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RACING ★ FINAL

Weather: Partly sunny, 53/35

# DAILY NEWS

## SpongeBob hooks a big Nick order

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**S**pongeBob SquarePants will be flipping burgers well into 2007.

Nickelodeon programmers have ordered 20 more episodes of the cartoon, bringing the total series count to 100.

"SpongeBob" is the network's top-rated show. It's been translated into 25 different languages and has generated \$4 billion in merchandise revenue since it premiered four years ago.

"It's pretty amazing," said Marjorie Cohn, vice president for development and original programming at Nickelodeon.

Creator Stephen Hillenburg started working on new episodes after he finished writing last year's "SpongeBob" movie.

According to Cohn, there's no reason

why SpongeBob and the rest of the underwater denizens that frequent the Krusty Krab shouldn't have a long tenure on the kids' network.

"I look at 'SpongeBob' as having emerged into the classic arena," said

**MORE TO SEA: SpongeBob**

Cohn. "Our kids' audience renews itself every couple of years, so I don't see why kids 10 or 15 years from now wouldn't find it funny."

But it's not just kids who think SpongeBob is the cat's pajamas.

"Twenty-five percent of our viewers on Friday night [when original episodes air] are actually adults," said Cohn.

The cross-generational appeal has certainly helped make the "SpongeBob" product line a cash cow.

"It is pretty astounding," said Cohn. "You can't go anywhere without seeing kids with 'SpongeBob' backpacks — and the adults are wearing the 'SpongeBob' T-shirts."

Some of those adults are celebrities — Tony Hawk lends his voice to tomorrow's episode.

Other recognizable voices have included Ernest Borgnine, Charles Nelson Reilly, filmmaker Jim Jarmusch, Marion Ross, Sara Paxton and John O'Hurley.

The show, said Cohn, has achieved its icon status because it's smart and original with just the right amount of sweetness.

"'SpongeBob' has that unique voice that's a little off the beaten path," she said. "It's not some cynical, jaded look at the world. It's optimistic. SpongeBob, if I can say this, is human. He's got his annoying qualities. He's got his faults. But his heart is in the right place."

