

## ARTS &amp; ENTERTAINMENT

## Who shot J.R.?

▪ 'Dallas' star Larry Hagman recounts career, helps kick off N.D. Museum of Art fundraiser

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"Charming" was a word seldom if ever used to describe television's villainous J.R. Ewing, the sneaky, rhymes with "dastard" Texas oilman who audiences loved to hate for 13 years on "Dallas."

Larry Hagman, on the other hand — the actor who played J.R. — had charm and wit to spare Saturday in Grand Forks as he helped friends Barton Benes and Laurel Reuter kick off \$2 million in fundraising for the North Dakota Museum of Art.

Nearly 200 people attended the evening event as Hagman shared photos, film clips and stories of his mother, Broadway musical star Mary Martin; of being so famous during the "Who shot J.R.?" cliffhanger that he drew a bigger crowd than Queen Elizabeth at the Ascot races in England; and of being reprimanded by Nancy Reagan for trying to steal a butter dish at a White House dinner.

The latter happened right about the time Mrs. Reagan was being castigated in the media for acquiring new and very expensive china. Hagman said he slipped his butter dish into his coat pocket while he was talking to Mrs. Reagan. She waited about five minutes for him to do the right thing, then gave him a stern warning:

"Larry Hagman, you put that right back right now."

Also at the event was Hagman's wife of 52 years, Maj, who was one of the first people to read the script for "Dallas" when Hagman was considering the role.

"Larry," Maj said, "this is it. There is not one redeeming good person in this."

Then there was the story about an opening night performance on Broadway with actor George C. Scott when Scott had four women pregnant at the same time, was served divorce papers and put his hand through a window hours before the show opened. And the time Hagman smart-alecked his famous mother with, "That's show biz!", when he got a cab and she didn't. A few hours later, Joel Grey introduced them both to an audience in Las Vegas where Hagman received respectable applause while his mother got a wild ovation. Afterwards, she turned to him and said: "That's show biz, too."

When asked at a Saturday morning news conference why he thought people would pay \$100 and \$500 to see him Saturday night, Hagman quipped: "Is that all?", which was enough to break up the dozen or so reporters and photographers there.

Benes, a New York artist who has exhibited several times at the North Dakota Museum of Art, and Reuter, executive director of NDMOA, also spoke at the news conference, and Hagman was quick to turn much of the attention to them.



Eric Hylden, staff photographer

▲ This is who shot J.R. on Saturday. Just for the fun of it, using cameras provided by the Herald, New York artist Barton Benes and North Dakota Museum of Art director Laurel Reuter got actor Larry Hagman to mug for them after a news conference in the museum. Hagman, famous as J.R. Ewing from the TV megahit "Dallas," was in town to kick off the \$2 million fund drive for the museum inspired by Benes' gift of his renown art collection.

Benes has a valuable collection of African and Egyptian art that he plans to leave to NDMOA. Then there's his own art, objects that he calls "celebrity relics" and "historical fossils," that he's collected, labeled and framed. Reuter recounted how Benes' legacy to the museum began as a casual conversation between the two of them in which Benes wondered aloud what would happen to all his things when he was gone.

"Oh, just give it to us," Reuter said. What they never considered, at least initially, Reuter said, was how much it would cost to dismantle the apartment, move it to North Dakota and house it at the Museum of Art.

Still, the opportunity to acquire all that marvelous art and a 21st century artist studio was a wonderful opportunity for North Dakota, Reuter said. For Benes, too, the idea of a gift to North Dakota just seemed right.

"I love it here," Benes said.

One of the reasons for his high regard was his 1993 exhibit, "Lethal Weapons," art work that included his own HIV-positive blood. The exhibit had been controversial elsewhere, including in Sweden, where all his work had to be taken to a hospital and heated to 160 degrees before it could be publicly exhibited.

"But in North Dakota, I had no trouble, and I never, ever got over that," Benes said Saturday.

Benes' "celebrity artifacts," etc., range from the amusing to the odd to the just plain weird: jelly beans from Ronald Reagan, a cookie baked by Katherine Hepburn, a dried-up frog, North Dakota wheat infected with vomitoxin, Laurel Reuter's hip bone (from when she had hip replacement surgery) and thousands and thousands of other, often tiny, objects.

He also made some of Hagman's gallstones into a ring. Hagman said proudly. The Reagan jelly beans were from a jar Hagman's mother from Reagan's office. At one time, Hagman said, Nancy Reagan has been his mother's protege, and the Reagans were family friends.

Hagman said he was happy to use his celebrity to help Benes and the North Dakota Museum of Art by present "An Evening with Larry Hagman" Saturday night at the museum for \$100 per person. (Art patrons who wanted to attend an earlier cocktail party, too, paid \$500.) Benes is hard-working and creative, and his work should be preserved, Hagman said.

"One thing I like about his stuff is you look at it and you always have a reaction," Hagman said. "To me, it's usually hilarious laughter, because it's so outrageous."

At the news conference, Hagman wore his "Dallas" trademark cowboy hat and a carefully trimmed beard, which is a new look for him. Hagman said the beard has kept him from being recognized in public, not that minds being recognized, he said. About the facial hair, he said: "I think I look like Gabby Hayes," the grizzled actor who played the sidekick in movies and TV shows featuring Roy Rogers, John Wayne and others.

Looking back on his career, Hagman said, he doesn't remember the setbacks, only the good things.

"I've had such a wonderful life and the luckiest life," he said. "I read the other day that luck is when opportunity meets preparation, and I think that's right."



Eric Hylden, staff photographer

▲ Larry Hagman (center) and friends, New York artist, Barton Benes (left) and North Dakota Museum of Art director Laurel Reuter.