

News Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Press Contacts

Jay Kelly/Off Loop PR

312.633.1992/ offloop@earthlink.net

or

Jennifer Moeller/League of Chicago Theatres

312.554.9800 x12/ jennifer@chicagoplays.com

228 S. Wabash Ave., Ste. #300

Chicago, IL 60604-2388

Phone: 312.554.9800

Fax: 312.922.7202

LEAGUE OF CHICAGO THEATRES INTRODUCES TV PSA CAMPAIGN PROMOTING CHICAGO'S ONE-OF-A-KIND LIVE THEATER SCENE

*Chicago-Trained Celebs George Wendt and Meshach Taylor Play A Cop and A Cabbie in
Street-Smart TV Spots that Declare Chicago Theater is "...Out There. Go Find It."*

CHICAGO, February 6, 2003 -- The League of Chicago Theatres debuted for the public today two new, professionally-produced 30 second TV PSAs, the latest installment in the local non-profit theater collective's year-old "From the Streets to the Seats" public service campaign promoting Chicago's live theater scene.

The League's new television PSAs are funny, full of drama and reflect gritty realism, just like Chicago theater itself. Each of the two spots stars a nationally known TV celebrity who got his start on Chicago's stages, portraying a street-smart, slice-of-life Chicago character. The PSAs begin local airplay this week on WMAQ-TV, NBC 5 Chicago; next month on WLS-TV, ABC 7 Chicago; in the coming weeks on the City of Chicago's own cable TV station; and can be viewed in the near future on the League of Chicago Theatres' web site, Chicagoplays.com. More Chicago media outlets are anticipated to sign on to air the PSAs and help spread the vital message that Chicago is indeed a one-of-a-kind theater town.

In the first 30-second spot, "Cop," a Chicago police officer is shown patrolling a dark, rain-soaked Loop alley. With a familiar voice, imposing presence, but unseen face, the cop walks toward the camera, ticking off a list of the bizarre crimes and criminals he's encountered on the beat. His tongue-in-cheek commentary begins "I've seen a lot in this city," listing such theatrical victims as ". . . one poor man was cleaved in two with a broadsword" and another who ". . . was mauled to death by a crazed panda bear." Just before his face is revealed, the spot cuts to a high-energy montage of dramatic theater "moments" filmed on Chicago's stages. The spot climaxes with a close-up of the officer, revealed to be Chicago native George Wendt, who exclaims, "Now that's what I call great theater!" The PSA concludes with the tag line "It's Out There. Go Find It.", the League of Chicago Theatres' web address, Chicagoplays.com, and an animated graphic of the League's familiar spotlight logo.

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In "Taxi," a Chicago cab driver is driving through downtown Loop traffic, eyes trained forward as he talks to his back seat passenger. The cabbie tells of the many strange passengers and incredible sights he has encountered navigating the streets of Chicago. He comments on the variety of emotions, characters and events he's experienced, including "love and hate," "four foot cockroaches," and "even a revolution, once." Suddenly, the spot cuts to the montage of Chicago stage images, then peaks when the cabbie, revealed to be Chicago acting alum Meshach Taylor, turns around to tell his passenger "Now that's what I call great theater!" Again, the PSA ends with the tag line "It's Out There. Go Find It!", the League's web address and animated logo.

In both PSAs, the ultimate revelation of the stars' familiar faces subtly reminds viewers of the many well-known celebrities who have emerged from Chicago's world-famous theater scene. However, the not-so-subtle call to action, driven home with an authoritative voice-over by Steppenwolf Theatre Company ensemble member Amy Morton, encourages viewers to get up, get out, and go see a live play or musical staged by one of the more than 200 Chicago area theater companies.

To underscore the campaign's "streets" settings, the League unveiled its new PSAs today at a special citywide press conference at Chicago Police Department headquarters, at 35th and Michigan Avenue. George Wendt was on hand to speak about his early days and continued involvement in Chicago theater, and help celebrate the official campaign launch. Chicago Police Department Superintendent Terry Hillard joined representatives of the League of Chicago Theatres, the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs, and the League's *pro bono* creative team, RAIN Communications, for the PSAs' first official public screening.

"The campaign introduces a bold new visual style and attitude for the League that better mirrors our 140-plus member theaters' collective reputation for excellence and edginess. RAIN Communications has cleverly enmeshed this positive message about Chicago theater with the vibrant imagery of the city of Chicago itself," said Marj Halperin, League of Chicago Theatres President and CEO. "The spots boast remarkably high production values and a humorous approach that communicates how that unique Chicago mix creates a theater scene with something for everyone, one where virtually anything can happen."

In addition to local TV and cable stations, the League plans to place the PSAs on more non-traditional media outlets in the coming months. Starting in June, through a program sponsored by the Chicago Department of Aviation, both PSAs will directly target the visiting tourist market via repeated airplay on eight video monitors stationed throughout Midway Airport's new baggage claim area.

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The behind-the-scenes story is how the League of Chicago Theatres - by enlisting the cooperation, assistance and in-kind donations from more than 60 individuals, companies and public institutions - stretched a \$20,000 production budget to create two professionally filmed TV PSAs valued at more than one half million dollars. That budget included a generous grant from the Penniston Family Foundation. Other major contributors to the production include: American Airlines; Chicago production consultant Marea Brichta; Mark Lichtenstein, Mark DeVos, and Jamie Vanadia at Chicago post production company Avenue; the Chicago Film Office; the Chicago Police Department; The Fairmont Hotel Chicago; Craig Rodgers, Steve Strachen and innumerable folks from the L.A. commercial production company Form; playwright and copywriter Penny Penniston; Ferdia Doherty and John Linesch of RAIN Communications; the Screen Actor's Guild; Robert Bial of SOMERSault; Steve Shafer and the musicians at Chicago-based Spank! Music and Sound Design; Sparkle; and freelance creative director Barry Vusko. Mr. Wendt's transportation was generously provided by Boston Coach and Yellow Cab Company.

Throughout the fall, the League worked with its pro bono communications firm RAIN Communications, Chicago production consultant Marea Brichta, and the L.A.-based production company Form, to conceive and produce the TV campaign. Nationally noted commercial director Charles Wittenmeier, including clients such as: Anheuser Busch, Nissan, and McIlhenny Co.'s Tabasco Products, directed the spots. The PSAs were shot on film over three days last November on the streets of Chicago and on stages around town. The TV PSAs are part of the "From the Streets to the Seats" integrated marketing program that will include radio and print advertisements, currently in development for introduction this spring, and a variety of grassroots marketing and promotional strategies throughout the year.

Filming with celebrities George Wendt and Meshach Taylor was completed on the streets of downtown Chicago on November 11, 2002. Both are products of Chicago's theater scene, and were pleased to be cast in the League's TV PSAs. Wendt, best known as Norm from the long-running NBC-TV hit comedy "Cheers," got his start at Chicago's Second City in the late 1970s. Despite a busy TV and film career, Wendt has always had a soft spot for Chicago theater, returning to appear on stage in *Wild Men!* at Body Politic, in Organic Theatre's *Bleacher Bums* in 1989 and earlier this season in Northlight Theatre's *Rounding Third*. Meshach Taylor's seven seasons as Anthony Bouvier on CBS-TV's "Designing Women," a role that earned him an Emmy nomination, followed many stage roles as a core member of Chicago's Organic Theatre Company.

With their familiar Chicago street settings, both PSAs strategically fit into the League's "From the Streets to Seats" marketing campaign, an ongoing program designed to showcase Chicago's theater community as a unique cultural asset for the city, and part of the economic engine that drives tourism. The campaign was launched last winter on the steps of Chicago's historic Water Tower to boost theater awareness and

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ticket sales during the sluggish winter months, with Mayor Richard M. Daley and hundreds from Chicago's theater community in attendance.

Founded in 1979, the League of Chicago Theatres leverages its collective strength to promote, support and advocate for Chicago's theater industry locally, nationally and internationally. The League serves a diverse membership of more than 140 theaters ranging from storefront, non-union companies with limited budgets to major cultural centers with multi-million dollar productions.

Other League audience development services include managing the network of seven area Hot Tix locations and the Play Money gift certificate program, running the Chicagoplays.com web site, and publishing the bi-monthly *Chicago Theatre Guide* found in hotels, theater lobbies and tourism kiosks throughout Chicago. Last September, the League also launched publication of *Chicagoplays*, a professional monthly theater program magazine developed and published by the League and its membership, now distributed by 37 theater companies for an average monthly circulation of 140,000. With the launch of *Chicagoplays*, the League of Chicago Theatres became the nation's first local non-profit theater collective to publish its own city-wide program book. *Chicagoplays* is supported, in part, by funding from the Prince Charitable Trusts and the Boeing Company.

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