

Ogiens promises to make over MTM

Michael Ogiens likes to trust his instincts.

The new president of MTM Television says it's important for producers to have faith in their creative impulses because in many ways television is a business of abstracts.

"We're in the business of manufacturing a product that isn't really tangible," Ogiens says. "At best, it's a judgment call when you're trying to come up with a winning show. So it's important for producers to have faith in the people responsible for the creative elements."

Ogiens joined MTM Television last June with a mandate from its new owners to revitalize the company that had produced such TV classics as *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *Hill Street Blues* and *The Bob Newhart Show*.

MTM, founded in 1969 by Mary Tyler Moore and then-husband Grant Tinker, was bought by British firm TVS Entertainment in 1988. International Family Entertainment, which owns the Family Channel basic cable network, acquired MTM with its purchase of TVS in 1993.

Although MTM recently produced the CBS network series *Christy* and *Evening Shade*, development of new programming had been slowed considerably by leadership changes and ownership shuffles during the past few years.

Since Ogiens's arrival, however, MTM has unveiled two first-run projects for launch next fall: *The Cape*, a big-budget weekly drama, and *The Beef*, a lighthearted reality strip (see box, page 44).

After working as an independent producer for the past decade, Ogiens says, his goal at MTM is to make the studio a nurturing environment for creativity, with the studio infrastructure acting as a "support service" for the industry's top talents.

"I very consciously try not to interfere with the decisions of the producers and writers on our shows," Ogiens says. "As a producer, I know that sometimes you wind up leaving teeth marks in the furniture when you get too much help from executives."

Ogiens spent 14 years as a production executive with CBS Entertainment before he and fellow CBS executive Josh Kane founded The Ogiens/Kane Co. in 1986. The company, which produced *The Young Riders* series for ABC, is in production with Castle Rock Entertainment on the



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President, MTM Television, Los Angeles; b. June 19, 1947, Los Angeles; Los Angeles: page, guest relations department, ABC, 1967; production assistant/producer, Chuck Barris Productions, 1967-70; production manager, Carruthers Co., 1970-71; unit manager, ABC, 1971-72; manager, daytime programs, CBS, 1972-73; director, daytime programs, CBS, 1973-75; CBS Entertainment: VP, daytime programs, 1976-79; VP, daytime and children's programs, 1979-81; VP, programs, New York, 1981-83; VP, comedy development, Los Angeles, 1984-86; partner/executive producer, Ogiens/Kane Co., Los Angeles, 1986-95; current position since June; m. Renee Ybarra, Dec. 30, 1989; children: Emma, 5; Kate, 2.

upcoming first-run drama *Lazarus Man*.

Born and raised in the Los Angeles area, Ogiens launched his career in television the old-fashioned way: He started at the bottom, landing a part-time job as a page with ABC in 1967. He quickly parlayed a couple of chance meetings with *Dating Game* and *Newlywed Game* creator Chuck Barris into a three-year stint with Barris Productions.

During his years at CBS, Ogiens worked on everything from children's programming to comedy development and was involved with the launches of such hits as *Designing Women*, *Kate and Allie* and *Charles in Charge*. The experience of having been both a buyer and a seller of programming helps him forecast the types of shows that TV audiences are looking for.

Yet Ogiens is wary of relying on market research and focus groups to pick winners and losers. "Market research might tell you what's wrong with something, but research can't tell you what's going to be a success on the air," he says. "We try to identify concepts that in our bones we know will be appealing to an audience and then assemble the best team we can to execute that concept."

With the resources and distribution outlets provided by IFE and the Family Channel, Ogiens and MTM's new team of executives have plunged headfirst into developing series and long-form projects for the networks, cable and syndication. MTM also has first option on projects in development at Ogiens/Kane.

The Cape, he promises, will fit that description. Like the best network dramas, Ogiens says, the show's strength will be its stories and characters. But MTM also has won unprecedented cooperation from NASA and Florida's Kennedy Space Center for the series, which focuses on astronauts and the space program.

Ogiens feels an extra responsibility to insure that MTM's new programs measure up to the legacy of such acclaimed MTM series as *Remington Steele*, *WKRP in Cincinnati* and *St. Elsewhere*. "The initial programs we roll out will be looked at more closely by the industry because of the heritage of the company," he says. "We're attempting to restore MTM as a leading supplier of quality TV entertainment. Hopefully, we can also restore the level of expectation the audience used to have for MTM-produced shows." —CL