

Television

'HOME' IS WHERE THE THREE-YEAR COMMITMENT IS

'Home Improvement' producer, distributor and ABC benefit from unusual deal

By Steve Coe

In one fell swoop last week ABC was guaranteed three more years of its hit comedy *Home Improvement*, the producers of the show and their production company, Wind Dancer Productions, were given series commitments from the network for two more projects, and the Walt Disney Company secured all domestic and international distribution rights for those two future projects.

All parties were involved in an unprecedented deal that saw ABC give Disney and the producers of *Home Improvement* a three-season pickup that guarantees the show a minimum of five seasons.

Wind Dancer, formed in 1988, comprises Matt Williams, who created both *Home Improvement* and *Roseanne*, and *Home Improvement* co-creators Carmen Finestra and David McFadzean.

Under the agreement ABC will deficit-finance the production of the two future projects, with the ability to participate financially in their sale into syndication.

The unusually structured deal for *Home Improvement* takes much of the gamble from Disney, since the studio won't be financing at a deficit. ABC meanwhile signs on to assume much of the upfront cost but will have an ownership interest in the show and can reap the financial rewards from its sale to a distributor.

Disney benefits in that it is guaranteed the necessary five-year network run for *Home Improvement*, which enables the studio to plan the off-net syndication of that series. Both the studio and ABC also avoid the expected rancorous renewal process for *Home Improvement's* fifth year. Since most series are signed to four-year deals by the network, studios will, if a



'Home Improvement' gets three-year hitch

show is a success, hold out for big dollars in return for a fifth season.

Wind Dancer is perhaps the biggest winner of the three in that the young company can now operate without any interference from the studio and has a guaranteed home for its next two projects. Also, ABC will almost certainly use *Home Improvement* as a launching pad for the new projects, since the network has a vested interest in the success of the shows beyond their performance on the prime time schedule. "We're trusting ABC to give us the best time slot, one that is adjacent to *Home Improvement*. There's nothing

contractually about the time slot, but we've had a good relationship with ABC and we're confident it will work out that way," says Rick Leed, president, Wind Dancer Productions.

Home Improvement has been a strong ratings performer since its debut in the fall of 1991. It was the only first-year success for the 1991-92 season and was moved from its safe Tuesday night time slot in order to anchor ABC's Wednesday night lineup this season. Ironically, Williams, the creator and one-time executive producer of *Roseanne* who was forced out of the show by star Roseanne Arnold, now finds himself on par with the volatile comedienne in clout with the network.

Arnold and husband Tom were successful in their demand the network use the post-*Roseanne* slot of Tuesday at 9:30 p.m. for the new *The Jackie Thomas Show* which stars Tom Arnold. ABC recently booted *Coach* from that slot to appease the Arnolds. Williams and company now will most likely have similar pull in scheduling decisions at ABC with regard to *Home Improvement's* surrounding time slots. The difference, however, is that ABC stands to gain far more by giving Wind Dancer Productions access to the *Home Improvement* lead-out than it will reap from turning over the post-*Roseanne* slot. ■

'LEWIS' AND PHILLIPS RENEWED

Clyde Phillips, creator and executive producer of Fox's *Parker Lewis*, has renewed his exclusive writing and production deal with Columbia Pictures Television. The new two-year deal includes an option for a third year and insures the producer will continue to produce exclusively for Columbia, where he has been since 1986. Phillips currently has a pilot commitment from ABC for either a half-hour or hour project. *Parker Lewis*, now in its third season, was not on Fox's fall lineup but will return to the network in January.

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