

NABET 53 SAYS GOODBYE TO TONIGHT

On February 6, “The Tonight Show” with Jay Leno ended its 22-year run at NBC’s studios in “beautiful downtown Burbank”, when Jay stepped down as host of the historic late night television franchise. The end of Jay Leno’s run also signified a new chapter in the lives of 30 NABET-CWA-represented workers. These workers will either be retiring from NBC Universal or moving on to other assignments at the Company or elsewhere. Included in this group is Local 53 President Steve Ross. Ross worked on the show for 32 years, which beat legendary host Johnny Carson’s record by two years and made Steve the longest-serving employee on the show. Ross started out as a Page, or a guide, and says many of the other Pages from back then are still there.

The 30 NABET-CWA workers on the Burbank show included 19 Daily Hires and 11 Staff. Ross says six staff members have accepted buyouts, but the other five are still young enough that retirement is not an option. In their case, the company is obligated through the contract to place them in jobs elsewhere at NBC facilities in the Los Angeles area. Prior to the show’s end, NBC negotiated an agreement with the Union that will pay Daily Hires and office staff in full until September if they stayed with the show until the February 2014 conclusion. In addition, the current NABET-CWA/NBCU Master Agreement contract provides Daily Hires a severance package if they’ve worked at NBC for at least three years. That severance formula, which is capped at 10 years of service, provides five days severance pay for every year worked. This provision will result in between \$18,000 to \$22,000 of severance being paid to Daily Hires, depending on their base salary, and effectively provides continuation pay until the middle of November 2014. The NBC contract was the first network agreement to provide severance to long-term Daily Hires, and this concept is now also covered in the ABC Master Agreement.

The end of production for “The Tonight Show” in Burbank is a bittersweet milestone for the Sector and Local 53. Many members spent their entire careers working on the show since it moved from New York to California 42 years ago. However recent hiring at FOX Sports 1 has provided many additional NABET-CWA covered jobs in Los Angeles. Local 53 has now seen its membership rolls return to 2010 levels as FOX hired 150 NABET-CWA crew members since last July. While it doesn’t appear that any of members of the current L.A.-based crew will follow the show to New York, the jobs ending in Burbank will be picked up by NABET-CWA members working on Jimmy Fallon’s Tonight Show crew.

“The Tonight Show” began in New York in 1954 and was hosted by Steve Allen, and later by Jack Paar. The show’s longest-serving host was Johnny Carson, who started with the show in 1962, and moved it to Los Angeles in 1972.

“There were a lot of good memories,” Ross said of his 32-year tenure with the show.

One of these memories was of Carson, clad in dark brown pants, a tan jacket and gold shirt, performing his monologue. Ross noticed something gold on the front of Carson’s brown pants. “He did his monologue with his zipper down,” Ross said. “Carson



Jay Leno’s Tonight Show set



Wendy Rotoli, Patrick Smith and Charlie Bouis



Bill Paulson



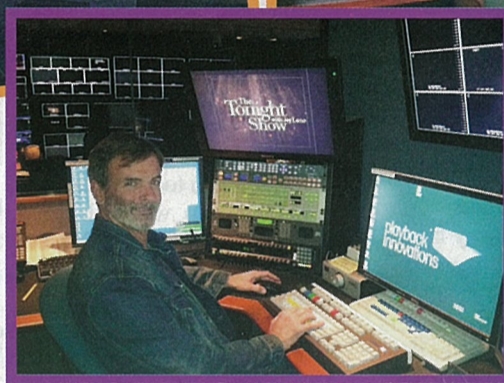
Schooner Darrow



Bill Guardhouse



Ernest Quiroz and Christian Rodriguez



Mac McAlpin

told [co-host] Ed McMahon on the air that he should have told him, then he said ‘In all of these years, I’ve never done the entire monologue with my zipper down.’” Though Ross had noticed the slip-up, it was Tonight Show Executive Producer Freddy de Cordova who broke the news to Carson.

One of the biggest differences between the Carson and Leno productions was the amount of editing done in the broadcast. Back in Carson’s days, the show would only be edited maybe a half dozen times in a year. “We’d just rewind it and send it to air,” Ross remembers. “Even if it wasn’t funny, we’d continue on with the show.”

Today, that aspect of the show is much different thanks to technology. There are 10 cameras on the present version of “The Tonight Show.” “The show is heavily edited. They want the show to be perfect. If a joke doesn’t get a laugh, we pull the joke out. Every segment is precisely timed. We edit the previous segment while taping the current segment. There have been times when we’ve had to edit the last segment up until the last minute before hit air on the Network.” Ross also noted that Jay Leno is a “real workaholic,” getting to the studio by 8 a.m. and staying until 9 p.m. Then, he would go out into the field to do his famous “Jaywalking” segment, and then work on his next day’s monologue from midnight to 4 a.m.

And sometimes there have been slip-ups that could not be edited out. During one show, the cue card guy forgot to make a change and halfway through Jay’s monologue some of the jokes weren’t there,” Ross said. “We had to stop taping, write the cue cards and start over again. Audience had to sit through some of the jokes again (and laugh again like they’d never heard them before).”

Ross said that another favorite Carson moment occurred when one of Johnny’s writers thought it would be funny to put powder in an envelope to be opened during a “Carnac the Magnificent” segment.

“Carnac would try to guess what was in the envelope before blowing into the envelope to open it. When Johnny opened this particular envelope, powder flew out and Carson laughed so hard that he couldn’t finish the bit. As funny as it was, that was the last time that happened.”

After Jay Leno’s last show on February 6, a wrap party was held for all of the staff and crew. The party was held in a banquet tent at the NBC Burbank lot and was a great opportunity for all to celebrate their place in television history.

Leno Thanks Union Crew

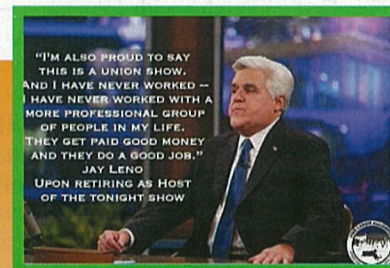
Before signing off for the last time, Jay Leno thanked the show’s crew, most of whom are members of NABET-CWA Local 53, for their professionalism and their contributions to making his show a success.

“I’m also proud to say this is a union show, and I have never worked with a more professional group of people in my life,” Leno said. “They get paid good money and they do a good job.”

Huffington Post blogger Peter Dreier congratulated the host on his statement: “Kudos to Jay Leno for ending his 22-year tenure on ‘The Tonight Show’ with a staunchly pro-union statement.” Dreier noted that this was not the first time that Leno has shown his solidarity with labor. He was scheduled to appear at the same convention in Las Vegas as a notorious union-busting law firm, but said he’d cancel if the firm’s presentation, “How to Stay Union Free,” wasn’t taken off the agenda. The conference canceled the law firm’s ap-

pearance, and kept Leno. “Last night, when he didn’t have to do so, he demonstrated which side he is on. Thanks, Jay!!”

The credits at the end of the show list all of the talented NABET-CWA Local 53 members that were a part of this piece of television history. On Monday, Feb. 17, “The Tonight Show” starring Jimmy Fallon returned, after 42 years, to production at 30 Rock in New York City.



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Jay Leno upon retiring as Host of “The Tonight Show”