

Stars help make sci-fi charity auction shine



Carole Ann Ford, left, another "Dr. Who" alumni, talks with Debi Smolinske, of Hoffman Estates.

Daily Herald Photo/Bill Zars

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Ever since Bob McLaughlin's son, Dean, went to live at Lambs Farm in Libertyville, he has searched for a way to raise money for the farm, a home and place of work for 150 persons with mental retardation.

It turns out the solution was an obvious one. While McLaughlin looked for a worthy fund-raiser, he also dreamed of throwing his own convention for science fiction fans, like himself. It was four years ago that he finally connected both desires and emerged with one good idea.

McLaughlin, and his crew of nearly 20 other sci-fi loving suburbanites held their fourth annual convention last weekend at the Hyatt Regency O'Hare Hotel, for fans of campy British science fiction TV shows.

Specifically, the convention showcased the 30th anniversary of the first broadcast of the celebrated, "Dr. Who," along with the other cult favorites, "Blake's Seven," "Robin of Sherwood" and "Red Dwarf."

Of the four programs, only "Red Dwarf," remains in production, while episodes of "Dr. Who" may be seen on the Science Fiction

Channel.

"You're right," says co-chairman Debi Smolinske, of Hoffman Estates, "the average person on the street probably has no idea what you're talking about when you mention these programs."

Still, the convention drew close to 1,800 visitors for the weekend-long event, completely taking over the 700-room Hyatt Regency. Nearly half came from the Chicago area, says Smolinske, while the rest came from across the country, and as far away as Australia, England and Canada.

Helping to pull off this logistical nightmare was Anne Mack of Cary, who ran the registration, Sandy Kinnard of Elk Grove Village and Ruth Ann Stern of Itasca, who helped escort guests to the various meeting rooms throughout the hotel; George Fergus of Schaumburg, who brainstormed the logistics; Patty Duke of Hoffman Estates, who headed operations, and John Lavalie of Des Plaines, who ran episodes of the shows in the video room.

Stars of these television shows remain the biggest attraction. This year's convention, with its Dr. Who anniversary theme, drew 27 British television stars, including Colin Baker, the sixth Dr. Who; Jeremy Bulloch, Robin's Ed-



John Levene, center, who played Sgt. Benton on the old "Dr. Who" series, laughs over somebody's costume with Patty Duke and Bob McLaughlin, who were instrumental in organizing the science fiction convention.

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ward of Wickham; and Christopher Barry, who directed 40 "Dr. Who" episodes.

It is these stars who make the success of the charity auction held right in the middle of the convention weekend. Each star brings a prop, piece of memorabilia or former script, from their television show to auction off. Then, the individual actor auctions it off during the oral auction.

Last year, the auction raised more than \$5,000, and prompted McLaughlin and Smolinske to split

the proceeds, and donate a portion to a second charity. They selected the Make-A-Wish foundation, which grants wishes to terminally ill children.

"Last year they donated \$3,000 to us, which is a significant contribution," said Carol Hack, a spokesman with Make-A-Wish foundation of Northern Illinois, based in Chicago. "The average cost of a wish is \$3,200, so with the this one donation, they've practically underwritten the one wish for a child."