Doctor Who? There's no question he's a cult hero

By BOLT RYKEN
Staff reporter

NEW YORK — About 900 "Who-vians," including a smattering from Delaware Valley area, attended the K-1 "Doctor Who" festival to be held on the East Coast on Saturday, only to have the second day of the two-day event canceled.

And who, you might ask, is "Doctor Who?"

For the unfamiliar, the "Doctor," who in the title is literal — in the jocular, science-fiction hero of a British television series that is almost an institution in England, where it has run for 20 years. It was first shown in the United States in 1976, and has since attained a cult status here similar to the following generated by "Star Trek."

The gathering of young and old, some from as far afield as New York and Wisconsin, came to celebrate the Doctor. Saturday, these celebrants, called "Who-vians," were the first ever to attend the Doctor Who Fan Club of America — watched rare and new television programs and meet other Who fans. "Doctor Who" merchandise (ranging from $10 T-shirts to $200 glossy picture books) and entered a series of raffles. They also walked in a long, hot line to receive autographs from two actors who have appeared in the show.

The 12-month-long series of conventions, usually two-day events with panels of guest speakers and Q&A sessions, ran through the year, and included visits by some of the series' actors, producers and writers, began this month in Tampa, Fla. There is something engaging about a character who, in the midst of some complicated science-fiction plot, remarks that he has "an uncanny ability for the apt phrase."

A special one-day convention is scheduled for Tuesday at Philadelphia's Walnut Street Theater from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., though the sale of "Doctor Who" merchandise will begin at 11 a.m.

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Doctor Who

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the actors — Jon Pertwee, the third to play the Doctor, and Elisabeth Sladen, who played companion Sarah Jane Smith. They persevered for 12 hours Saturday.

Sunday was to be much the same sort of day, but at 10 p.m. Saturday, Ron Katz, president of the 12,000-member Denver-based fan club, announced the cancellation of Sunday’s schedule. He said later this was because of a dispute over advance payment to union members of the Beacon Theater, an ornate, one-time vaudeville palace at 74th and Broadway.

Sunday, 100 people who hadn’t heard the news waited outside the clearly closed theater. At one point, someone suggested breaking in. “I’ve got a sonic screwdriver,” he said, referring to an all-purpose tool used by the Doctor.

Some of the disappointed expressed interest in using their Sunday tickets at the one-day Philadelphia festival.

The attendance at the New York festival was disappointing to the organizers, who blamed WOR-TV (9), a New York station (available on Rollins Cablevision in northern Delaware and Storer Cable in Dover) because it repeats the same 90 episodes.

The series also can be seen in Delaware on WHYY-TV (12). The series, with Davison in the role, returned to Channel 12 on July 4 as the result of viewers’ protests when the series was canceled in December after almost three years. Channel 12 said it had insufficient money to purchase the show. So a special fund-raising effort was made in March. Fans of the series, including members of the Doctor Who Fan Club of America, donated $32,000.

Katz said crowds at the other festivals have surpassed that in New York. “We’re sold out in Philadelphia, we were 70 percent sold out in Tampa . . . and we’ve sold 4,000 seats in Denver,” he said.

The 900 seem to represent what