



MOTION PICTURE SCREEN CARTOONISTS & AFFILIATED OPTICAL ELECTRONIC & GRAPHIC ARTS

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, APRIL 2001

VOL. 30, NO. 4

WE WIN AT BKN!

Our union sweeps representation election, 38-3

Local 839 has won a long-delayed ballot count of a National Labor Relations Board organizing election that took place in June, 1999 at Bohbot Kids Network. The ballot tally was thirty-eight in favor of union representation versus three against, with six challenged ballots. The NLRB has declared Local 839 the bargaining representative of BKN employees, and BKN was legally bound to negotiate in good faith with us. As this issue goes to press, we are awaiting the start of these negotiations.

BKN attorneys had delayed the vote count with legal challenges to the election procedures, which the NLRB overruled in late January. The studio currently produces the *Jumanji*, *Starship Troopers* and *Extreme Ghostbusters* animated series for Sony. The German company BKN International recently announced it was acquiring the assets of Los Angeles-based BKN Inc., its former parent company.

Local 839 is in ongoing negotiations with DIC Enterprises, which began after DIC lost a Federal court appeal of the NLRB's decision that Local 839 be the bargaining representative at DIC.

What's happening in animation

ADELAIDE PRODUCTIONS (Sony) has thirty-nine episodes of *Jackie Chan* in production, and several series awaiting green-light. *Dragon Tales* just completed thirteen episodes.

8680 Hayden Place
Culver City 90232
(310) 840-7864 [main desk]

CARTOON NETWORK has twenty-six half-hours each of *Time Squad* and *Samurai Jack*. Twenty-six half-hours of *Grim and Evil* have just wrapped, and they're hoping to get picked up for more. Several shorts are in production, plus thirteen new episodes of *Dexter's Lab*, a seventy-five-minute *Flintstones* Special, a *Power Puff Girls* feature, a half-hour *Johnny Bravo* Christmas special, and a half-hour *Eltingville* special.

300 North Third Street
Burbank 91502
(818) 729-4200

(see *WHAT'S HAPPENING*, page 6)

From the President

Cahuenga dreamin'

Bill Hanna had as great an impact on the animation business as Walt Disney.

Thinking about the passing of this great man brought my mind back to the summer of 1978. I had hit town like every other young hotshot animator, thinking he was the center of the business and ready to conquer Hollywood! For us new arrivals the drill was: fly in to LAX, get your portfolio rejected at Disney, then get jet lag.

Finally after four months of frustration, lost portfolios and unemployment, Mother Mabel Gesner talked to Bob Goe and got me a job at the Hanna-Barbera assistant pool. We were doing the *Godzilla Power Hour*, *Superfriends*, *Yogi's Space Race*, *Jana of the Jungle* and starting up on the feature *Heidi's Song*. They had just finished the *Robonic Stooges*, which I had a perverse sadness in not having worked on.

I was paid better than I ever had been in New York. I was making more as an assistant than my friends at Disney who were trainee animators.

Hot sun-bleached days set to the music of Chuck Mangione. Getting off the Ventura bus with a pocket full of transfers, running up the hill to 3400 Cahuenga Blvd. You had to be in before 8:35 am so as not to be written up in the dreaded Late Book. Looking out the window in the penthouse across the Hollywood Freeway and watching the hawks lazily circle and the coyotes romp on the scrubby hill where Universal CityWalk is today.

From 1965 to 1990 Hanna-Barbera was the largest employer in animation.

While the Disney Empire slept in a post-Walt coma with an animation staff of only a hundred aging veterans, and Phil Roman was just a staff animator on *Peanuts* specials, Hanna-Barbera employed over a thousand artists and outsourced to numerous smaller houses in town like Peter Aries, Love-Hutten-Love and Ron Campbell.



Earlier experiments in outsourcing work overseas, like Jay Ward's Gamma Productions in Mexico City, had met with marginal success. H-B built studios in Australia, Taiwan and Spain. When the home

studio was bursting at the seams with work, we were only doing three out of the twelve projects in production at any one time. Hanna-Barbera made the overseas studios so financially essential to TV animation that today the great bulk of television production has moved away from Los Angeles.

The saying was "Everybody passes through Hanna-Barbera" sooner or later. Animation legends like Art Babbitt, Bill Tytla, Alex Toth, Dave Tendlar, Amby Paliwoda, Mike Maltese, Friz Freleng, as well as the old MGM Tom & Jerry gang: Ken Muse, Ray Patterson, Ed Barge, Irv Spence. One friend saw Tex Avery pulling into the Cahuenga parking lot and asked him: "Hey Tex! What are *you* doing here?" He answered: "Hey, this is where all the elephants come to die!" Tex collapsed and died two weeks later in the Cahuenga parking lot.

I sat in the assistant pool between Sib Torres and Tom Ruegger, who had also come from back east. At the adjacent desks were Bronny Barry, Duncan Marjoribanks, Judy Levitow and Roger Chiasson. Chris Chu would be outside with a protein shake from Panacea working on the detailing of his van. Up to then, Tran Vu had only heard Southern California English so he was amazed by my New York accent. He loved when I said: "Noo Yawk" and asked me if I was in the Mafia. I said yes.

Ted Cassidy, who had played Lurch in *The Addams Family* and now voiced everything from Space Ghost to Godzilla, would smile warmly as his six foot nine frame lumbered through the hallway. Clarence the supply guy would hand you a stack of Blackwing Pencils as thick as your fist. Bill Schipek, the former head of cleanup, had just died of a heart attack in a toilet stall on the second floor, and Alvaro Gavioto had to crawl under the space and open the latch.

But despite its immense size and prestige, for those who worked there Hanna-Barbera never stopped being a family business. The studio never reached the levels of infuriating, micromanaged production pidgeonholing that we endure today. Bill and Joe were the final word on every decision, and as they walked through the studio they were always accessible and aware of all that went on.

Every day at afternoon break there was always a birthday cake for somebody. On Mr. Hanna's birthday, at 5:25 PM precisely there was a strawberry shortcake as big as a door and cases of champagne.

(see FROM THE PRESIDENT, page 4)

From the Business Representative

Reinventing the wheel



The ancient observation that there is nothing new under the sun certainly applies to animation (and for that matter, Hollywood in general). Every couple of years, as certainly as the sun rises in the East, a new crop of animation executives arrives on the scene, brain pans overflowing with Great New Ideas and Ways of Doing Things. Almost invariably The Great New Ideas have been done before.

I'm not talking about old story ideas that were developed, then dropped, then picked up again years later. Disney noodled around with Hans Christian Anderson's *The Little Mermaid* in the late 'thirties and finally released a film by that title in 1989. And the company worked on a *Three Musketeers* Mickey-Donald-Goofy project in the early 'eighties and are now developing the same vehicle for the same stars as a direct-to-video feature. That kind of thing happens all the time. I'm talking about corporate methods and corporate structures. About corporate "efficiency drives" that usually drive efficiency down and costs up. And then get reversed when the New Idea doesn't work out.

Now, there have been technological breakthroughs in animation since the art form was invented. Cel animation came in during the early 'twenties and eliminated the early need of drawing characters and background for every frame of film. And the 'twenties saw the invention of the whole assembly-line method of animators and assistants cranking animation through to photography and finished film. Limited animation came in during the forties, got refined by the boys and girls at UPA, then was systematized for television by Jay Ward on *Crusader Rabbit* (1949-50) and raised to an art form by Bill Hanna and Joe Barbera as they built their TV 'toon empire a decade later. Disney replaced inked cels

with Xerox in 1959, and computer generated imagery became the "wave of the future" in the 'nineties.

But the basic building blocks for animation remained the same: some creative artist has had to stare down a blank page or computer screen and fill it with inspiration and entertainment for a hungry public. And meanwhile, non-creators hovered about, finding ways to improve the methods of creation. This usually meant "reinventing the wheel," over and over again, usually to please executives at a higher level of the conglomerates for which we all now work, either directly or indirectly.

I've been around long enough to see the following cycle occur multiple times: A large cartoon company hires staff to work on a new television show. The show is written, boarded, directed, shipped to Asia. The show comes back, gets edited, gets put on the air and becomes a hit. At which point a new exec strides onto the scene, observes the costs of having a staff turn out the show and says: "You know, we can do this a lot *cheaper* if we freelance the work of the staff."

At which point most of the staff gets laid off, freelancers are hired and crank through the shows on a footage basis. There are many high-quality freelance directors out there, but the quality almost always goes because with freelancers, quantity is the number one priority.

And so by and by, the hit show unravels. And gets cancelled. Then another exec says: "You know, what

(see *FROM THE BUSINESS REPRESENTATIVE*, page 5)

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

(continued from page 2)

Despite their executive status, Bill Hanna never took himself so far from the production pipeline that he wasn't forever timing exposure sheets, and Joe was writing copy for future series pitches. If a rush for a Monday presentation to network meant the development artists had to work all weekend into the night, Bill and Joe were right next to them, sleeves rolled up. Even though they were addressed as Mr. Hanna and Mr. Barbera, we all knew they weren't really suits, they were grunts like us. Bill had once been a painter and checker, Joe was a great storyboard artist.

Shamus Culhane once told me his opinion of Walt Disney. "Walt was a genius, he was a good friend, and he was a tough S.O.B." The same applies to Bill Hanna. He was a tough businessman, he pushed this union hard and once referred to his staff as "lettuce pickers". H-B tried hard to break our strike of 1982, and after encouraging many members to pick up work with a promise of secrecy they gave all the names to the union anyway to avoid paying back benefits.

But Mr. Hanna was warm and loyal to those who were loyal to him. Ken Muse was one of the finest Tom & Jerry animators in the '40s, but hard work and hard living had burned him out to a shell of his former self.

I was assisting a *Superfriends* scene of Superman flying, when I noticed Kenny had animated Superman's hair flapping forward as though he was flying backwards. When Kenny balked at fixing it I took it to supervisor Jay Sarbry, who did the fix growling loudly.

When I asked why Kenny didn't retire, Jay repeated this statement like he was Thumper being reprimanded by his mom: "Mr. Hanna says that Kenny helped make this company, so as long as Kenny wants to work he can work."

That was Bill Hanna, too.

Today. Hanna-Barbera is a wing in Warner Bros. Animation, Ted Turner has purged most of the older producers, and the Hollywood Conservancy is fighting a losing battle to keep 3400 Cahuenga Boulevard West from being demolished for a freeway cloverleaf for Universal City.

Like Ozymandias, our empires crumble back into the sand, but our memories live on. Bill Hanna lives on in my mind, smiling his leprechaun grin, cooking his famous chili, wearing a loud pair of golf pants.

Adios, Mr. Hanna.

— Tom Sito

In the news

MacCurdy out, Schwartz in

JEAN MACCURDY, the longest-lived current head of a major L. A. animation studio, has stepped down as president of Warner Bros. Animation and will be replaced by former Sony Family Entertainment Group president **SANDER SCHWARTZ**. MacCurdy will become a creative consultant for the studio, working on developing animated and live-action children's productions.

Bid for Film Roman hits snag

The attempt by Indian conglomerate **PENTAMEDIA** to buy controlling interest in Film Roman has run into problems.

Film Roman had agreed in October to sell a majority stake of the company to Pentamedia. In a SEC Commission filing on April 6, Film Roman reported that they had rejected a Pentamedia bid to restructure the deal. Representatives are meeting to see if they can salvage the deal.

Icebox redux

A group of five former founders and senior executives of **ICEBOX.COM** have purchased key assets from the defunct company, and plan to relaunch as a syndicator and developer of properties for the Web and television. The company has also announced a new syndication deal with Mondo Media which ensures distribution for many Icebox properties, including *Zombie College* and *Poker Night*.

And the TV goes to ...

The \$2,500 high-definition TV promised by Academy Award producer Gil Cates to the Oscar winner with the shortest acceptance speech, was won by Best Animated Short winner **MICHAEL DUDOK DE WIT**. Dudok De Wit, who plans to donate the set to a children's charity, says he didn't give a short speech just to win the TV — he just didn't have that much to say ...

FROM THE BUSINESS REPRESENTATIVE

(continued from page 3)

we need around here is *quality*. Let's hire in-house staff. These damn freelancers are only interested in getting the shows off their desks and on to the next freelance assignment."

I kid you not, in the time I've been business rep, I have seen this scenario play out at various studios three or four times. If I keep doing this job long enough (God help me), I'll no doubt see it happen thirty or forty times.

Another great new innovation — actually not new at all, since it's been used in feature animation for seven decades — is a computer-based story reel called animatics. In the past five years animatics has caught on in television cartoon production big time, and it's not hard to see why. Executives love it, because production boards are synched up to sound track on a computer screen and they are relieved of having to actually read a storyboard and imagine what the finished product might look like.

But animatics adds another layer to the production process, and often slows things down. Worse than that, it adds expense, and is invisible in the final, aired show. So guess what? After years of wider and wider use, animatics has now been eliminated from a major studio's production budget because, guess what, it costs too much money. Tomorrow, of course, someone else will decree that starting up animatics again will be the answer to all problems, and the tiresome process will start all over again.

Unhappily, the downside to this constant reinvention of various previously-invented wheels is that the creators of the work suffer. And as most of us are all too aware, many are now suffering through a multitude of re-inventions at a multitude of studios. Currently, we are in the midst of another "freelance everything out" cycle, which means artists, writers, directors and others have to scramble after shows, hoping another is ready for them when they turn in their work on the last one.

The good news is, there is more television product in various stages of work than at any time in the past year (see our front page). The bad news is, we are still below the peaks of the mid-nineties, and feature animation is still downsizing. But as one wise old producer recently told me: "Bad times don't last forever, they flow in and out like the tide."

Take heart in the fact that television work is up, and that better times, like the tide, will one day flow strongly again in our direction.

— Steve Hulett

In memoriam

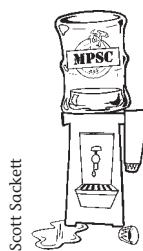
MABEL GESNER died on March 28 at the age of eighty. Starting as an inker and Xerox checker and eventually becoming an assistant animator, since 1960 she had worked for Hanna-Barbera, Grantray-Lawrence, Sutherland, Bakshi, DePatie-Freleng, Sanrio, Osterman, Filmation and Disney.

I knew her very well and she was a wonderful person. She was one of the first employees of Hanna-Barbera when they were still over a storefront. In 1978 she got me a job as an assistant at H-B when no one else would answer my phone calls. She later coached me on how to get into the famous H-B lunchtime poker game with Nick Nichols, Rick Leon, Lefty Callahan, Kay Wright, Hal Ambro and others. On breaks she used to drive out to carry freelance to Hicks Lokey so he could make enough money to help pay for his infant granddaughter's eye surgery. She was like that, no fuss, if a favor was needed Mother Mabel was there to help. When it's my time to appear before the Pearly Gates I hope Mabel will be there to get me in!

—Tom Sito



BILL HANNA died on March 22 at the age of ninety. (See *FROM THE PRESIDENT*, page 2)



At the water cooler

Congratulations to **NATASHA CASE** who has been selected to be one of two recipients of the Richard F. Walsh/Alfred W. DiTolla/Harold P. Spivak Scholarship, given to the children of IATSE members. We believe she is the first child of a Local 839 member to win this distinguished scholarship.

Natasha, daughter of Disney director **BARBARA DOURMASHKIN CASE**, is a senior at Harvard-Westlake where she is on the honor roll, captains the girls' varsity soccer team, plays in the jazz band and studies art. She is choosing between MIT, Berkeley, Swarthmore, and Wesleyan.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

(continued from front page)

Among the projects at **DISNEY TV ANIMATION** are thirty-nine episodes of *Atlantis: The Series* with a possibility of thirteen more; thirteen episodes each of *Teamo Supremo*, *Kim Possible*, *Teacher's Pet* and *Fillmore*; and additional episodes of *Weekenders*. Five episodes of *Lloyd In Space* are in the works, with additional episodes not yet greenlit.

Disney direct-to-video features in various stages of production include *Winnie the Pooh*, *Lion King III*, and *Dalmatians II* in conjunction with Character Builders in Ohio. Also: *Return to Neverland (Peter Pan II)*, *Jungle Book II*, *Three Musketeers* with Mickey, Donald and Goofy, *Mulan II*, and *Dumbo II*.

**500 S. Buena Vista Street
Burbank 91521
(818) 560-0560**

At **DISNEY FEATURE ANIMATION**, *Treasure Planet* and *Sweating Bullets* are now in production. *Lilo and Stitch* will be produced in Orlando and Burbank. Several features in development are awaiting greenlight.

**2100 Riverside Drive
Burbank 91506
(818) 460-8000**

DREAMWORKS's *Spirit* feature is in its final stretch of production, with company planning layoffs after completion. *Sinbad* is still in story development.

**1000 Flower Street
Glendale 91201
(818) 695-5000**

UNIVERSAL has thirteen episodes of *The Mummy* and a fourth season of *Woody Woodpecker*, along with *Land Before Time VIII* and *Land Before Time IX* videos.

**100 Universal City Plaza
Universal City 91608
(818) 777-1510**

WARNER BROS. ANIMATION has thirteen additional episodes of *Static Shock*, twenty-six new episodes of *Justice League* and eight additional episodes of *Zeta*. Various small projects in production, including one new short. Two video features, *Tom & Jerry* and *Scooby Doo*, are moving into post-production. *Osmosis Jones* is now in post-production.

**15303 Ventura Boulevard
Sherman Oaks 91403
(818) 977-8700**

Support SB 40

Union members are being asked to support California Senate Bill SB 40, which will raise California unemployment benefits.

In 1999, California ranked last in the nation in replacing lost wages for laid-off workers. On average, California's average unemployment benefits of \$155 per week replaced only 23% of the state's average wage. Our maximum benefit is \$230 per week; only Mississippi, Alabama, Arizona and South Dakota have lower maximum UI benefits.

Efforts to support SB 40 will be discussed at the next membership meeting next membership meeting on April 24, and we will be mailing further information to members.

FOR SALE (or Tax-deductible Donation): *Allenwood Pro Desk* and *16-field Cartoon Colour disk* with movable top and bottom pegbars. Call Dylan at (310) 396-4335, or email dylan@mobopro.com.

It is estimated that fewer than 10 percent of voters will ever write to elected officials. Yet contacting your elected officials with a letter is an important part of making a difference. They work for you. They theoretically want to hear our views, and they definitely can't afford to ignore them. It's our responsibility to express those views ... The truth is most members of Congress receive fewer than 100 letters on any one issue. On the state level, elected officials often receive fewer than ten letters on a particular issue. Your letter can carry a lot of weight.

Your opinions are particularly important when an issue is timely — for example, when a vote is expected ... Tips for your letter: Be brief, address only one issue at a time, keep the letter down to four or five sentences; say why the issue matters to you ... If you have a particular expertise, then say what it is. Be positive and constructive; give compliments if they're sincere. Send a copy to your local newspaper to help build support for the issue. Use the appropriate title of the elected official ... After you have written once, then keep up the contact and periodically communicate that you're following closely what happens; thank the official and state that you'll be following up with a phone call in a week to receive a response, and then do so.

As effective as one letter is, twenty-five on the same issue are even better ...

— From *The Healing of America* by Marianne Williamson



Feeling haunted by the ghosts of cartoonists past? SIGN A REP CARD!

At right is the most potent weapon you can wield to protect your union health insurance, pension and 401(k). Representation cards are a confidential way to support your union's efforts to organize your non-union employer.

Any employee of any non-union shop can fill out a representation card. Your employer will never know that you have signed it. When sufficient cards are collected, the union's Business Representative turns the cards over to the National Labor Relations Board, which does a blind comparison of the cards to an employee list supplied by the employer. If the union has at least 30% representation, an election will be held.

Fill one out yourself and give one to a friend. Put them in an envelope and mail to:

**M. P. S. C. Local 839 IATSE
4729 Lankershim Boulevard
North Hollywood, CA 91602-1864**

AUTHORIZATION

I. A. T. S. E. & M. P. T. A. A. C.*

I, _____ (Please print your name) _____, (_____) (Your home telephone)

of _____ (Please print your home address, city, zip)

(Please print your job classification [animator, layout, etc.]) _____ (Your Social Security number) _____
 authorize IATSE & MPTAAC* to represent me in collective bargaining and to negotiate and conclude all agreements with my employer, _____ (Name of your employer) _____, regarding the terms and conditions of my employment. If the union obtains an agreement with my employer, I understand that I am free to negotiate more desirable terms on an individual basis. I understand that when the majority of employees authorize union representation, recognition from my employer may be obtained without an election.

X _____ (Please sign here) _____ (Today's date)

Received by: _____
 *International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees and Moving Picture Technicians, Artists and Allied Crafts of the United States and Canada, AFL-CIO/CLC

AUTHORIZATION

I. A. T. S. E. & M. P. T. A. A. C.*

I, _____ (Please print your name) _____, (_____) (Your home telephone)

of _____ (Please print your home address, city, zip)

(Please print your job classification [animator, layout, etc.]) _____ (Your Social Security number) _____
 authorize IATSE & MPTAAC* to represent me in collective bargaining and to negotiate and conclude all agreements with my employer, _____ (Name of your employer) _____, regarding the terms and conditions of my employment. If the union obtains an agreement with my employer, I understand that I am free to negotiate more desirable terms on an individual basis. I understand that when the majority of employees authorize union representation, recognition from my employer may be obtained without an election.

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M. P. S. C. LOCAL 839 IATSE
**GENERAL MEMBERSHIP
MEETING**

TUESDAY, APRIL 24, 2001 · 7 PM
4729 LANKERSHIM BLVD., SECOND FLOOR
NORTH HOLLYWOOD

AGENDA:

- * BUSINESS REPRESENTATIVE'S REPORT:
 - + THE STATE OF THE INDUSTRY
 - + ORGANIZING
 - + STUDIO ISSUES
 - + CGI TRAINING
 - + VISITS TO ANIMATION SCHOOLS

- * OLD BUSINESS:
 - + REPORTS OF COMMITTEES:
 - PUBLICITY · EVENTS · PIECEWORK STUDY · LETTER WRITING
 - + EFFORTS TO COMBAT WORK GOING OUT OF TOWN
 - + WEBSITE UPDATE
- * NEW BUSINESS:
 - + SENATE BILL SB 40 TO RAISE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS (SEE PAGE 6)
 - + OTHER MATTERS AS DETERMINED BY THE MEMBERSHIP

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