

Is it showtime?

County execs film funny TV pilot program

By RALPH E. ECHTINAW
STAFF WRITER

The Democrats and Republicans in Washington might be doing their best to preserve the federal gridlock program, but in Wayne and Oakland counties they're getting on like Laurel and Hardy.

As Wayne County Executive Edward McNamara and Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson hosted the pilot episode for a new TV show last week, sufficient humor leavened the substantive discussion to make comedians all over metro Detroit seriously worried for their livelihood.

The program, called "County Lines," hasn't received the green light for a slot in the WDIV-TV Channel 4 line-up yet, and the pilot episode is not supposed to be aired. But if last week's foray into levity is any indication, McNamara and Patterson might be the Siskel and Ebert of public affairs programming.

"The chemistry is real good," said producer Jeff Fink. "The two of them play off each other really well. Everybody seems pretty high on (the show) around here."

The repartee started early Thursday as McNamara and Patterson waited on opposite sides of a small stage for the cameras to start rolling. "This is a fine mess you've gotten me into, Brooks," said McNamara, recalling Oliver Hardy's famous line.

"Oprah makes it look so easy," Patterson quipped.

McNamara, dressed in a grandfatherly sweater, was quietly cautioned by an aide to fasten the garment's bottom two buttons. "What she said is, 'Your fly is



Ed McNamara



L. Brooks Patterson

open," McNamara told the audience.

"You look like a homeboy," an audience member joked back.

Once the program began taping, Patterson wasted no time ribbing McNamara about his recently reported personal fleet of three county cars. Patterson apologized to audience members who had trouble finding a parking place because McNamara brought all his cars. "Just try finding yours

when you leave," McNamara shot back.

To a guest, McNamara said, "You didn't drive I hope. I could have sent a car for you."

The two men bantered for nearly an hour about public funding of stadiums, casino gambling, blight in Detroit, the Red Wings and Dr. Jack Kevorkian. On Kevorkian, Patterson said, "He's our local resident nut case."

McNamara took a moment late

in the program to plug the SMART bus system, noting that he rode a bus from Dearborn to downtown Detroit Thursday morning. "I could fly to Chicago faster than it took me to get from Telegraph and Michigan to downtown," he said.

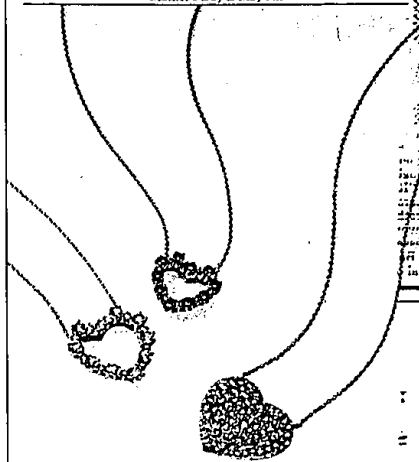
Afterwards he noted that "the silliness comes out."

Even audience members got in on the hilarity, albeit inadvertently. Paul Funk, who works for Patterson, prefaced a question by saying, "I grew up in Wayne County. I'm fortunate enough now to live and work in Oakland County."

Speaking of the audience, it was primarily composed of McNamara's 25 guests, gleaned from the memberships of several civic groups. Patterson's guests numbered perhaps 15, mostly Oakland County directors and department heads who spent an hour before the taping across the street at the Anchor Bar, then returned there after the taping.

James Alexander, Republican party chairman in Oakland County, loved the show. "They played off each other well," he said. "It was very interesting. Maybe they'll start working together."

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Major issues get their due too

By RALPH E. ECHTINAW
STAFF WRITER

Squeezed in between their many jokes last week, Wayne County Executive Edward McNamara and Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson seriously discussed some issues of local interest.

The lead topic of their TV pilot program was public funding for stadiums, particularly as it might apply to building a new arena for the Detroit Tigers.

"I love the old stadium," McNamara said. "I think it's beautiful. But they've got to generate more revenue."

McNamara added that he's not opposed to partial public funding for a new Tiger Stadium, but "I don't think you ever do it without a vote of the people."

Tigers owner Mike Ilitch, however, hasn't asked the county for help. Noting that Ilitch wants to keep the Tigers in Detroit, McNamara said that's a big improvement over former owner Tom Monaghan. "Monaghan's attitude was, 'I want to leave town,'" he said.

If public money is used to help build a new stadium, McNamara said, new taxes on rental cars and hotels would be a good source.

Patterson and McNamara also discussed the recent proposal to fence off largely vacant areas of Detroit. Patterson thinks it's a dumb idea. "If I ever said, 'Put a fence around Detroit,' they'd run me out of town," he said.

McNamara likes the idea, but said "fencing is a bad word. I would hope that you clear (those vacant areas) and start looking for a market. I am convinced that the new frontier the developers are going to discover someday is the city of Detroit."

McNamara added that the state constitution changes outlined in Proposal A, which would drastically reduce property taxes in Detroit, are just the impetus developers need to move back to the city. Proposal A is due to be voted on statewide June 2.

McNamara said that Oakland County should be worried about Detroit, too, because eventually "Royal Oak and Birmingham will also suffer on account of that blight (in Detroit)."

As the taping ended at about 10 p.m. Thursday, McNamara said to Patterson, "I'm surprised how well-informed you are."

Your mother is somewhere on this page.



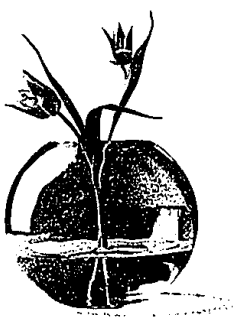
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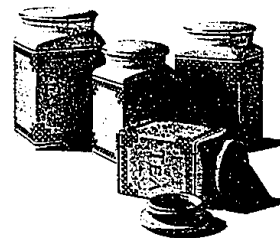
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