



www.weirs.com

ONLINE

DEDICATED TO NEW HAMPSHIRE • Complimentary At Over 300 Locations Across New Hampshire Every Thursday!

by Roger Amsden
News Correspondent

Will the Hallmark Network step up to the plate and revive the critically acclaimed Nero Wolfe television series that was dropped two years ago by the Arts and Entertainment Network after two seasons?

That's the question currently being asked by fans of the Nero Wolfe series, who are intrigued by a recent report in Multichannel News which quotes David Kenin, the Hallmark Network's executive vice president of programming, as saying that the channel is planning to do 16 Sunday night mystery movies in four different character sets, each of which could become scripted series "down the road."

That's exciting news for devoted fans of the corpulent crime solver, who see it as a promising opportunity to have the Hallmark Network become the new home of the Nero Wolfe series.

"It's about time television went back to quality shows that are well-done. Do we really need one more degrading reality show?" asks Deb Montague of Gilford, who has campaigned for the last 18 months to bring back the Nero Wolfe series.

Montague, who was inspired to read (and re-read) all of the 74 Rex Stout novels featuring Nero Wolfe since the series first aired three years ago, says that she doesn't think the network gave the show enough time to reach people interested in quality television.

These were her impressions of the show. "For the first time, in my opinion, television has got it right. I have always been a reader, and I have not cared much for television or movie productions based on books. They just never seemed to be able to translate the written word to the screen in a way that was acceptable to me. Finally, someone, Michael Jaffe and Timothy Hutton, through Jaffe Braunstein Productions, got it right."

The Nero Wolfe mysteries series ran for two seasons on A&E and earned high marks from the dedicated viewers it attracted. But the network, citing high production costs, dropped the series at the end of the 2002 season, prompting outrage from fans who have been conducting a massive letter writing and e-mail campaign ever since then to get it back on the air.

The series featured Maury Chaykin as Nero Wolfe, Timothy Hutton as Archie Goodwin, Wolfe's partner in crime solving and each episode had a similar structure in which Wolfe would, seldom leaving his brownstone, orchids and gourmet meals, assemble all the suspects in his office in the final scene and disclose the identity of the murderer.

Montague says the series was simply the best television she'd ever seen, with every scene and detail from the books meticulously recreated and first-rate acting that made the characters come to life in a vivid way.

"The sets are marvelous with details such as rugs, orchids, cookbooks, and desk paraphernalia. When you watch the show you feel as if you've walked into Nero Wolfe's brownstone for a consultation," says Montague, who notes that the music is also always appropriate and well done.

She became such a fan that she joined "The Wolfe Pack", a group dedicated to Rex Stout's novels, and has attended its conventions in New York City as well as touring the author's home in Brewster, New York.

"Why not uplift the audience? One of the great things about the Nero Wolfe shows was that they didn't dumb down the material. The dialogue was almost exactly the way it was written in the books and everyone who acted in that series had to read the books first," says Montague.

Montague said that the show proved popular with young people, many of whom joined in the chat room discussions about the series and even convinced their high school English teachers to include the Nero Wolfe books in their classes.

"It's a shame that something as good as this couldn't continue. Who knows? Maybe some other network will acquire the rights. If they bring it back maybe we'll see that there is a big audience out there for quality shows," says Montague.

She said that Wolfe fans are pleased that starting on Saturday, March 6 A&E will start re-



runs of the series on its' Biography Channel.

But she says that many who have waged the long campaign to get more Nero Wolfe episodes made aren't convinced that A&E will ever back original productions again and are in the process of shifting gears to try and convince the Hallmark Channel to take over the series.

A recent e-mail she received from a fellow Nero Wolfe series fan notes that producer Michael Jaffe has already written a script for "In the Best of Families" and assured fans that Timothy Hutton and Maury Chakyn are committed to playing the same parts in that episode, and others which would follow provided an outlet is found.

And Hallmark's financial position is becoming stronger according to Variety magazine, which reported recently that 2003 revenues of Crown Media Holdings, which operates and distributes the Hallmark Channel in the U.S. and 121 other countries, rose by 64 percent for the fourth quarter and 29 percent for the full year.

The Hallmark Channel's subscriber count expanded for the full year by 15 percent, both outside the U.S., to 57.3 million, and within the U.S., to 56 million.

Variety said that the ramped-up circulation and more original programming like TV movies helped the Hallmark Channel to finish among the top 10 rated cable networks in total-day for December and January. The Hallmark Channel in the U.S. gets its revenues from advertisers and cable operators and its ad revenues increased by 42 percent for the year, to \$98.1 million, while its license fees from cable operators increased to \$68.9 million.

Montague said that DVDs from the first season are hugely popular and hopes that as the Nero Wolfe shows are seen by more people it will lead to a growing demand for better television and get her favorite series up and running again. DVDs of the second season will be released in June.

Critic Adam Tyner had this to say about the Nero Wolfe DVDs. "I'm reaching in vain for adjectives to fully describe how immeasurably I enjoyed this first season of Nero Wolfe. It's rare for any form of entertainment, be it a television series, a film, or a book, to so immediately and unrelentingly seize my attention. I'm planning on picking up as many of Rex Stout's novels as I can find, and I'm very much looking forward to giving this box a second spin in my DVD player, not to mention the hopefully impending second season, the TV movie *The Golden Spiders*."

Montague says that people who would like to see the Nero Wolfe series on the Hallmark Channel should e-mail Viewers@hallmarkchannel.com or write to either:

•Elizabeth Missan Yost

Head of Original Programming and Development

•Marcey Mascotte

Manager of Original Programming

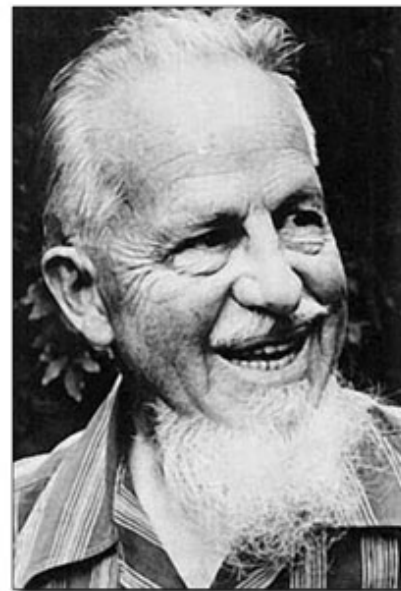
•David Kenin

Executive Vice President for Programming

•Hallmark Channel

12700 Ventura Blvd.

Studio City, CA 91604-2469.



The Weirs Times is a full color weekly newspaper which tells the history, humor and happenings of New Hampshire's Lakes Region and beyond. The paper, first published in 1883 by Mathew H. Calvert, was named Calvert's Weirs Times and Tourists' Gazette and continued until Mr. Calvert's death in 1902. The new Weirs Times began publication in 1992 and strives to maintain the patriotic spirit of its predecessor as well as his devotion to the interests of Lake Winnepesaukee and vicinity. Currently 30,000 copies are distributed across the entire state from as far North as Bethlehem and as far south as Portsmouth. The Weirs Times has grown since its beginnings in 1992 and is now one of NH's largest weekly newspapers.