

TV WEEK

MONTGOMERY COUNTY EDITION

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THIS WEEK'S PICKS

GROSS NATIONAL PRODUCT

Wednesday at 9:30 on MPT

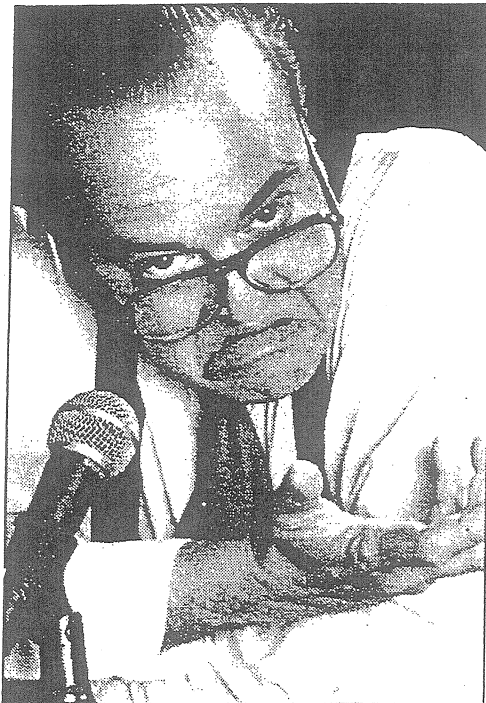
In 1980, not long out of college, John Simmons was working here as a reporter for the Commerce Clearinghouse law journal and trying to create a political satire group, Gross National Product.

"It was like a Clark Kent existence," he said. "I wandered the halls of government by day, and by night I was a satirist."

By 1983, GNP had a show at D.C. Space, and cast members were commuting to New York to appear at cabarets such as The Improv, the Duplex and Caroline's Comedy Club. Some did gigs out in Los Angeles, where GNP still maintains an office. But things were tough. For two years, 1985 to 1987, Simmons himself stayed in Los Angeles, working in television.

Then along came "the Iran-contra thing, and I started salivating," he said. "I couldn't stand it. This place has always been a magnet. I had to do the show ['Man Without a Contra'], and that was the rebirth of GNP here."

In 1988, GNP began "BushCapades," which ran at The Bayou for four years. Then the group devised Scandal Tours, running from April to October. For the 1992 elections, GNP produced "The Unofficial Debates" for television and, when the Clintons arrived, "Clintoons," back at the Bayou. The group's second television special, "The First 100 Daze," aired last year. Excerpts were featured in a BBC documentary, "Presenting the President."



Gross National Product's Bob Heck as Larry King.

Wednesday, GNP offers its third special, some of it taped last Saturday at Lisner Auditorium. They're parodying Washington politics, of course, as well as television itself.

On the chopping block: "The Whitewater Brief"; David Gergen (Dr. Gergenstein, with George Stephanopoulos as Igor); Larry King ("C-Span 2 After Hours Live From Duke Zeibert's"); the Winter Olympics; PBS pledge drives; Discovery Channel's "Wings"; NBC's "Rescue 911," in which paramedics rescue Sen. Robert Packwood; and Disney's proposed historical theme park here.

Simmons, who worked one summer at

Walt Disney World ("the worst experience of my life"), considers Washington, D.C., "the original theme park itself." So he's devised a park that includes an EPA exhibit, "It's a Smell World After All"; "The Haul of Presidents"; "Cash Mountain" (the Capitol dome); and "The Experimental Prototype Catastrophe of Tomorrow."

Besides actor-producer Simmons, who will play Attorney General Janet Reno, other cast members are Marianne Curan, Sarah Delea, Bob Heck (as Larry King and Bill Clinton), Shari Elliker, John Roarke ("probably the most brilliant impersonator I've ever met"), Chris Thompson and Stephen Schmidt.