

Former porn actress leads fight against AIDS

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ANGELES — Sharon Mitchell has two very different accomplishments — a doctorate in human sexuality and a place in Hustler magazine's Hall of Fame.

As a porn star in the 1970s, she lived a "Boogie Nights"-style life of fame and excess. During her 25-year career, she made more than 1,000 movies with titles like "Jail Bait" and "Captain Lust and the Pirate Women."

Along the way, she got herpes, chlamydia and a 16-year heroin addiction. She was also raped and beaten by a deranged fan in 1996, leading her to finally leave the industry.

She returned two years later in a much different role.

Through the nonprofit Adult Industry Medical Healthcare Foundation that she co-founded in 1998, Mitchell provides testing for

sexually transmitted diseases along with drug and psychological counseling for porn performers.

"She is basically the Mother Teresa of porn," actor and producer Dave Pounder said.

It was the foundation's testing that determined last week that actors Darren James and Lara Roxx were infected with HIV, leading to the voluntary quarantine of 53 people and a voluntary moratorium that Mitchell estimates has halted 80 percent of porn movie production until further testing

gives the all-clear.

While she has her critics, many in the multibillion-dollar industry credit her with getting the notoriously rebellious industry to look seriously at the occupational hazard of AIDS.

"She's trying so hard to keep this ragtag bunch of hooligans together in this industry," said Suze Randall, a friend and adult film producer. "We're all rule-breakers and free spirits, and Sharon's got her work cut out keeping us all alive."

Mitchell, 46, said she is the only one providing compre-

hensive help to the industry, which is centered in Los Angeles' San Fernando Valley.

"It's a nightmare of a job," she said. "When there's an HIV outbreak they either praise us or curse us because they've got to be put on quarantine."

She hears constant complaints about the \$110 cost of the tests that many produc-

ers require once a month and most actors must pay for themselves. But that doesn't stop her from laying out the dangers.

"We let them know that HIV is an occupational hazard ... not just a risk or a remote possibility," Mitchell said. "Nobody seems to hear it. Everybody is so into making money."

File-sharing lawsuits have mixed effect

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — Driven largely by fears of copyright lawsuits, more than 17 million Americans, or 14 percent of adult Internet users, have stopped downloading music over the Internet, a survey finds.

But the overall percentage of people who say they currently do so has inched back up since November, the Pew Internet and American Life Project said in a study Sunday.

A third of the former downloaders—nearly 6 million—say they stopped because of the highly publicized lawsuits filed by the recording industry since last summer against more than 1,000 users.

Many of the lawsuits have led to settlements of thousands of dollars each. Legally, recording labels can demand \$150,000 per song for copyright infringement.

Men and users ages 18-29 were the ones most likely to stop, the survey finds.

The study does not distinguish between music downloaded illegally and songs bought through authorized sites such as iTunes. Seventeen percent of the current downloaders did say they are using paid services, though not necessarily as their exclusive source of online music.

Among those who have never downloaded music, three in five users—women more likely than men—say the lawsuits are enough to persuade them never to do so.

Even many of those still downloading music—38 percent—say they are doing so less frequently because of the lawsuits.

Nonetheless, the random telephone-based study conducted in February finds that 18 percent of Internet users say they now download music over the Internet, an increase from 14 percent in a pre-Christmas survey.

And the percentage of Internet users who say they share their music, video and other files with others over the Internet increased to 23 percent in February, from 20 percent in the Nov. 18-Dec. 14 survey.

Still both sets of numbers reflect decreases from last spring. The February study of 1,371 Internet users has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3 percentage points.

On the Net:

<http://www.pewinternet.org>

Alabama woman pushes for death penalty moratorium

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

OPELIKA, Ala. — In the heart of one of the South's capitals of capital punishment, 70-year-old Esther Brown and her supporters are on a quest to persuade local governments to call for a moratorium on the death penalty.

It's been going well, thanks in part to her strategy of approaching predominantly poor, black communities she believes would want to send a message about the disproportionate numbers of minorities on Alabama's death row.

Already, 24 cities and counties have gotten on board, the largest number of any such effort in the nation.

Mostly white Lee County was another story.

As Brown stood before the six county commissioners, she could see them shift in their seats and glance at their watches.

"I know you feel that I'm asking for a lot ... but I'm not asking you to be a trailblazer," she told the commission.

In the end, she couldn't even get them to take a vote.

Brown, who as a child in Nazi Germany saw the persecution of Jews and minorities, was not discouraged.

Her successes have come in demonstrating how questioning the death penalty resonates in small towns and rural counties with mostly black and economically struggling populations.

"On the whole, I do look at racial makeup," she said. "It's not that I haven't gone before a predominantly white (council or commission). But my time is limited. I need to use my energy to the best advantage."

She contends a moratorium would allow time for an independent, two-year study on Alabama's death penalty sys-

tem. Such a study, she says, would reinforce the notion of a disproportionate number of black inmates on death row, especially those who can't afford a strong defense.

"They are singling out certain groups — minorities, the poor, the psychotics, the mentally retarded — and we kill them," she says.

Though blacks make up 26 percent of the state population, 46 percent of Alabama's more than 190 death row inmates are black. Since 1976, when the U.S. Supreme Court allowed states to reinstate the death penalty, Alabama has executed 28 inmates; more than half of those were black.

Brown, executive secretary for Project Hope to Abolish the Death Penalty, and her supporters have so far approached 28 cities, succeeding in 24 — the most of any state in the nation. North Carolina is second, with 21 city and county governments signed on, according to Equal Justice USA, an anti-death penalty group.

Illinois and Maryland are the only states that have imposed statewide moratoriums, but Maryland's was rescinded shortly after Republican Gov. Robert Ehrlich took office in November.

Getting local governments to join support is no easy task, especially in Alabama—where conservative views on capital punishment dominate the Legislature.

Brown said the response of the Lee County Commission proves her point. The county is more than 77 percent white and five of the six commissioners are white.

Commissioner Sam Pierce, who is white, said it's not the job of local governments to vote on state-level issues.

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