

Ed cries uncle, leaves 'All Night Live'

By Patty Pryor

Well, Uncle Ed of *All Night Live* is gone — and gone with him are Caffeina, Nicotina, the banana phone, the creed, the back-hand salute and all the other Uncle Ed trappings.

In his place is Dick Wilson and *All Night Live* — *The Second Generation*.

Uncle Ed Muscare, who ruled the late-night cable airwaves for two-and-half years on Kansas City's KSHB, has moved onto sunnier climes in San Diego.

"It was Uncle Ed's decision," said Dan Wheatcroft, ANL executive producer. "He came to me in November and handed me his resignation. He said he didn't quite like the climate in Kansas City."

"Yep, I hate cold weather," Muscare, 51, agreed. So now he plays cards and bets the horses in balmy San Diego, where he used to operate a hot dog stand back in 1977.

"I just want to relax for awhile," he said. "I'm doing a lot of gardening and sitting in the sun."

Before the advent of Uncle Ed and *All Night Live*, Muscare's career included quite a number of versatile roles with KSHB, the first of which was as a kiddie show host on *41 Treehouse Lane* in 1970.

From there, he became The Creeper on a late-night horror show, from which he cocreated an earlier version of the ANL creed, called the Creeper Creed, that included the immortal line: "I pledge that, instead of going to sleeper, I'll stay up and watch Channel 41's Creeper."

Muscare was living in his brother's Florida home, across the street from Disney World (somehow a seemingly perfect environment for Uncle Ed), when he heard of KSHB's plans for *All Night Live*.

"I thought it would be right up my alley," he recalled — and the rest, as they say, is history.

Throughout his stint with ANL, Muscare infused the show with his own particular style and brand of humor — which made the transition from Uncle Ed to Dick Wilson and *The Second Generation* a bit tricky.

Despite mixed reception from local *All Night Live* ers, both Wilson and Wheatcroft say they've received mostly favorable response to the change.

"It's been very positive and very comfortable moving in," said Wilson, who took over as ANL ringmaster Feb. 20.

A change in style was pretty much necessitated by Muscare's departure, Wheatcroft said, because of the difficulty in duplicating Uncle Ed's peculiarities.

"No one can become Uncle Ed — it's not a character we could make up," he said. "We would not want to tell him (Wilson) to act like Uncle Ed."

Muscare was "a very honest person on the air," Wheatcroft added. "He was not acting as much as reacting."

Wilson, 35, agreed that trying to become a "second Uncle Ed" would have been the wrong approach.

"What Ed did was what Ed did and what I do is what I do," Wilson said. "I think his bizarritry was in the way he looked; mine will come out in my thoughts."

Wheatcroft said the search for Muscare's replacement was a tough one. Muscare wanted to leave in a month, but when no new host turned up by then, he agreed to fly in from San Diego every Monday to tape the week's shows.

"That got a little old," Muscare said. "It's hard to do five shows in one night."

But Wheatcroft said he wanted just the right man for the job, and thinks he's found it in Wilson, who has a 12-year history with Kansas City radio station KY102 behind him.

"He's one of the most creative people in Kansas City," Wheatcroft said, "and that's what we needed, with someone having to react continually."

Some of Wilson's new ideas for the show include a Friday night band, composed of a different group of strangers every week; a roving camera visiting local hotspots; flash video contests, with snippets of several television shows to identify; and a penalty box on the set for those occasional live goof-ups.

Wilson said he also was looking for "foreign correspondents" from the cable viewing audience to send polaroid photos of local happenings with their phone numbers to the studio. The correspondents will then be contacted to describe their events on the air.

Other than his own segments, Wheatcroft said the ANL host hasn't much say in programming decisions, such as the recent discontinuation of *The Twilight Zone*.

The programming department reads viewer mail every day, he said, and bases many of its decisions on that feedback.

"A perfect example of that was just last week," Wheatcroft said, "when we heard from two people who wanted to know why they hadn't seen Curly in *The Three Stooges* lately."

"Now Curly's back on — that's all it took was those two people," he said.

So, viewer response will most likely determine Wilson's future with *The Second Generation*, and both he and Wheatcroft are optimistic.

"I think we're off to a dynamite beginning," Wheatcroft said.

Still, there are those who miss all the old props and gimmicks, but Uncle Ed himself isn't one of them.

"No, I don't really miss it," he said. "I still do (the back-hand salute) wherever I go, but out here, they look at me like I'm crazy."

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