

USC ANNENBERG

The Norman Lear CENTER



HOLLYWOOD, HEALTH & SOCIETY
PARTNERING ENTERTAINMENT, EDUCATION AND THE CDC

For Release: October 26, 2002

Contacts: Saundra Halgrimson (818) 981-3446 (323) 791-3635
Vicki Beck (323) 782-3315/(760) 431-6765

HIV Storyline Wins Third Annual Sentinel for Health Award for Daytime Drama

1962 Agnes Nixon Storyline Honored as First to Address Health Topic in Soaps

Los Angeles – The USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) honored *The Bold and The Beautiful's* storyline, *Tony's HIV*, with the Sentinel for Health Award for Daytime Drama today, Oct. 26. The storyline was recognized for its portrayal of a young man learning to live with HIV.

"We applaud *The Bold and The Beautiful* for tackling such an important public health issue by showing a character with HIV who comes to terms with his diagnosis, and goes on to live a full life with a new wife and child," said Martin Kaplan, Associate Dean at the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Director of the Norman Lear Center. "Research tells us that people learn about health issues from daytime drama storylines. In this case, the CDC was able to track a very large spike in callers to the national AIDS hotline with requests for even more information after a public service ad was shown following two episodes of the show."

The award was presented by TV/stage actress Judith Light, a former soap opera star who also played the mother of teenage AIDS patient, Ryan White, on ABC-TV's landmark production in 1989. Invited experts from public health, academic, advocacy, and entertainment organizations judged the award entries and noted that the HIV storyline included "good information on the impact of the disease and accurate depiction of the disease, especially transmission, stigma, and discrimination." It included a "positive range of HIV-related issues," and "excellent information about the responsibilities of HIV-positive persons."

A highlight of the award program was a new award, the Sentinel for Health Pioneer Award, which was given to Agnes Nixon for *Bert's Pap Smear*, a storyline that aired in 1961-1962 on *Guiding Light*. Nixon's groundbreaking storyline is considered to be the first health storyline in daytime drama.

"When I proposed this topic, it was met with great resistance," said Nixon, who had been a head writer for only a year and had lost a friend to cancer. "But I fought very hard to get it on air because I wanted to educate women about the importance of Pap smears for early detection and prevention of uterine cancer. As a result, we got hundreds of letters from viewers all over the country who went to their doctors for Pap smears, and many felt it saved their lives."

The Sentinel for Health Award for Daytime Drama was established by the CDC in 2000 to recognize exemplary achievements of daytime dramas that inform, educate, and motivate viewers to make choices for healthier and safer lives. It is administered by Hollywood, Health & Society (HH&S), a partnership between CDC and the USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center. A second storyline, *Ashley's Breast Cancer*, produced by *The Young and The Restless*, was

recognized as a finalist this year. Past winners of the award are *Viki's Breast Cancer* from *One Life to Live* (2000), and *Raul's Diabetes* from *The Young and The Restless* (2001).

CDC reports that nearly half of regular daytime drama viewers learn about diseases or how to prevent them from watching soaps, and more than a third take some action – like talking to others about the health issue, giving advice to prevent the problem, or visiting a doctor or clinic themselves. Women of color who are regular viewers report learning about health issues from daytime dramas more often than from prime time dramas, and African-American women who are regular viewers report giving prevention advice learned from a daytime drama more often than advice received from a prime time show.

Funded by the CDC, HH&S provides entertainment industry professionals with accurate and timely information for health storylines. It is based at the USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center as a one-stop-shop for writers, producers, and others in search of credible information on a wide range of public health topics. The program offers writers individual briefings, special seminars, expert consultation, health tip sheets, and an innovative Web site, entertainment.usc.edu/hhs.

The Norman Lear Center is a multidisciplinary research and public policy center exploring implications of the convergence of entertainment, commerce and society. Based at the USC Annenberg School for Communication, the Lear Center works to bridge the gap between the entertainment industry and academia, and between them and the public. For more information, visit entertainment.usc.edu.

Located in Los Angeles at the University of Southern California, the USC Annenberg School for Communication is among the nation's leading institutions devoted to the study of journalism and communication, and their impact on politics, culture, and society. With an enrollment of more than 1500 graduate and undergraduate students, USC Annenberg offers B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in journalism, communication, and public relations. For more information, visit annenberg.usc.edu.

###