

CHAT ROOM



Mary Rodrigue

December - time for celebrations, spiritual renewal

The little girl proudly displayed her menorah for visitors to see. Not quite 4 years old, she already has a sense of the special significance attached to this symbol of Hanukkah, or the Jewish Festival of Lights. Carefully she placed a small candle into her menorah, with holders for each of the eight days of Hanukkah.

Last weekend at William Tyndale College's "King's Feast" in Farmington Hills, chorale members donning medieval dress sang robustly the songs attached to Christmas - "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing," "The First Noel." Candle-holding diners joined in singing "Silent Night," their voices rising together in the darkened chapel illuminated by a hundred small flames.

A Christmas story

Even the glamorous Radio City Music Hall Rockettes, with their high kicking dance steps, tell the Christmas story in the final segment of their show - the Holy Family in a manger in Bethlehem, complete with shepherds, live camels and sheep.

December is a month of festive celebrations and spiritual renewal. Countless people over the next couple

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News woman takes profession to task

Speaking at Adat Shalom in Farmington Hills, NBC political reporter Andrea Mitchell said there needs to be more accountability in the news media.

BY MARY RODRIGUE
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NBC News Washington correspondent Andrea Mitchell took her own profession to task and warned that "we won't get better government as long as we don't care" in a speech before the Jewish Business and Professional Women's Voices program recently at Adat Shalom Synagogue in Farmington Hills.

About 600 guests supporting the Women's Allied Jewish campaign heard Mitchell speak on a variety of topics. Her appearance was sponsored by Northern Trust Bank.

"Don't ask me about interest rates," quipped Mitchell, who is married to Alan Greenspan, chairman of the Federal Reserve. "He doesn't talk in his sleep."

A native of New Rochelle, N.Y., Mitchell began her NBC career 20 years ago covering the U.S. Department of Energy "when gas lines were long and then Three Mile Island happened." She switched to the presidential beat in 1980 and covered the Reagan White House for two terms, followed by Capitol Hill and then the Clinton-Gore campaign in 1992. She is a political analyst on the "Today" show and appears on "Meet the Press" as a panelist and occasional host.

Blurring the lines

"Many (people) feel the term TV journalist is a contradiction," said Mitchell. "Viewers can hardly tell the difference between news and infotainment shows. Washington is at a difficult stage.



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL INESLIN

Chatting: After her talk, Andrea Mitchell (left) speaks with Sally Krugel and Peter Alter, co-chair of the Allied Jewish Campaign.

The only ones less popular than politicians are members of the press. Who would've thought that the first X rating in the new TV rating system would go to "Meet the Press?" she said, referring to the Clinton/Monica Lewinsky affair.

Of the impeachment scandal, she said "the role of the press has been controversial. It's evolved into a feeding frenzy. We have all news all the time -

radio, TV, the Internet. It's not like the Reagan White House when he came in at 10 a.m. and went for a nap at 4 p.m. and it was all very civil.

"It's been a tough evolution. This president was elected when the media had changed radically. In the past, print correspondents would not appear on television. Now they compete with each other to do so. And shows display

an endless parade of former prosecutors being passed off as experts. How does that give them credentials?"

"In no way can the media police itself at a time when 'Hard Copy' and 'Inside Edition' are passing themselves off as news shows. A lot of people are coming in with no journalism background. It's a rough time. There are new rules of the game with tabloid TV.

"As long as we care too much about the O.J. and JonBenet stories, a lot of remedial work needs to be done."

Politics too important

Mitchell said it's "time for voters to take a deep breath. Why are candidates for the year 2000 already setting up committees to create issue ads? They saw the success in '96. As long as we don't care, we won't get better government. Politics is too important to be left to advertising consultants."

Regarding her perception of political partisanship, Mitchell said the trend started in Congress with Newt Gingrich in 1989.

"Prior to that, all (in Congress) got along well enough to make policy. Newt Gingrich changed that when he challenged Bob Michael. At the same time, all the old rules went out the window. In 1994, a lot of new congressmen were elected who had not worked their way up. Most had not traveled abroad. It's gotten a lot meaner. It's dysfunctional and it has to change."

Asked the effects of the impeachment process on the next presidential election, Mitchell said "it is undetermined. It will certainly affect character issues."

Other snippets: President Reagan once admitted to Mitchell that he entertained the thought of faking a heart attack while horseback riding with wife Nancy on their Santa Barbara ranch just to rile the press corps he knew was stationed across a valley watching the goings on through telephone camera lenses.

Hillary Clinton "is doing great and

Please see NEWSWOMAN, B2



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