

Behind bars

Celebrities are sent to slammer for cancer fight

By Chris Rizk
staff writer

The group laudably gathered around the jail cells of the Farmington Department of Public Safety seemed strangely out of place.

There was a Detroit police inspector, a used car salesman, a former weather newscaster, a controversial prosecuting attorney, a WXYZ-Channel 7 news anchor and a Detroit councilwoman, all of whom waited their turn before the television cameras.

This strange conglomeration of local celebrities — Inspector Gilbert Hill, Mel Farr, Sonny Elliot, L. Brooks Patterson, Maryann Mahoney and WXYZ-Channel 7's Rich Fisher — was called together at the request of American Cancer Society's metro area chairperson Mark Ridley — better known as one of Detroit's more popular hosts of comedy acts.

Founder of Berkeley's Comedy Castle, Ridley's comic spirit was not lost on his current role nor on his attempts to coordinate the filming of several commercials designed to publicize the society's fundraising efforts.

In fact, most of the guests, warming up to Ridley's fun repertoire of off-the-wall remarks, were so preoccupied with laughing that their commercial takes had to be redone.

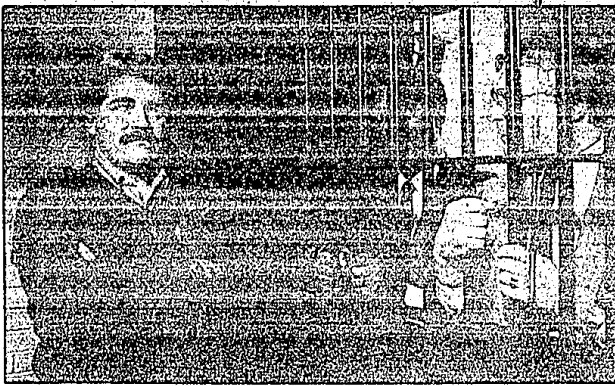
"I'M HERE BECAUSE they promised an agent from Paramount would be here with a long-term contract," joked Hill, now known in movie circles as actor Eddie Murphy's commanding officer in "Beverly Hills Cop" and the soon-to-be-released sequel, "Beverly Hills Cop II."

The project, sponsored by the cancer society and titled, "The Great American Lockup," has brought celebrities and television personalities alike to join in combatting a disease that kills more than 18,000 Michigan residents a year.

The Farmington police station was selected as the filming site because it houses the older-style bar jail cells, a production member said.

The idea, said Ridley, is to make fundraising fun.

And who better to recruit than a comedian whose life revolves



Mark Ridley (left), Comedy Castle owner and chairman of the "Great American Lockup," Glibert Hill and Oakland County Prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson (right), stand guard over Detroit Police Inspector

around finding fun in the most serious of subjects, said Susan Solts, public relations director for the cancer society's metro Detroit division.

"We're attempting to use this as a pilot program for the rest of the nation," Solts said. "We want to gather community publicity to

make this thing work."

Last year, the society raised more than \$50,000 in donations over a three-day period, mostly from their unique method of gathering publicity.

For \$25, participants can have the person of their choice "arrested" and put behind bars in simulated

ed jail cells located at the Fisher Building, Summit Place Mall and the Macomb Mall.

After receiving their sentences by cancer society judges, the "convicts" can make as many phone calls as they desire to contact persons able to post their bail.

THE COMMERCIALS, which will head off the March 24-26 lock-up, begin airing March 9, and are intended to capitalize on the familiarity of the personalities involved, Ridley said.

Using his television contacts while Solts recruited radio personalities and, with the help of the Southfield-based September Moon Production Network, the series of commercials depicts the personalities confronting their jailers in an attempt to win their release from behind bars.

Following in the format set forth by Ridley, former stand-up comic at the Comedy Castle, Gene Taylor, wrote the scripts for the commercials in a manner that highlighted each performer's personality.

The results were hilarious. "Never mind my lawyer," shouted Hill in one sequence, "call my

Sponsored by the American Cancer Society, "The Great American Lockup" has brought local celebrities and television personalities alike to join in combatting a disease that kills more than 18,000 Michigan residents a year. Last year, the society raised more than \$50,000 in donations over a three-day period, mostly from the unique method of gathering publicity.



Rich Fisher, 8 p.m. anchor for WXYZ-Channel 7, news, was among celebrities behind bars for the commercial taping.



Detroit celebrity Sonny Elliot (right) joins Detroit Police Inspector Glibert Hill and Oakland County Prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson in waiting his turn to be locked up.

agent."

As laughter erupted and Hill performed again for the camera, various guest "actors" prepared for their turn.

"This was my chance to meet the infamous Inspector Hill," quipped Patterson shortly before reading his lines.

"If people have a lot of fun doing something and others notice it, they're going to give more money," reasoned Ridley. "This was a lot of fun to do and I think everybody involved would agree. I mean, how often do you see Glibert Hill and Brooks Patterson behind bars? You

gotta admit, it's not something you'd see everyday."

For more information on the procedure for a "citizen's arrest," contact the American Cancer Society at 425-6830 in Wayne County, 557-5353 in Oakland County and 758-7800 in Macomb County and ask for Lock-Up Central Booking.

Staff photos by
RANDY BORST

Hostages

Journalist: negotiation isn't the answer

By Janice Brunson
staff writer

"What is the answer to the fate of hostages held by terrorists?" award-winning journalist Daniel Schorr asked a crowd of clergymen in Bloomfield Township.

"I think," he said, answering the question himself, "let them die." Schorr made the remarks Feb. 13 in an address on terrorism and the media at the 45th ecumenical seminar sponsored by the B. Benedict Glaser Institute at Temple Beth El.

"I know I am speaking to a group of people whose respect for life is very high," Schorr said.

But, he added, if the only solution for the release of hostages is conducting negotiations with terrorists, then the fate of the hostages is already sealed.

"The current presidential administration already says as much," Schorr said, although he readily concedes recent actions by the administration have shown total disregard for its announced policy.

"It is difficult to know what words mean to this president. He has a way of saying things that are in opposition to what you know to be true."

"BUT WHEN he says 'we won't deal,' he means they (the hostages) will die. He just doesn't take the next step and say it."

"Winning (against terrorists) is accepting the loss of a few lives, if that is what's needed."

However, Schorr said, it is not in the best interests of terrorists to kill hostages. "If they kill them, they lose their power."

Letting hostages die or not is just one piece of a larger picture that Schorr said constitutes an ethical dilemma now facing administration officials, the televised news industry and individual reporters. All, Schorr said, share blame for creating problems now faced in dealing with terrorists.

"We (the media) have made terrorism work and hostage-holding effective," Schorr said.

He cited the platform given to relatives of hostages by television news stations as an example, and partially blames it for what Schorr labels "our recent insanity," the Iran-Contra affair.

"We didn't know at the time (the relatives) comments were having on the president, who sees life in small anecdotes anyway."

"Thanks to the relatives and their campaign, and the effect on the president, we got what we got."

SCHORR CHARGES, "There is a love affair between television and terrorists because they serve each other so well. Television gets ratings and terrorists get attention."

"When ABC gets into the cockpit of a hijacked TWA plane to interview a terrorist, it is a great television victory."

"Television makes violence a commonplace thing."

Featuring violence on television, both in the news and as entertainment, is nothing new, Schorr said.

Returning to the United States in the 1960s after 20 years abroad as a foreign correspondent, Schorr was assigned to cover domestic news.

Urban violence was the topic of the moment and Schorr said interviews with black militants were preferred over those with Martin Luther King for nightly news airing.

'It is difficult to know what words mean to this president. He has a way of saying things that are in opposition to what you know to be true.'

— Daniel Schorr
journalist

"Television (news) is not really a very good medium for conveying information. It conveys experience better than information. It likes drama and conflict. Nothing succeeds better than violence."

"When it deals in philosophical ideas, it presents two extremes, while the truth might really lie somewhere in the fuzzy middle."

"I am not saying TV should not cover the news. I am saying it should be done without exploiting situations, without negotiating interviews with terrorists."

"The news has to stop dealing with terrorism as though it is a legitimate force in the world with something to sell."

REAL CHANGE in the way televised news is covered, Schorr said, will only come about by pressure from the public on TV executives and program directors. "They are very responsive to ratings."

Twice in his 30-year career Schorr said he "killed" news stories for ethical reasons, once in Poland following World War II and again in Ireland.

In both instances Schorr said he knew he had obtained information under privileged circumstances and not in the typical adversarial role of a journalist.

"I knew I was an outside-journalist looking in." He chose not to report either story.

Schorr, now 70, said his talk is a theme for one or two books I have in mind, that is, if I can ever detach myself from daily news."

Currently he is a senior news analyst for public radio in Washington, D.C., where he lives with his wife of 20 years and two children, a son who is a student at Yale and a daughter who is in high school.

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