

Jumping to it at Wood Creek



ANN HEALY/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Roped into it: Emily Splater (left) and Katie McDermot, fourth-graders at Wood Creek Elementary School in Farmington Hills, hop to it during the recent jump rope event to benefit the American Heart Association. More than 200 youngsters raised \$4,226.01 from friends and family, said Linda Perkins, physical education teacher who coordinated the event.

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Simpsons,' you just had a family, a mother, a father and three kids."

"The Critic" has one central character, although Jean said he'd like time to develop more. That's in the network's hands. Jean is waiting to see if "The Critic" will be picked up for the fall. Otherwise, he'll wait for something else to pop up.

Jean's used to the transient nature of Hollywood writing jobs. Since his days honing his wry humor writing skills at Harvard and National Lampoon magazines, Jean has gone to work for the "Tonight Show" with Johnny Carson, HBO's "Not Necessarily the News," and Fox's "It's Garry Shandling's Show."

The Harvard grad who majored in math owes his success to one equation: He'd take jobs no one else wanted.

Jean and Reiss, who were roommates at Harvard, were summoned to Hollywood to work on the spoof turned crash "Airplane II." The film, which bombed, provided a door for TV writing jobs.

About five years ago, Fox wanted to take a 30-second cartoon on "The Tracey Ullman Show" and turn it into a 30-minute sitcom. Jean and Reiss applied.

"None of our friends wanted to do it because it was a cartoon," Jean said. "We had nothing else going. We were out of work."

"The Simpsons" soon became a hit, pummeling "The Cosby Show" into retirement. The sitcom evolved beyond the Dennis the Menace antics of an underachieving orphan named Bart. The show aired Thursdays on Channel 50 parodies pop culture, the political landscape and anything else deemed fit to poke under the sardonic sun.

Characters such as the Indian convenience store operator Apu, the grumpy Glaswegian Willie the Grandsquisper and the Kennedyesque Mayor of Springfield Diamond Joe Quimby carry the show as much as America's No. 1 animated family.

Jean had a hand in the transition. He and his partner helped

create Apu, the mayor and a jazz musician named Bleeding Gums Murphy.

Jean has some favorite episodes.

One included guest appearances by Jose Canseco, Darryl Strawberry and Roger Clemens, who were recruited by Homer's boss Monty Burns for the company's softball team. Another Jean fave was when Michael Jackson visited, providing the voice for an overweight white guy who has delusions of grandeur in which he is the pop star.

Writing for a cartoon has its pluses, Jean said. "It wasn't difficult conceptually," he said. "Actually, it was kind of liberating because you can do anything you want, go anywhere you want. The big problem with live action is budget."

A show like "The Simpsons" is a year-around effort. Said Jean,



Al Jean

"You find you're on a treadmill you can't get off very easily."

Jean and Reiss serve as consultants to "The Simpsons." They hope to work the same magic with "The Critic."

ABC-TV holds the key.



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Exchange students need homes

Ellen Henrich and Matthias Schmitz are at home now in Germany dreaming of spending the upcoming school year in America. World Learning Inc. is seeking two families to open their homes and hearts to these two very talented 16-year-old high school students.

Although they won't be arriving until the end of August, a family must be found for each before April 15 or they will not be allowed to come to Michigan, said Lynne Levanbach of Plymouth, the local representative for World Learning Inc.

Ellen, friendly and outgoing, has studied English for six years. She loves ballet and jazz dancing and fervently hopes to find a host family that shares her love of dance and will be willing to transport her to lessons and competitions. Ellen also enjoys cooking, swimming, skiing and shopping.

Matt, a quiet and straightforward person, has studied English for four years. He loves to play the trumpet and piano and hopes to be in high school band and choir. He is hoping for a host family with a piano. Matt also enjoys board games, movies, swimming, bicycling and tennis.

Both students will have full medical insurance and enough money to cover their expenses. These teens need a family to provide them with bed, meals, love and guidance from September to June.

Farmington area families who wish to host the students may contact Levanbach at 313-453-8562 or 313-453-6851.

Petition deadline May 3

Anyone interested in becoming a delegate to either the Republican or Democratic party county convention must submit a petition by 4 p.m. May 3 to the Oakland County Clerk's Office.

The petition must be signed by at least three registered voters from the same precinct as the petitioner.

The petitions are available through the parties or from the county clerk's office.

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