

# Knight Considering Dropping Out Of New Show

By ELIZABETH STEWART  
Staff Writer

More than bad television ratings will knock Ted Knight down, the versatile actor said in Charlotte Wednesday.

Angry at latest Nielsen ratings of "Ted Knight Show," in which he portrays Roger Dennis and operates an escort service, Knight was interviewed by area reporters at a press conference and luncheon at WBT Studios in Charlotte. He had stopped over in Charlotte enroute from Atlanta, Ga. to Washington, D. C.

Knight, whose big break came in 1971 when he won the role of anchorman Ted Baxter on "The Mary Tyler Moore Show," said he is seriously considering dropping out of his new show, which he thinks is good and shows talented writing and acting despite unkind reviews.

He blamed "network irresponsibility" which, he said, "has to go along" with the Nielsen barometer of programming, and charged that high ratings are controlled by "12-year-old knob twirlers." He also said that it's difficult to establish a viewing pattern after one show, that a show requires a full season to win public acceptance. (WBTV premiered "Ted Knight Show" Saturday).

Knight cited public disenchantment for television as the reason for the "slippage" in overall viewing and declared that

a more honest approach, rather than what he termed "cheap shot" programming is badly needed in the industry.

To a question, Knight said that Mary Tyler Moore show opened many doors for him.

He shot to stardom seven years ago with his portrayal of the bumbling, egotistical newscaster, basing the character on his years of actual experience and observation in the field. He won Emmy awards in both 1973 and

1976 and best supporting actor in a comedy role and in 1975 was voted Television Father of the Year by the National Father's Day Committee. In 1976 he starred on the Network in his own special.

Born in Terryville, Conn. of Polish-American heritage, Ted's real name is Tadeusz Wladyslaw Knopka. He went from high school into World War II, where he served with the First Army Group combat engineers. He won five Bronze Stars during his military service and was with the first American troops to enter Berlin. After the war he decided to pursue a childhood ambition to be an entertainer. He enrolled at the Randall School of Dramatic Arts in Hartford, Conn. and later at the American Theatre Wing in New York.

He appeared in student productions of "Lillian," "Grand Hotel," "Antigone" and "Time of Your Life" and worked in radio and television on such shows as "Big Town," "Suspense" and "Lux Video Theatre." He also worked at radio stations in North Carolina, Rhode Island, and New York in a wide variety of jobs, including disc jockeys, announcer, kiddie show host, newsmen and singer.

In 1967 he moved to Los Angeles and became one of Hollywood's busiest actors, appearing in more than 300 television and radio roles and doing

hundreds of commercials.

He has continued his interest in stage work with a recent appearance on Broadway in "Some of My Best Friends" and leading roles at the Player's Ring, Omnibus Theatre and Pasadena Playhouse in the Los Angeles area and the Sombbrero Playhouse in Phenix. He has also done a standup comedy act in Las Vegas.

Ted Knight recalled how Mary Tyler Moore Show required nine months of casting before it aired on television and how it also had a "rocky start," before plummeting into stardom. He also recalled that a co-actor Ed Asner went on to star in his own show, "Lou Grant," the same character he portrayed on the Mary Tyler Moore Show. "Ed's a marvelous actor," said Ted, "and his show had a rocky beginning also."

How much of Ted Baxter is in Ted Knight's portrayal of Roger Dennis? "A lot," said Knight, who said he is cast in the frustrated role in the new show but unlike his old role, can now display intelligent reactions.

"The Ted Knight Show" is not a spin-off of "Busting Loose," said Knight. It is not a show that crusades or espouses causes but is light entertainment with no "cheap shot, below belt," humor. He quickly adds writers have written "very Victorian" scripts in impenetrable taste with "no hanky-panky at all with clientele of the escort service." "The 'frustrated' Mr. Dennis provides any and all kinds of escort service, from that of a tourist guide to a companion for a party.

The show is filmed before live audiences and Knight said that all laughter has been genuine and spontaneous for all six shows that have been

filmed.

"The people enjoy it. What else can you ask of a show, he asked.

Ted Baxter sees the need for some female writers since the escort service employs only females. Gloria de Haven plays his ex-wife in the show.

What was the magic of the Mary Tyler Moore Show? Knight said Miss Moore's husband, Grant Tinker, with the assistance of executive producers,

James Brooks and Allen Burns, put the show together in nine months. Miss Moore was gun-shy, at first, said Knight, because of some past disappointments.

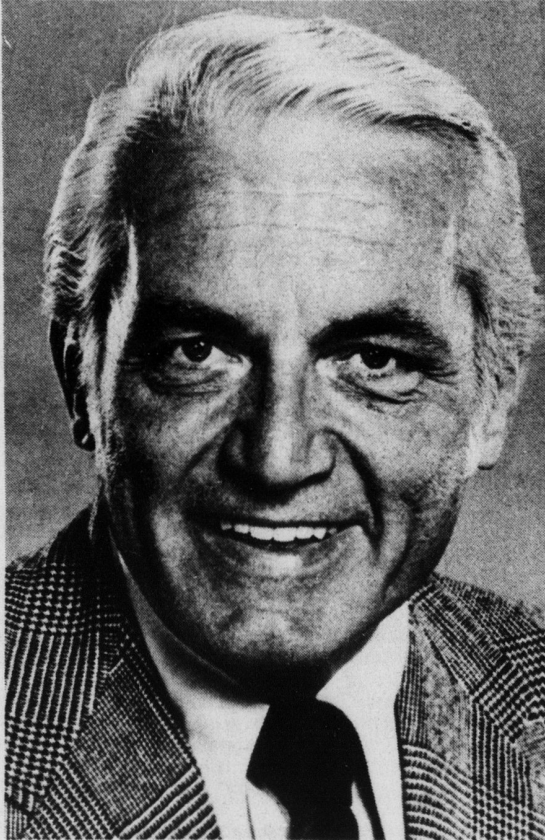
Knight said he had the highest regard for Miss Moore, Mr. Tinker and the entire cast.

"Best shows on television now," he quipped, "are re-runs of the Mary Tyler Moore Show."

The versatile Knight is a skilled ventriloquist and puppeteer. He also enjoys swimming, boating, cycling and mountain climbing.

If he steps down from his show, where does he go from here? Perhaps to nightclub development, summer stock, movies.

He and his wife, Dorothy, live in Pacific Palisades, Calif. They have three children. Ted, Jr., 23; Elyse, 17; and Eric, 14.



ENTERTAINER — Ted Knight, versatile star of "The Ted Knight Show," was in Charlotte last week for interviews by press and television at WBTV which premiered his show on a recent Saturday night.

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Cost is \$3 and the young people are advertising the promotion as "cars washed inside and out and with each car washed you obtain a free coupon from Hardee's."

All proceeds will help purchase the Fulton property adjoining the church.

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