

Farmington grad is MAD about new comedy TV show

BY JILL HOCKMAN
STAFF WRITER

After seven years of acting for free in a Los Angeles comedy theater and occasionally appearing as a television guest star, a 1981 Farmington High School graduate has landed a full-time comedy job as one of the stars of a new television show.

Mary Scheer, a Farmington native, is one of three women in the eight-member cast of "MAD TV," a late-night show that started this fall on the FOX network.

The sketch-based show has been compared to Saturday Night Live, but it has a newer, sort of young feel," Scheer said. It airs at 11 p.m. Saturdays on Channel 2.

Because the hour-long show is a series of short sketches, Scheer plays a variety of characters on "MAD TV." Topics range from film and television parodies, political satire, commercial spoofs and social commentary.

"We always thought she'd make it," said Martha Sutton of Farmington, Scheer's younger sister. "She's always been the comedian of the family. She can put on many faces. She's always the life of a party."

"I'm really glad that she's finally done it. I knew she would," said Sutton, who's followed her sister's acting career for years, and now watches "MAD TV" every week.

"This is the first job I've had where I've got to quit my captioning job," said Scheer, who has worked overnight shifts performing television closed captioning for the hearing impaired. "This is so much fun."

Scheer urged Farmington-area residents to tune in to the show. "Just tell them to watch so that we don't get canceled," she said with a laugh.

Scheer's interest in comedy was sparked in high school, although she says she wasn't a class clown.

"I would never disrupt a class or anything. I was too shy and dorky," she said.



Acting up: Farmington native Mary Scheer is part of the "MAD TV" cast.

Instead, Scheer said, she focused on playing violin, singing, getting good grades and being a member of the school's forensics team.

"I was basically just sort of a geek," she said. As a senior, she ranked eighth in the state's storytelling competition. "That was acting in a way it's like doing a monologue," she said.

She also served as the student director for a comedy play during her senior year.

Scheer went on to Michigan State University, where she first studied theater but then switched her major to telecommunications when her parents urged her to get a degree in a field where she could land a "real" job.

After graduation, she lived in London for seven months, and then moved to Washington, D.C., where she worked for National Public Radio.

In 1988, Scheer packed up and moved to Los Angeles to perform for The Groundlings Theater Company, a small sketch comedy theater group where many career comedians get their start.

Because she wasn't paid for

the five shows a week she performed in, she paid her bills by working a midnight to 8 a.m. closed captioning shift. She also appeared in low-budget films and guest starred on television shows, including "Seinfeld," "Party of Five," "Beverly Hills 90210" and "Quantum Leap."

Scheer was chosen for "MAD TV" from a pool of some 1,000 applicants.

Scheer's former Farmington High School teachers were thrilled to hear of her success. "I've been waiting for this day for 27 years," said an enthusiastic Gina Van Horn, a 23-year teacher at Farmington High School who's proud to say that she was Scheer's public speaking teacher and forensics coach.

"She was very dedicated and she loved performance," she said. "Just the fact that she even mentioned my name and the fact that my class had an effect on her. It just makes my day."

Van Horn said she still remembers the story Scheer told in the state storytelling finals about a miniature elephant.

"She did a super job of it," Van Horn said. "It was a funny story — it had a lot of voices in it. She was absolutely kooky-crazy doing it. She'd screw up her face and screw up her posture for the different characters."

Van Horn said she plans to videotape "MAD TV" and play it for her students.

"I might even grade her," she said. "I'm going to sit there with an evaluation form and grade her — see what she learned."

Rita Piron, a retired English teacher who chose Scheer as the student director for the high school play, remembered Scheer as a smart girl with a good sense of humor.

"She was not a comic in class. She was a serious student," Piron said. "However, given dramatic chances, she could be very funny. I would expect that anything she wanted to do and put her mind to, she could do it."



How about a hug?: Cathy Webb, Farmington Schools trustee, receives a hug from a well-wisher to go with her citizenship award.

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"They have been teaching me by example the importance of giving back," she said.

Webb, who has distinguished herself through the PTA, Farmington Youth Assistance and by helping found Advocates for Excellence in Education in 1992, filtered just a bit as she held back some tears of emotion while thanking her biggest supporters, husband Jim and sons Matt and Jim.

"I love you guys," she said, adding that her family has endured more than its share of fast food and prepared dinners.

County Commissioner David Moffitt called honoring Webb "good duty." He also had his own slant on the future, compliments of his son, 6.

"I told him that I was listening to an exciting talk about the future," Moffitt said of his phone conversation with his son. "He said why don't you set your watch ahead a half hour and come home."

Futurist David Pearce Snyder talked a lot about time, and seemed prophetic when he talked about a generation where a more pre-prepared



In the future: David Pearce Snyder, a "futurist," talks about events to come.

and fast food is consumed than the home-cooked variety.

"Cooking from scratch is in danger of becoming a hobby," said the former long-range planner for the Internal Revenue Service.

Must of what is happening in the U.S. labor market has to do with a continuing decline in middle class income as lower paying service jobs replace higher paying industrial-based jobs, he said.

Citing the elimination of levels of middle management by such giants as Ford Motor Co., Snyder made the case that to keep pace economically, more and more families will need both spouses to earn an income.

"Now 47 percent of household income is provided by females," he said.

As that and other economic trends continue, there will be a good deal of "political mischief and great social pain." He said that despite the technological gains in the computer age, productivity and income had not kept pace.

Snyder said that in the next

"I think it shows that we are already that kind of school system that is teaching not just in the static way."

Cathy Webb
Citizen of the Year

10 years, U.S. workers will have to be better trained to use computers that are themselves, still improving rapidly. When that combination clicks, it will be like the industrial revolution.

And the key for making that change will be having an educational system that will better train people to use that new third-wave technology. Webb agreed.

"I think we already have programs that are involving our students in that kind of environment," she said. "I think we are going to be a leader and become the best school system in the nation."



At the mike: Chamber official Nurten Ural makes introductions.

Hearing it: Sam Skeegan listens to the main speaker during Thursday's Chamber of Commerce dinner in Farmington Hills.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS WEEK OF NOVEMBER 12, 1995

Mark your calendar!

14/TUESDAY

RON LEAL PERSONAL APPEARANCE

Meet the designer as he debuts his Spring 1996 Collection.
10 am to 4 pm
Collection Sportswear

17/FRIDAY

JAY STRONGWATER PERSONAL APPEARANCE

Mr. Strongwater presents his contemporary collection of jewelry.
10 am to 4 pm
Fashion Jewelry

IKEBANA DEMONSTRATION

Artist Judith Satsuko Hata demonstrates the art of Japanese flower arranging.
8 to 8 pm
Store for the Home

"TRIM A HOME SEMINAR"

An informative seminar focusing on safety and unique ways to decorate your home.
10 am to 1 pm
Store for the Home

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