

## Retail Rings Up For Counter AID '95

■ BY DOUGLAS REECE

LOS ANGELES—Retail is once again teaming with the music industry's AIDS charity LIFEbeat to help raise money for those with HIV/AIDS.

Counter AID '95, which runs Friday (1)-Dec. 7, is LIFEbeat's largest fundraiser. The event's organizers request store customers to round up their purchases to the nearest dollar, with the difference going to LIFEbeat. Retailers will also offer point-of-purchase displays with tear-off bar-coded \$1 donations.

Tim Rosta, executive director of LIFEbeat, says the goal is to sign on 1,500 stores, each of which could raise \$500, resulting in \$750,000 for the organization. At press time, 1,260 stores across the country have signed on for Counter AID.

Retail outlets already set to work with LIFEbeat on the fund-raiser

Other promotional tie-ins include an MTV-sponsored trip to New York for the cashier who raises the most money, as well as four regional prizes for store employees who raise the most money in their territories. Prizes for the best LIFEbeat displays will also be awarded to individual stores.



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"The event gets better every year, and the reason is that retailers and cashiers are becoming more familiar with it," says Rosta. "We really have to rely on them

to be our fund-raisers that week, because the event is only as good as the people behind the counters."

Hundreds of volunteers, including several company teams, will supplement the effort by appearing at stores and soliciting donations from customers.

Sue Vovsi, GM at the J&R Music World in New York, has been involved with LIFEbeat for four years, and during that time, the store has had such artists as Meat Loaf and Debbie Gibson participating.

"This event is really nice for employees, because they get excited about being involved in a charity around the holidays and having artists in-store," says Vovsi. "We're proud to be a part of Counter AID, and we're looking forward to it growing each year."

## FOURTH QUARTER BOOSTS AUDIOBOOK BUSINESS

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importantly, in units per title, because more consumers are coming to the party." Just released and selling strongly are Simon & Schuster's "Charles Kuralt's America" and "No Ordinary Time" by Mario Cuomo.

"The business continues to grow from year to year at a strong pace," says Jenny Frost, VP/publisher at BDD Audio, whose current best sellers include Pat Conroy's "Beach Music," Pilcher's "Coming Home," and "Couplehood" by Paul Reiser of TV's "Mad About You." "It doesn't grow from year to year as much as it did three years ago, but for a maturing business it's an impressive rate. There are also sociological indications: The number of jokes, cartoons, and references to audiobooks in popular culture is increasing."

While all agree on the strength of the fourth quarter, executives are divided on the year's sales prior to that. Some, like Dove, Harper, and Simon & Schuster, report consistently high sales. "We're up at least 15% over last year, and a lot of it is due to new businesses getting into audio—Camelot Music, audio rental programs in video stores, and more and more truck stops," says Carolyn Willis, asso-

ciate director of marketing at Harper Audio. Advance orders for "A Call To Character," a collection of poems and fables emphasizing moral values, are running almost as high as those for the hardcover version, adds marketing manager Hugo Jellett. Harper is also preparing to release "The X-Files: Ground Zero," read by one of the show's stars, Gillian Anderson.

"The whole market is getting better for all the major players," says Dove president Michael Viner. "Our overall business for the year is about 50% ahead of last year, and this will be our best fourth quarter ever." In addition to big titles like "Memories Of Madison County" (which is shipping 50,000 copies on audio) and Amy Tan's "The Hundred Secret Senses," Viner says, "we're having a lot of good sales from the backlist—everything from Dave Barry to 'The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy.'"

Warner Audio Video Entertainment VP of operations Judy McGuinn notes that the company's 14% increase occurred despite the fact that last year WAVE sold a lot of Power Rangers releases, which it didn't do this year. "We're seeing a lot of very healthy sales of adult audiobooks, particularly Dean Koontz's 'Strange Highways' collection and 'Batman Forever.'"

Many smaller publishers are also doing very well. At B&B Audio, president Beth Baxter says, "I've already surpassed my goal for 1995, and there's still two months to go. It's definitely better than last year, and last year was great." B&B's big fall title is "Frank Sinatra: An American Legend," written and read by Nancy Sinatra. B&B is about to release Victoria Starr's "k.d. lang: All You Get Is Me."

Likewise, Brilliance Audio editorial VP Eileen Hutton says, "We've been going great guns. I've heard stories that audio in general is slow, but hasn't been for us." Brilliance is doing well with Leonard Nimoy's autobiography "I Am Spock" and has just signed a deal to produce Brett Butler's autobiography, "Knee Deep In Paradise," read by Butler. The company has just launched a children's horror line, called Strange Matter Audio.

But for others, the year was mixed until the fourth quarter. The APA reports that for the first quarter,

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## newsline...

**HARVEY ENTERTAINMENT**, producer of films and merchandiser and licensor of such cartoon characters as Casper the Friendly Ghost, says



it plans to develop a new core business: producing direct-to-video family movies featuring its licensed characters. The first live-action, feature-length film will be the sequel to "Richie Rich." Harvey has not disclosed the video distributor for the title. Besides Casper and Rich, Harvey's characters include Baby Huey and Little Audrey. Meanwhile, the Santa Monica, Calif.-based company reports a net profit of \$214,000 on sales of \$1.87 million in the third quarter, compared with a profit of \$457,000 on sales of \$2.03 million in the same period a year ago.

**LIVE ENTERTAINMENT** reports that third-quarter sales rose 18.4% to \$40 million because of stronger video rental releases compared to last year. The biggest title of the quarter was "Stargate." The company says that the net loss narrowed to \$1.59 million from \$6.62 million a year ago. In other news, LIVE Film & Mediaworks signed a first-look movie distribution deal with SCENT Film.

**ALL AMERICAN COMMUNICATIONS**, the producer and syndicator of TV's "Baywatch" and owner of Scotti Bros. Records, plans a 4.5 million-share public offering of stock in December at an estimated \$12 a share. The company is selling 4 million shares and investor Interpublic Group of Cos. is selling 500,000 shares. The company will use the proceeds to pay down revolving debt and make acquisitions. In the third quarter, net profit rose from \$1.1 million to \$5.6 million, while sales grew from \$38.1 million to \$85.1 million. All American says its record label "generated sales gains... as a result of an active roster of new artist releases." Scotti Bros. scored gold with an album and single by rapper Skee-Lo.

**HALLMARK HOME ENTERTAINMENT** has acquired the U.S. video distribution rights to five films from Arrow Releasing and a first-look option for all of Arrow's foreign-language films on video for two years. The first video release, under Evergreen Entertainment, is expected in February.



**RHINO RECORDS** plans to release what it calls the first soundtrack album for a CD-ROM interactive game, "Fox Hunt," published by Capcom Entertainment. The 12-track CD, which will be released Jan. 23, contains material by such acts as Violent Femmes, the Butthole Surfers, and Dick Dale & His Del-Tones, among others.

**TRIMARK HOLDINGS**, parent of Vidmark Entertainment home video company, reports a net profit of \$82,000 on revenues of \$16 million for the third quarter, compared with a profit of \$454,000 on revenues of \$22.1 million during the same period a year ago. Sales and profits declined because of lower domestic home video revenues, the company says. The company also notes higher expenses associated with Trimark Interactive, which shipped more than 120,000 units of CD-ROM game "The Hive" in the quarter.

**RECOTON**, the consumer electronics supplier to retail, says that global expansion helped fuel increases in sales and profits in the third quarter. Net profit rose to \$4.1 million on sales of \$55.7 million, compared with a profit of \$3.65 million on sales of \$46.1 million last year. The company has been developing a line of multimedia accessories.

**BARNES & NOBLE** reports that same-store sales for superstores, many of which sell music, increased 9.8% in the third quarter. Relocated stores were included in the same-store total. During the quarter, the company opened 35 superstores for an overall 322 and two mall stores for a total of 671. The company says that superstores now account for 70% of revenues, which were \$432 million in the quarter, up from \$359 million a year ago. Barnes & Noble reports that net loss edged up to \$3.5 million from \$3.3 million last year.



**CINERGI PICTURES ENTERTAINMENT**, a movie producer, says revenues more than doubled in the third quarter to \$51.5 million because of such strong releases as "Die Hard With A Vengeance" and "Judge Dredd" in international markets. But because "Dredd" and "The Scarlet Letter" did not perform well in domestic markets, the company took a big write-off and reports a net loss of \$9 million.



include HMV, Tower, Virgin Mega-stores, Blockbuster, J&R Music World, Spec's, Borders, and Hard Rock Cafe/West Coast, as well as a multitude of independent record stores nationwide.

The event features special in-stores by performers and celebrities on Saturday (2). Among those slated to staff cash registers in New York record stores are Faith Evans, members of Dinosaur Jr and Sponge, Kathy Mattea, Naomi Campbell, and Coolio. Los Angeles retail will have appearances by Traci Lords, Me'shell NdegéOcello, and "Weird Al" Yankovic. Artists will also be on hand at stores in Miami and Atlanta.

"This is the kind of thing we have found artists love to do," says Rosta. "There's no pressure to perform, and they get to talk with their fans. It's a lot of fun for them."

## EXECUTIVE TURNTABLE

**HOME VIDEO:** LIVE Home Video appoints **Tim McCreary** Southeast regional sales manager in Lexington, Ky., and **Marie Di Perna** Northeast regional sales manager in Tarrytown, N.Y. He was Southeast regional sales manager for Academy Entertainment. She handled sales and marketing for Troma Team Video.

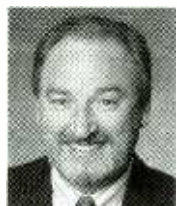
**Lelah Willoughby** was named president of the New England chapter of the Video Software Dealers Assn. She was a board member.

**ENTER\*ACTIVE:** Henry A. Kaplan is appointed president/COO of Philips Media Software in Los Angeles. He was founder and chairman of Hi Tech Entertainment.

**Frank LoVerme** is promoted to VP of sales, advanced media, for WEA Media Services in Burbank, Calif. He was executive director of CD-ROM sales for WEA Manufacturing.



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**RELATED FIELDS:** Barnes & Noble Inc. in New York promotes **Thomas A. Tolworthy** to president of Barnes & Noble Superstores and **Kristine Terrill** to president of B. Dalton Bookseller. They were, respectively, president and West Coast regional director of B. Dalton Bookseller.

Information for the Merchants & Marketing Executive Turntable should be sent to Terri Horak, Billboard, 1515 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10036. Photographs are welcome.