

## VARIETY GOLD HEARTS AWARD / CLARK WOODS & JIM MURRAY

# Children's org pins new honor on duo

By THOMAS J. MCLEAN

**F**ew charities depend on volunteers with hearts of gold as much as Variety Intl.

The children's charity — which is unrelated to the Variety publications — will honor Paramount exec VP general sales manager Clark Woods and National Amusements VP of operations Jim Murray with the inaugural Variety Gold Hearts Award on Tuesday for their roles in the group's signature Gold Hearts fund-raiser.

The Gold Hearts project began in 1991 in the U.K., when a local tent began selling heart-shaped pins for a small fee to raise money to benefit the hospital made famous by "Peter Pan" author J.M. Barrie. The project came to the U.S. and became an annual event, with a newly designed pin being sold each year in theaters in a campaign that ends on Valentine's Day.

The program sells \$2 gold pins in the shape of a heart at theaters around

the country and has raised \$91 million to become

the charity's largest and most-successful fund-raiser. Last year, the program sold 2 million hearts in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, France, Israel, Barbados and Australia, says Woods.

Woods is on the studio side of the effort. Brought in during the early 1990s as part of an effort to revive the foundering local tent, Woods attached himself to the Gold Pin project right away and decided first to involve Paramount, which ran the program the first two years, then passed it on to other studios.

A lot of credit for the program's growth belongs to the studios, says Woods. For example, once Disney lent an image of Mickey Mouse's hand to the pin under its stewardship of the program, other studios followed suit. The result has been pins with designs from "Shrek" and "ET: The Extra-Terrestrial" and this year's pin will feature a "Spider-Man 2" theme.

"We've now partnered closely with very current, hot

projects, and that has allowed it to grow even more," Woods says.

Woods also is proud of expanding the program around the world, which began when a group from Australia expressed interest in the program but had no money to buy pins or experience in running the program. A deal was worked out to supply the Australians with leftover pins from the U.S. and the result was more than \$250,000 raised for children in Australia. That model has been expanded to create programs in other countries.

"It cost them no money to do this and suddenly they were part of our greater family. Now they do it every year," Woods says.

"The efforts in Australia make me especially happy because it's something that we never really envisioned we could do."

Murray represents the exhibitor side of the equation and has paid special attention to the program at National Amusements, a Massachusetts-based chain with more

than 1,400 screens in 13 states and six nations.

Sales figures are checked daily and "if somebody's selling 100 or 200 hearts and somebody else sold 10, I want to know why," says Murray.

The result has been that National has sold more than 2 million pins since the program started — more than any other exhib.

Murray started working in the exhibition business as an usher at age 14. He joined National in 1973 and has worked with various industry orgs, including NATO and the Theater Owners of New England.

Variety Intl. began in 1927 as a social club for 11 men who worked in various aspects of show business in Pittsburgh. On Christmas Eve 1928, a 1-month-old girl was found abandoned in the Sheridan Theater, whose owner was a member of the club. The club adopted the girl — named her Catherine Variety Sheridan — and raised funds to care for her and find her a home.

They were so successful, they continued their work and expanded the club to 10,000 members and 54 chapters — called tents after the club's original ties to the circus business — in 14 countries.



WOODS



MURRAY



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