

# Backstage Pass

Hal Boedeker and Roger Moore

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## Actors' schedules might sink Disney Channel Games this year

LOS ANGELES — Will the Disney Channel Games happen this year? The young actors' commitments could scuttle the Orlando event, said **Gary Marsh**, president of entertainment for Disney Channels Worldwide. "With the chaos of the schedules, I can't be sure," Marsh told me Friday when I asked whether the event was on. A decision on the games has to be made by March, a Disney Channel spokeswoman said. Last year, the channel used the games to help promote *Camp Rock* with **Jonas Brothers** and **Demi Lovato**. **Miley Cyrus** performed at the concert that concluded the games. (And, yes, there's a *Camp Rock* sequel on the way, planned for a 2010 release.) — **HB**

## Newly hot Rourke's 'Killshot' may see light of day

Not sure how **Mickey Rourke** feels about this, but his hit-man thriller *Killshot*, with **Diane Lane** as the heroine trying to escape his scope, may be released thanks to his new *Wrestler* buzz. *Killshot* has been in the can for three years or so — recut, gathering dust. It's an **Elmore Leonard** adaptation directed by **John Madden** (*Shakespeare in Love*, *Proof*), so who knows what went wrong? Now it's to open in Phoenix next weekend. Maybe it'll open and close too fast (if it's as bad as its much-delayed status and lame trailer suggest) to hurt Rourke's Oscar shot. — **RM**

## Conan O'Brien: 'Tonight' is 'sacred territory'

LOS ANGELES — **Conan O'Brien** doesn't see a problem with **Jay Leno** doing a show at 10 p.m. next fall on NBC. "*The Tonight Show* has been at 11:30 on NBC, and to me, that is sacred territory," O'Brien told TV critics. Leno's new assignment "doesn't in any way affect, I think, the show I'm getting," O'Brien added. "A few people asked me, 'Does this, you know, in any way diminish *The Tonight Show*?' And my response is, 'I don't need any help diminishing *The Tonight Show*. I've got that covered.'" — **HB**

## NASA

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Griffin had lobbied fiercely to continue as administrator. But the often-combative engineer hurt his chances when he publicly upbraided **Lori Garver**, head of the transition team, as "not qualified" to evaluate the Ares I moon rocket that he championed.

Instead, his resignation — required of all appointees of President George W. Bush — will be effective at noon Tuesday.

### Griffin's legacy at risk

The Obama administration has begun reviewing the Constellation program, which includes Ares I and the new Orion capsule and is meant to return astronauts to the moon by 2020. The program has been nagged by technical and financial problems, and its fate is likely to determine Griffin's legacy.

"It is totally tied to Constellation," said **Roger Launius**, curator at the National Air and Space Museum and a NASA historian for 12 years. "He has repeatedly worked to protect that particular approach. He has criticized and sometimes belittled those who leveled criticism against the program."

Griffin, NASA's 11th administrator, leaves behind an agency at the crossroads.

The space shuttle is scheduled to retire in 2010, and Constellation won't launch before 2015. In the interim, America will have to rely on Russian-made Soyuz spacecraft to get to the international space station, and 3,500 jobs at Kennedy Space Center could disappear.

Obama also has urged more emphasis on science missions — including research about climate change and global warming — which NASA's rocket scientists fear

will divert money from its manned space program.

Griffin, 59, was named administrator by Bush in 2005, shortly after the president set a goal of returning to the moon and eventually flying to Mars. But the space community complained that Bush and Congress never gave the \$17 billion agency enough money to do the job.

Griffin settled on Constellation in 2005. The shuttle-derived spacecraft was intended to cut costs because it would require fewer personnel to launch and maintain it — a major concern for KSC workers, who prepare the shuttle for flight.

But one recent study warned that Constellation could cost \$7 billion more than expected if it is to fly by its target date of March 2015. The Ares I rocket also faces engineering challenges, such as violent shaking during lift-off that could kill astronauts.

### Still backs Constellation

Griffin, who acknowledged having "difficult user interface" with others, rejected all alternatives, including extending the shuttle past 2010 or mounting a new crew capsule aboard military rockets. He insisted Constellation was the safest and cheapest option.

"If I have one regret," he said Friday, "the one I would say, honestly, is that I could not manage to persuade an even higher percentage of people that the things we were doing were the right things."

Griffin's other noteworthy controversy erupted in 2007 when he questioned whether global warming was a problem.

"I am not sure that it is fair to say that is a problem we must wrestle with," he told National Public Radio. An internal NASA watchdog later concluded political appoint-

## AIRMEN

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On Tuesday he and other airmen will be in Washington for another historic event: Barack Obama's presidential inauguration. In his long life, Keel said he never expected such an event.

"No way," he said. "I'd never thought I'd see a black president. I didn't think he had a chance."

In December, U.S. Sen. **Dianne Feinstein**, chairwoman of the Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies, invited the airmen to attend the ceremony, said **John Patterson**, Eastern Region president of Tuskegee Airmen Inc., a nonprofit organization with 51 chapters nationwide.

Two-hundred-and-ten vets accepted the invitation, which included two tickets to the inauguration but no accommodations, Patterson said.

The airmen will gather at Bolling Air Force Base in southeast Washington and travel by bus to the ceremony. They have seats next to members of Congress, on the left side of the podium where Obama will deliver his address, Patterson said.

Nine of them also will ride on a float during the inaugural parade. Patterson said the men deserve to be honored for their service.

"After World War II, everyone received their parade down Fifth Avenue in New York City besides the Tuskegee Airmen," he said. "Due to the racial segregation at that time, they never had a



COURTESY OF DANIEL KEEL

'LT Cyril Burke and F/O Officer Daniel Keel receive their wings at Midland Army Air Field,' says the caption on this 1940s photo.

parade; they never received any recognition. This is for someone to give them their overdue recognition."

### 900 earned pilot wings

From 1941 to 1946, many black men were drafted or voluntarily enlisted to be part of the war and postwar effort. Before 1941, blacks were not allowed to fly in combat, but a push from President Franklin Roosevelt's administration and a series of congressional measures forced the U.S. Army Air Corps — forerunner of today's U.S. Air Force — to train and allow black servicemen to fly in combat.

More than 900 graduated and earned their pilot wings from Tuskegee Army Air Field in Alabama. About 15,000 others served as engine mechanics, armament specialists, parachute riggers, control-tower operators and in administrative posts.

Many of the pilots fought in North Africa and Europe, but the war ended before

others, such as Keel, got to go overseas. Some credit the airmen's service with persuading President Truman to desegregate the military in 1948. In 2007, Keel and about 300 remaining living Tuskegee Airmen were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest civilian honor Congress can give.

Keel, who left the military in 1946 and started a successful electrical-contracting company, said the Tuskegee Airmen paved the way for the civil-rights movement and the election of America's first black president.

"If we hadn't been successful as Tuskegee Airmen, the civil-rights movement would have been moved back quite a few years," Keel said. "If I hadn't worked hard and we all hadn't worked hard back then, I have a feeling that Obama would not be president today."

Keel plans to attend the ceremony with his wife of 67 years, Barbara. They will

fly to Washington on Monday. Some airmen in Keel's local chapter have opted not to go, however. Many are in their 80s and 90s and face constraints because of their health. Still, they are elated about the inauguration.

### 'Proud point in my life'

"To see us come to the point to where someone of African-American descent is the commander in chief is a very proud point in my life," said **Bob Griffin**, 78, a fellow airman who lives in Viera.

"We were always told that democracy is here, but it was not complete, and it will get better. During my lifetime, it's happened," Griffin said.

Even airmen who have tended to vote Republican, such as 84-year-old **Noel Harris** of Merritt Island, said the inauguration of Democrat Obama will be a historic moment.

"It says that this country is now becoming a world leader. The world has looked at what has happened and has all praised America," said **Harris**, who will watch the inauguration on a new 20-inch television he bought just for the occasion.

Keel, who will stay with a family friend in Washington, said this year's election is a continuation of the civil-rights movement. He's hoping Obama will move that legacy forward.

"I tell my friends that if he can do his job as well as the Tuskegee Airmen did their job, it would be great," Keel said.

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## Controversy

One controversy of his tenure erupted in 2007 after Griffin questioned whether global warming was a problem on National Public Radio. "I have no doubt that global — that a trend of global warming exists," he said. "I am not sure that it is fair to say that is a problem we must wrestle with."

The global-warming issue continually plagued NASA and the Bush administration. An internal NASA watchdog later concluded that political appointees in NASA's press office either "marginalized or mischaracterized" climate studies from 2004 to 2006.

## His career

Previously, Griffin, 59, led the space department at Johns Hopkins University's Applied Physics Laboratory and was president of an investment company that helped fund new CIA technology. He earned seven degrees, including a doctorate in aerospace engineering from the University of Maryland.



BILL INGALLS/NASA VIA GETTY IMAGES

NASA Administrator Michael Griffin and flight managers watch the Feb. 7 launch of shuttle Atlantis at Kennedy Space Center.

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Griffin generally avoided controversies in his farewell address, which was televised live to NASA facilities across the country. Instead, he spent nearly an hour thanking employees and encouraging them to cooperate with Obama. "Try to find common ground with the new leadership," he said.

"NASA will look great

whether we are asked to return to the moon and . . . go to Mars, as I think we ought to be asked to do. Or whether we are asked to carry out some other task," he said.

He said his top achievement was returning the shuttle to flight after the 2003 Columbia accident grounded the fleet for two years.

"Nothing in the world is harder than picking yourself up after a cataclysm like that," Griffin said.

### Griffin 'very successful'

John Logsdon, a former director of the Space Policy Institute at George Washington University, said Griffin's "careful stewardship of the shuttle" would stand as a lasting achievement.

"He has been very successful of managing the risks of a risky program," he said.

U.S. Sen. **Bill Nelson**, D-Fla., who heads the Senate's NASA oversight committee, praised Griffin as "a good

man [who] was a good administrator."

But **Nelson**, who supports ex-astronaut **Bolden** to replace Griffin, also sent a veiled warning to Obama.

"I am hopeful," he said, "that the administration's selection to replace him has similar experience and knowledge of the space program as Mike does."

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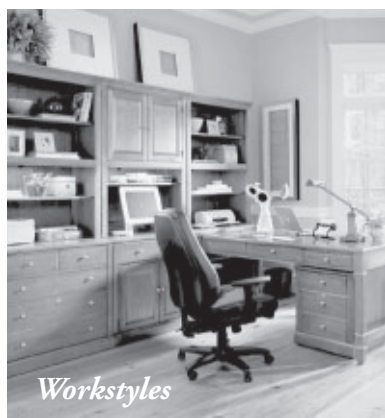
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CORRECTION NOTICE

The Orlando Sentinel published an ad featuring RBC Bank's Money Market Account in the January 4, 2009 edition of the newspaper. The ad was not scheduled to run, as the offer featured expired on December 31st, 2008.

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