

FLASHBACK



The cast of "The Magic Toy Shop," which aired on WHEN-TV, included, from left: Socrates Sampson as Eddie Flum Num, Jean Daugherty as the Play Lady and Marilyn Herr as Merrily. In photo at right, Sampson and Herr are joined by Tony Riposo, center. Courtesy of Onondaga Historical Association

Syracuse's 'Magic Toy Shop' ended its run after 27 years

Johnathan Croyle
jcroyle@syracuse.com

A piece of Syracuse television history came to close 35 years ago.

After 27 years, on Sept. 11, 1982, "The Magic Toy Shop," (or "Corporation on Location" as it was known during its final six years) aired for the final time on WTVH-TV, Channel 5.

It was one of the pioneer children's programs in the country and quite possibly the oldest of its kind.

Its final segment would air at 11:30 a.m. that Saturday — and was cut to a half hour to make room for coverage of the U.S. Open tennis tournament.

The show's creator and writer, Jean Daugherty, said the show was ended because of the "time and money involved in taping on location."

"The Magic Toy Shop" debuted on Feb. 28, 1955, six months before "Captain Kangaroo," and aired Monday through Friday from 9 to 9:30 a.m. on WHEN-TV.

The show was part of an effort by the channel to "capture the romper set's attention," according to Herald-American writer Robert Sokolsky in his "Looking and Listening" column.

Sokolsky saw a closed-circuit preview of "The Magic Toy Shop" a week before it premiered. He called it a "top-notch program and the adult viewers on hand were impressed."

Two characters were salvaged from the show "Tip Top Showboat": Eddie Flum Num and Mr. Trolley, who were joined with Merrily (played by WHEN continuity director Marilyn Herr) and her Magic Music Box.

The original Herald-Amer-

ican review described Eddie as a "lovable big kid with a sailor suit and big glasses, and the inventor of such wonderful things as striped paint and rainy-day sun bonnets." He was played by Socrates Sampson.

Lew O'Donnell played the storytelling and wise Mr. Trolley, who "is capable of traveling anywhere and bringing back anything that is magic and pleasant."

The show opening was a "gaily decorated door to the Magic Toy Shop where all sorts of wonderful things are located." Merrily has the key to the door and is willing to share it with us, "A smile is the magic key to the magic door to the wonderful Magic Toy Shop."

Sokolsky predicted a hit and closed his preview by writing a personal note to his boss: "If we are not around our desk in the morning this

week don't worry. We'll just be watching television with the rest of the kids."

It was a success and WHEN received more than 700 letters in the program's first weeks from parents telling the network how pleased they were with the show.

Two months into its run, right after local schools had their Easter recess, the show had become one of the station's most popular shows.

Despite being designed for preschool kids, it "had tremendous drawing power for the older ones."

In 1976, when WHEN became WTVH, the show was renamed "Corporation on Location" and aired once a week on Saturday mornings.

For its last broadcast, original cast members would be shown in classic episodes.

Daugherty — who produced all 6,200 episodes —

"I don't feel that it's gone because people still recognize me," Marilyn Herr told The Post-Standard in 1982.

promised a "nostalgic trip" for those who watched the final show.

"We will throw away the script and talk about ourselves, and viewers will see everyone who was ever on the program," she said.

And although the show's run was coming to an end, all involved believed it would live on through its viewers.

"I don't feel that it's gone because people still recognize me," Marilyn Herr told the Post-Standard in 1982. "Today, two women stood and talked to me about how their children watched us and how they really appreciated it."