



Tuesday, December 29, 2009

## **Ripa, Consuelos to return to 'Children'**

"All My Children" alums husband and wife Kelly Ripa and Mark Consuelos will return to the ABC daytime drama, in two episodes Jan. 4 and Jan. 5, which will mark "Children's" 40th anniversary. "It is always great to come home," Ripa said. Several other "Children" veterans, including La Rue, Julia Barr, Laurence Lau, Taylor Miller, James Mitchell, Leven Rambin and Eden Riegel will be part of the anniversary episodes. Its story line will have Pine Valley elected "The Most Congenial Town in America," and Hayley (Ripa) and Mateo (Consuelos) will return to their hometown for Hayley to produce and host a documentary for her television show "The Wave," as she interviews her family members, friends and citizens who all call Pine Valley home. Jan. 4 also marks the long-running soap's first day of production in Los Angeles after four decades in New York.

## **USA tops cable growth**

Not only was USA the most-watched cable network this year, the channel grew its total primetime audience by 15% -- more than any of its top competitors. USA's drama series hit factory grew along with "True Blood"-fueled pay network HBO (+41%), and BET (+23%), the latter boosted by its coverage of Michael Jackson's death. Food Network (+26%) cooked up a good year, "Jon & Kate" helped TLC (+18%) and sophomore hit "Sons of Anarchy" aided FX (+10%). On the downside, CNN (-30%) fell more than any other cable network. Lifetime, despite gaining sampling with "Project Runway," dropped sharply (-20%), as did competitor Hallmark (-18%). Several MTV Networks brands slumped, with SpikeTV (-18%), Comedy Central (-10%) and MTV (-10%) down.

## **Disney sees superpowers in Marvel deal**

Moviegoers have shown a willingness to be entangled by Spider-Man's web over and over again. Now, as Disney prepares to buy the comic-book powerhouse Marvel, it faces the question of whether fans will also get attached to characters as obscure as Ant-Man and Iron Fist. The Walt Disney Co. is making a \$4.2 billion bet that they will as it nears completion of its acquisition of Marvel Entertainment this week. The cash-and-stock deal brings those characters and thousands of others to an entertainment empire that already includes Mickey Mouse, Kermit the Frog and Hannah Montana. Disney's biggest challenge will be to get enough people enthused about second-string superheroes to justify the price -- about \$1.2 billion, or 40%, more than what Marvel's stock was worth when the deal was announced Aug. 31. The high price means Disney will have to find new ways to earn revenue from Marvel -- perhaps by bringing Marvel-licensed toys to more store shelves around the world, and by digging deep into its comic vault for potential new blockbusters.

## **MSNBC criticized over terrorism coverage**

NEW YORK -- MSNBC spent considerable time Monday reporting on the aftermath of an attempted Christmas Day attack on a Detroit-bound airliner, but its executives didn't want to talk about why the story received little attention as it was breaking. Competitors CNN and Fox News

Channel gave much more extensive attention to the story on Christmas night as MSNBC stuck with taped programs on a murder mystery and environmental issues, along with an "undercover" report on the teenage sex trade. MSNBC has been criticized in the past for failing to respond quickly to breaking news during off-hours, a choice that may complicate its efforts to be seen as a go-to news source. The network is revamping its daytime schedule to be more news-oriented than personality-driven, since the latter approach has proven to be a ratings failure. On Christmas, an anchor did live cut-ins about once an hour to pass on news of the attempted terrorism, said Jeremy Gaines, network spokesman. Fox mixed live coverage of the story Friday night with a taped year-end retrospective show with Bill O'Reilly. CNN devoted virtually all of its prime-time hours to the incident, its coverage anchored by Ali Velshi. Neither Gaines nor Phil Griffin, MSNBC's top executive, would discuss the judgment call on Monday.

### **AFI hails 'Avatar' as one of year's top moments**

The American Film Institute hailed James Cameron's "Avatar" as one of the eight noteworthy events in the world of the moving image in 2009 as it released its list of the past year's "Moments of Significance" on Monday. The list is a companion piece to the AFI Movies of the Year and the AFI Television Programs of the Year, which were announced earlier in December. Ironically, "Avatar" failed to make the AFI's movies list. However, in surveying the past year, the AFI described "Avatar" as a pioneering effort to unleash the human imagination, "... a film that firmly established itself as a landmark in the way stories are told." The AFI added that Cameron's advances in CGI and 3D are "an achievement that will have profound effects on the future of the art form." According to the AFI, other film trends of note were "a dazzling explosion of noteworthy" animation and rising ticket grosses, which it said, demonstrated that "movies again prove a tonic for economic ails." Reviewing the TV scene, the AFI pointed to "The Jay Leno Show" at 10 p.m., which resulted in the loss of "five hours traditionally reserved for episodic drama"; it said that "reality television crossed a line in 2009 as the cultural craving for celebrity moved in a dangerous new direction," as exemplified by the tales of the "Balloon Boy" and the "Octomom"; and it also noted that the end of analog TV symbolically represented the changing TV landscape.