6th Annual WITF Auction May 12 Through May 18

The annual WITF Auction, the largest and most unusual sales event in Central Pennsylvania, gets underway Sunday night May 12 at 6 p.m. for a week-long run on WITF-TV, Channel 33.

The colorful fund-raising extravaganza, which has become one of the most eagerly-awaited and fascinating local television events of each season, is an important source of income for this area's non-commercial, public broadcasting stations, WITF-TV and WITF-FM (89.5).

WITF-TV pre-empts its entire regular evening program schedule, some 60 hours of prime television time, for the Auction: Sunday, 6 p.m. to midnight; Monday through Friday, 5 p.m. to midnight; Saturday, 1 p.m. until the last item is sold (last year that was at 3:45 a.m. Sunday!).

The long hours have never seemed to pose a problem as far as audience is concerned. The Auction has uncommon holding power. In fact, the staff has identified at least three people who devote part of their vacation to Auction Week, either so they can watch until the end every night without having to worry about getting up for work, or so they can volunteer their services for the week.

Station officials hope to better 1973's record gross receipts of $113,000--10 percent of the WITF budget. For two-and-a-half months, more than 600 volunteers have been calling on business, industry and individuals in communities throughtout South Central Pennsylvania for contributions. By the time the Auction ends, more than 1500 items will have been sold--all new merchandise, services, artwork, crafts or antiques, most with a retail value of $50 or more.

Auction contributions are described on the air by well-known community leaders and personalities, and viewers bid by dialing a toll-free telephone number. At the end of a specified period of time for each item, the bidding is closed, and the caller with the highest bid "wins." While many items sell for far below retail value, and some go above, all high bidders realize an automatic six percent saving because Auction sales are exempt from State sales tax.

WITF is the sole recipient of the proceeds, which last year amounted to 76 percent of the total retail value.

The selection of items sold during the week is as varied as the business community itself, and every viewer is likely to find something of appeal. Home appliances, building materials, clothing, sporting equipment, lawn and garden supplies, furniture, carpeting, vacation trips, books, jewelry, an assortment of services; this is just a partial list.

Among the hundreds of things already received, however, are a number of high value or unusual items, including: a 1974 2-door Subaru sedan; a cruise for two to Bermuda; a hair transplant; a five-piece suite of office furniture; a complete home security system; and six footballs autographed by Penn State's Heisman Trophy winner John Cappelletti, his fellow All-American team captains, and coach Joe Paterno.

The complexity of producing the Auction is a story in itself. The marathon television show originates from the Hershey Community Theatre because it offers not only a stage large enough for the Auction studio, but the space needed to register and brief the 1,000 volunteers used during the week--and feed them--and to warehouse the Auction merchandise, which is sorted and stored by category on four floors or dressing rooms. The backstage elevator looks like one in a department store, with a directory of the various types of merchandise and their locations by floor!

Preparations in the Theatre begin a full week before the Auction goes on the air; they involve hundreds of man hours to construct the set; hang lights; install more than 50 telephone lines for incoming bids, outbound bid verifying calls, and internal communications; and to set up the elaborate system of audio and video electronics for the television show itself.

Also during setup week, merchandise is delivered by the truck-load from branch warehouses in Harrisburg, Lancaster and York. These locations, which have been accepting Auction items since April 1, are contributed by the Pennsylvania Army National Guard in Harrisburg, Keystone Moving and Storage Com-

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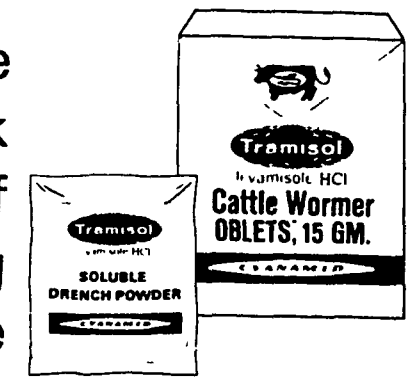

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