

## INNER TUBE



### PROBLEMS & QUESTIONS LOOM LARGE IF DEGENERES' 'ELLEN' COMES OUT

Having the lead character on ABC's "Ellen" come out as a lesbian, while groundbreaking, could cause some problems for ABC's prime-time schedule, say entertainment-industry insiders.

As reported Saturday, according to an upcoming issue of TV Guide, there's talk that producers of the program, including series star **Ellen DeGeneres**, are lobbying to have her Ellen Morgan character reveal she's a lesbian.

"If this pans out, as we hope it does, and we're very happy about this, it would be a landmark decision in the world of television," said **Alan Klein**, a spokesman for the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation.

However, should the storyline be fully developed, others might not be as happy as GLAAD. In fact, ABC and the show's producer, Walt Disney's Touchstone TV, could face more trouble than they've bargained for.

Industry observers were speculating Friday about how producers would weave the revelation into the program. The thinking being: Why bring it up at all unless it's going to be dealt with on a regular basis? Which leads to another question: Can ABC leave a show with a lesbian as the main character in the 8 p.m. slot traditionally geared for family viewing?

If the outing occurs, it wouldn't happen until at least midway through the season, said an insider, who cautioned that no decision at all had been made.

Furthermore, ABC could end up having a problem with advertiser defections because of the homosexual storyline.

In the past, advertisers have been skittish about being part of a program that had anything to do with homosexuality.

— **Richard Huff**

#### 'PrimeTime' uncertainty

"PrimeTime Live" correspondent **Renee Poussaint** surprised her colleagues at last week's News and Documentary Emmys when, upon accepting one of her two awards, she mentioned that the honors came at an awkward period in her career.

Turns out the awkwardness comes from Poussaint's current contract limbo with ABC News. Poussaint told The News on Friday that her contract is up in November and that she "honestly" doesn't know what her future holds.

Poussaint hasn't been on "PrimeTime Live" in recent months, and only has one story in the works.

Asked why she's been off the show, Poussaint said she wasn't sure, but that it wasn't by her own choosing.

"I'm not the one who makes those kinds of decisions, the executive producer does," she said. "I'm a little confused about it... I'm just generally confused about my future at ABC. Hopefully it will get clarified real soon."

— **R.H.**

#### Busy summer for Tiffani

**Tiffani-Amber Thiessen** didn't take much time off to relax this summer.

The "Beverly Hills, 90210" star spent her hiatus from the series in

Canada filming back-to-back telefilms for NBC.

The first, "Sweet Dreams," airs tonight at 9 on the Peacock net. It tells the tale of an amnesiac who tries to piece together the details of her obviously-troubled past with the help of a sympathetic small-town cop (**A Martinez**) and a psychiatrist (**David Newsom**) whom she apparently knew in her former life.

"Sweet Dreams" also features a handful of torrid love scenes that set the small screen aflame. Thiessen, though, found the actual love-scene shooting a bit chilly.

"The love scenes were definitely hard. We were on the 27th floor of this apartment building in Vancouver. It was freezing cold, and we were outside. It was our first day of shooting, and I had to be naked in a jacuzzi with

a guy I'd just met two days earlier," Thiessen says, laughing.

After only a two-day break, Thiessen shuffled off to Toronto to start work on another yet-to-be-scheduled NBC film with **Tim Matheson**, tentatively titled "Angel Girl."

Then, it was back to California, and "90210" — for now.

"This looks like probably my last season on the show," says Thiessen. "It's



'DREAMS' GIRL: Tiffani-Amber Thiessen

the last season for all of our contracts."

As for the future?

"I have no idea," she says with a laugh. "I hope to stay in the business as long as I can. I'll just take it one step at a time."

— **Christy Slewinski**

#### Dot's all . . .

"Broadway Beat" kicks off its sixth year tomorrow (Ch. 69 in Manhattan, 5 p.m.) with a half-hour show devoted to the late cabaret singer **Nancy LaMott**. It'll feature LaMott in performance from 1978-1995. . . .

Tonight, "Time and Again" (MSNBC, 7 p.m.) looks back at the tumultuous civil rights battles. It was 33 years ago this week that the struggle reached epic proportions in Birmingham, Ala. when a bomb ripped through the 16th Street Baptist Church during services, killing four choir girls and injuring 20 other children. . . .

**Eleanor Mondale**, daughter of former Veep **Walter Mondale**, has joined CBS News' "This Morning" as an L.A.-based entertainment contributor. She'll continue to host the E! channel's "Uncut," a celeb interview