

## Newswire

**ANIMAL PLANET GOES BUGGY FOR WILD, WHOA TV NIGHTS**

SILVER SPRING, Md.—Cable TV channel **ANIMAL PLANET** on June 8 breaks a summer campaign seeking to expand its reach and drive viewers to two new destination nights, *Wild Wednesday* and *Whoa Sunday*. The net will run a 30-second spot for *Wild Wednesday*: an 8 p.m. to 10 p.m. package featuring a new series *Buggin' with Ruud* and another one from Jeff Corwin. Spots target adult pet owners. *Whoa Sunday* will be programmed with a mix of debut and previously-aired specials. Radio and print support. Modernista, Boston, handled creative. The effort runs through July.

**DIET COKE GETS AN OSCAR, TAKES OVER AWARDS 'CAST**

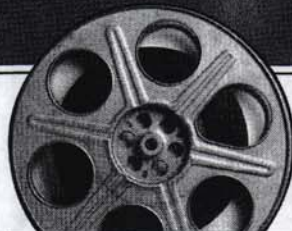
ATLANTA—**COCA-COLA** has snatched ABC's telecast of the **ACADEMY AWARDS** away from **PEPSICO**. After a seven-year hiatus, the No. 1 beverage company reappears in March 2006. Seven commercials, led by the **DIET COKE** brand, will run during the show. The length of the deal was not disclosed. FCB, New York, is lead agency for Diet Coke.

**MERCK IMAGE EFFORT TOUTS RESEARCH, LOW-INCOME AID**

WHITEHOUSE STATION, N.J.—**MERCK** launched a corporate image campaign last week, touting its history of vaccine research and its assistance programs for low-income patients. Tagline: "Where patients come first." Creative, three TV spots and five print ads, came from Ogilvy & Mather, New York. Media buy includes all major nets and cable in both daytime and prime time, and more than 40 national titles. Merck spent \$370 million on ads last year, per Nielsen Monitor-Plus.

**ETC.**

**MICROSOFT XBOX** this summer will go heavy on sponsorships, backing the Green Day Tour, WB/Six Flags Backstage Tour, NOPI, AVP, Minor League Baseball and a number of summer radio festival events ... **STRIDE RITE**, Lexington, Mass., is buying **SAUCONY** athletic footwear, Peabody, Mass., for \$170 million. Saucony had sales of \$166.7 million last year. Its CEO, John Fisher, has been asked to serve as a consultant for about a year following the closing, which is expected this summer.

**The Biz**

By Becky Ebenkamp and Todd Wasserman

**Holly Hobbie's New Friends; Arresting Campaign for Reno**

**H**OLLY Hobbie, a property that hit the height of its popularity around 1980, will return this year with a direct-to-video launch from Nickelodeon and a line of toys from Mattel.

The American Greetings character is the latest retro property from the company to get a facelift in recent years, following on the heels of Strawberry Shortcake and the Care Bears, both of which are on or close to hitting the billion-dollar mark in sales on their second go-arounds.

Unlike those licensed characters, AG is taking a two-tiered approach with Holly

property had been eclipsed by American Greetings' Strawberry Shortcake.

Brown said the time was right to re-release the wholesome Holly Hobbie. "Especially with a more moralistic type of property like this, we couldn't be in a better

position," Brown said. A tie-in promotion with Land 'O Lakes is also in the works.

Holly Stein, vp of entertainment licensing at Mattel, said it was too soon to say what kind of products the company will eventually roll out, but agreed that the timing was right for a Holly relaunch. "I think our business is very cyclical and everything's going back to wholesome values," she said.

"I think wholesome is the new 'edgy.'"

Gary Caplan, a licensing consultant based in Studio City, Calif., predicted Holly Hobbie will do well. "I believe there is still room for at least one more strong retro property," he said. "Nickelodeon is a very powerful, influential licensor and American Greetings is a company for which I have a lot of respect. If you've got Nickelodeon and Amer-

ican Greetings together on this, you've got to pay attention."

**Some Backup Support For Reno 911!**

**COMEDY CENTRAL's** fake police reality show *Reno 911!* will get marketing support from appropriately ersatz Friends of the Force cards, which fit easily into one's wallet and would no doubt come in handy if a pretend-cop pulls you over.

Created by Filter Creative Group, New York, the cards support the second season of *Reno*, which hits DVD on June 14. The cards will be distributed at concerts and clubs.

Other tie-ins include playing cards, which will be given out at *Reno*-hosted poker parties, and a contest dangling a prize pack replete with Serpico-style aviator shades and T-shirts.

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**Holly, geel:** The new Holly (right) and Reno's fake cards.

Hobbie. Holly Hobbie Classic will be geared towards adults who remember the property from when they were kids and will be supported with collector-edition dolls, some of which are already going on sale.

Holly Hobbie & Friends, however, is aimed at kids 4-8. The difference between the two properties is striking: The Classic Holly looks like a relative of Raggedy Ann's. The new Holly looks like she hangs out with Bratz.

The latter will be featured in a direct-to-video DVD from Nick in association with fellow Viacom unit Paramount Home Video in spring 2006 and a TV special on Nick around the same time. "For it to become a successful property, it has to take on a life of its own," said Mike Brown, AG vp-licensing.

AG introduced Holly Hobbie in 1967. The line of dolls, named after the artist who invented them, were drawing \$1 billion in retail sales in 1980. But by mid-decade, the