



Tune in the Labor Day Telethon

For those of us who have grown up with Jerry Lewis and the MDA Labor Day telethon, it is easy to take for granted the tremendous accomplishment it has become. The show is a part of the American landscape. Many of us can remember from a very young age watching with emotion as the stories of those afflicted with neuromuscular diseases were told. We also hoped along with the families as cures and treatments occurred as a result of the efforts and pledges of millions across our nation.

The first telethon was aired in New York City in June 1955 by just one television station and raised \$600,000 for MDA. Since then, the “MDA Love Network” of television stations has grown to more than 190 outlets, and the telethon raised over \$61 million last year, a new record. Jerry Lewis has always said his goal each year is to raise “one dollar more.” He has reached and surpassed that goal almost every year.

The telethon was moved to Labor Day in 1966, again on one television station, and has been broadcast into our homes each year since. Over 250,000 volunteers worked the weekend last year to accept pledges and raise funds. Additionally,

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over 40 million viewers in North America watched the show in 2006 and it was seen by many more via the Internet.

One of the questions asked is, What is done with the money pledged during the telethon? It is the single most important fund-raising event of the year for MDA. From these funds, as well as those raised throughout the year, patient care, vaccinations, medical and therapeutic care, summer camps and education are supported.

During the telethon, reports are made about breakthroughs in research and medical treatments. Viewers get to meet the families MDA supports and hear their stories, and, at the same time, are entertained by some of America’s best talent.

NALC has been there since the beginning for MDA. Our history goes all the way back to 1952 and we have con-

tributed mightily each year through our own network of branch officers and MDA coordinators. As I reported in last month’s column, NALC branches gave over \$1.2 million in 2006 and we are working ever harder to increase our contribution for 2007.

Reports are coming in all over the country about the work you are doing for MDA. It is exciting to hear about branches doubling and even tripling their efforts. We are working closely with MDA fund-raising professionals and the results are showing the effort. I want to thank all of you for your ideas and I promise we will look at each one. Unfortunately, we cannot implement all of them immediately, but know that none of the ideas will be ignored. The next few years will provide us opportunity to grow our focus on MDA.

This year’s telethon will also feature the 2006 NALC contest winners from all around the country. As reported in last month’s column, we have changed from five categories with 10 representatives to 12 category winners. Those branches will send representatives to Las Vegas, Nevada to appear during different segments of the show. I enjoy meet-

ing and getting to know these representatives every year.

The opportunity to recognize those who have gone above and beyond is important and we should be proud of their accomplishments. By changing the structure of the awards and reducing the num-

bers to compete in each level, we hope to give branches greater incentive to get more involved.

Why are we involved? What is our hope? It is that one day those suffering from these diseases will have real hope. Recently, I read the story of a man who has lived to 49 years of age with Duchenne’s muscular dystrophy. He is a rarity and has lived a most difficult life. Our goal is to not just have people live longer but to also improve quality of life. Every dollar you raise increases our chances to do just that.

Finally, I want to apologize to some branches we recently discovered were inadvertently left off the MDA Honor Roll for 2006. Many thanks to Branch 1690, West Palm Beach, Florida for raising \$1,164; Branch 1131, Jonesboro, Arkansas, \$900; Branch 595, Danville, Virginia, \$560; and Branch 115, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, \$1,000. 