

# 'Bagels and Talk' on cutting edge



MARY LINDA CALDERONE

Does Rush Limbaugh think he's the only one on the cutting edge of societal evolution these days? If so, he has yet to meet Tracy and Phil of Channel 12's "Bagels and Talk." Before mainstream media focused on the religious conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina, alternative healing methods, clitoridectomies, televangelist mail-order scams, the use of female condoms, or the problem of the Somali quacksand for American involvement, Tracy and Phil hashed it out first on "Bagels and Talk."

It's not surprising that they would be on the "cutting edge" when it comes to all these issues that is, not if one delves a little into their personal backgrounds. Tracy Thompson has a bachelor of science in chemistry, a master's degree in communications, and a law degree. She's also proficient in Russian and a world traveler who's been on every continent except Antarctica. She has whale-watched in Baja, California, and Mexico, and polar-bear-watched in Manitoba, Canada.

Phil is actually Dr. Philip Singer, professor of health behavioral sciences and anthropology at Oakland University. Throughout his career, he has worked for the United Nations as an international civil servant, taught physicians in the area of behavioral sciences at Albany Medical College, and consulted for the World Health Organization on traditional healing methods. On video, he has documented cultures throughout the world from Native Americans in South Dakota to Nigerians in Nigeria.

Both Phil and Tracy are avid readers. They scan newspapers, magazines and books in search of interesting and controversial topics for their program. Their current show deals with a national debate taking place in parent/teacher associations and school boards concerning introducing

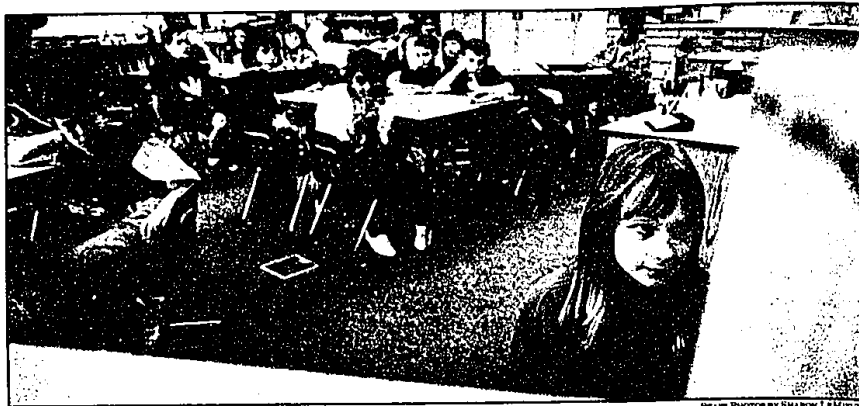
American patriotism in school curriculum.

This has been sparked by the decision of the Tavares Middle School in Florida, where a policy was approved by the school board to teach Lake County's 22,526 students that American culture, values and political institutions are inherently "superior to other foreign or historical cultures." This position was put forth by the fundamentalist Christians who dominate the school board. Local teachers' unions and citizen groups are protesting the measure, saying it is intolerant, racist and possibly illegal. Furthermore, no one seems sure how teachers should deliver the "American First" message. The New York Times quoted Steven Farrell, a social studies teacher in the Tavares Middle School who is required to teach the new curriculum, as saying, "We need clearer definitions."

On the "cutting edge" again, Tracy and Phil in "Bagels and Talk" offer school boards across the nation seven objective criteria by which to measure one country's superiority over another and introduce American patriotism into the schools. Their thinking on the subject has been stimulated in part, by the great American anthropologist Alfred Kroeber, who developed objectives to measure progress.

The seven criteria are listed as follows. A culture may be considered superior to the extent it: 1. emphasizes equal access of all of its political institutions to all of its citizens, 2. emphasizes upward mobility and equal opportunity to all of its citizens, 3. maintains stability of its political institutions over time, 4. makes possible for all of its citizens to travel freely within its borders and outside its borders, 5. spends less attention on superstitions and magic in its daily life, 6. continues to develop cumulatively its scientific basis of knowledge, 7. de-emphasizes concerns with bodily mutilation (e.g., breast enlargements, clitoridectomy and penile enlargement).

See **CABLE**, 20A



STAFF PHOTOS BY SHARON LAMMERS

Modem masters: Kristin Ulewicz, who can type 104 words per minute, is one of four "modem masters" who do all the logging-in.

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brought in newspaper articles and discussed them in class as well as with those in their computer learning circle.

There was some resistance at first, Harris said.

"Some kids thought, 'We're not going to listen to rap music and go out and shoot somebody.' . . . After delving into it, they learned it might not affect them directly, but they were convinced it would affect a great number of kids," Harris said.

Conversely, students at other schools asked for Hillside's input on projects they were working on.

One school discussed jobs, another wanted to know where Hillside students would take them if they were to visit.

Menwith Hills Elementary in England simply inquired about what was making news in Detroit.

Harris sees such computer-aided projects as combining English and social studies as well as technology. She has a group of students whom she calls Modem Masters, who take turns operating the Macintosh computer. One fourth-grader, Kristin Ulewicz, can type 104 words a

**'We'll get addresses for pen pals through snail mail through the names of students they work with on E-mail.'**

Dodie Harris

minute on the keyboard.

Harris started the data flowing two years ago. She received a grant from Michigan Association of Computer Users in Learning for the software. The school is underwriting the cost this year.

The district supplied the 2,400-baud modem, which Harris said her students are more than up to speed on.

"We're doing so well, we're ready for a 9,600-baud modem," Harris said.



Afterthoughts: After the project, Jason Close concluded that TV violence may affect the aggressive behavior of some.

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