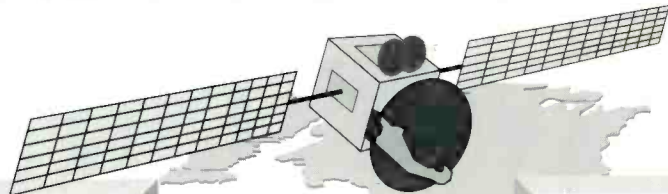
With the Local Multimedia Report, you can identify which advertisers are concentrating their buys in newspaper, how much they're spending and when they advertise. Using trends provided in the Report, you can time your sales proposal to get to advertisers before they make

their media plans.

The Local Multimedia Report is just one more example of the Arbitron commitment to the business of local market television. So when you want local market tools that solve local market problems, turn to the champion who's been at it since 1949. Contact your local Arbitron representative for answers to the issues.

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