



# John H. Mitchell Gift Bolsters Business of Cinematic Arts Program

**In** his heyday as president of Columbia Pictures' television division from 1968 to 1977, the late John H. Mitchell produced TV classics *The Flintstones*, *Bewitched* and Emmy-winning TV movie *Brian's Song* along with more than 150 other shows. **Intent on extending his legacy to future generations of hit-makers, the Patricia W. Mitchell Trusts—named after the executive's late wife—has endowed USC School of Cinematic Arts with \$20 million earmarked for entertainment business studies.**

Story by Hugh Hart



Photo by Roberto A. Gómez





Supervised by USC alum Bill Allen '79, these monies establish The John H. Mitchell Endowment Fund for the Business of Entertainment; The John H. Mitchell Endowed Chair in the Business of Entertainment; and The Patricia W. & John H. Mitchell Endowed Fund for Student Support, whose scholarship recipients will be designated as Mitchell Scholars.

Dean Elizabeth M. Daley expects the gift to play a critical role in strengthening both Business Cinematic Arts programs, the Graduate Certificate in the Business of Entertainment, launched 24 years ago, and the Business of Cinematic Arts undergraduate degree program (BCA) launched 20 years ago, both in partnership with Marshall School of Business. “Entertainment is an art form but it’s also a big business,” says Daley. “We’re one of the few schools that truly respect that fact, which is why we work so closely with our business school. This gift enables us to expand the program’s impact because we’ll have more support for faculty, visiting lecturers, talent week, internship programs. For everything, really.”

Daley and Senior Associate Dean Marlene Loadvine put together proposals tailored to the Mitchell Trusts’ interests after being contacted by Allen, who previously served as president of the USC Alumni Association and now runs Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation. Allen knew Patricia because she and John H. Mitchell, who died in 1988, had been close friends with his father Steve Allen, creator of The Tonight Show, his mother Jane Meadows, and his aunt Audrey Meadows, famous for playing Alice Kramden in The Honeymooners. “In the early 2000s when I got involved in administering the estates for my father and Aunt Audrey, Pat asked me to be the trustee for the Mitchell estate,” Allen recalls. “I told Pat if she wanted the Trust to develop well-rounded, ethically based leaders and encourage diversity in the film and television industry, she should look at USC because it’s the number one film school in the nation.”

Patricia Mitchell died in 2016. This June, USC, UCLA and Mr. Mitchell’s alma mater, the University of Michigan, were officially named as recipients of Mitchell Trust endowments. Allen explains, “Pat’s lawyer constructed a document that enabled me to give the proceeds from the trust to one or more universities, and each school came forward with very creative proposals.”

Like John H. Mitchell, who served as president of the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences before his death in 1988, Allen champions the symbiotic connection between business acumen and creative ingenuity. He remembers pushing film school leadership to include business courses when he first arrived at USC in 1975. “As an 18-year-old freshman, I was thrilled to enroll at the legendary USC School of Cinema, but there were no entertainment business courses in accounting, marketing, finance, or distribution. I set up a meeting with the co-chairs, E. Russell McGregor and Mort Zarcoff, and asked them, ‘Why aren’t there any business courses in the film school? It is called show business.’ They told me the business school had sole provenance over those classes.”

Prohibited from pursuing a double-major, Allen took business courses every summer and ultimately augmented his BA degree in Cinema Television Production with a minor in business. Upon graduation, he went to work at CBS, rising through the ranks to direct comedy development at the network. Allen then joined forces with Mary Tyler Moore and Grant Tinker to become president of MTM during its reign as one of Hollywood’s hottest TV production companies. “Because I had both the business and the creative training at USC, it



enabled me to serve as a sort of diplomat and translator between creative and business folks,” Allen says. “USC plays a unique role in this type of training because the Business of Cinematic Arts programs bring these disciplines together.”

Both the graduate and undergraduate programs will be run by Bonnie Chi, the John H. Mitchell Endowed Chair in the Business of Entertainment, who also oversees the School’s Industry Relations Office. The newly fortified BCA undergraduate program, a magnet for aspiring agents, managers and studio executives, annually offers 55 Marshall School of Business freshmen a sequence of nine courses leading to a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration with an emphasis in Cinematic Arts. At the graduate level, students at SCA, Marshall, Gould School of Law, and Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism can take courses within the Graduate Certificate Program en route to earning the John H. Mitchell Graduate Certificate in the Business of Entertainment.

## An Appetite for Ethics

The Mitchell monies enable Chi and her BCA team to address a topic that Allen describes as a key priority: business ethics. “That issue really resonated for Pat as well as for John, and certainly for myself,” he says. “Grounding people in a framework of mores and values is a big component of the Mitchell gift. So often these days, we hear about people in the industry who have not acted ethically. When scandals break, people lose their jobs because of breaches in behavior. Through this gift, we want to train people to make better decisions and not harm otherwise creative, successful careers.”

Business ethics will soon become an integral part of the BCA curriculum, according to Chi. “We will be creating a class or a seminar taught by executives who demonstrate a high level of business ethics,” she says. “It’s important to instill our students with core values by learning from executives who have achieved success the right away. The #metoo movement broke everything wide open about the importance of how people in this business conduct themselves. Training in work ethics is now going to be built into the curriculum.”

Chi also plans to use Mitchell funding to expand SCA’s long-standing engagement with industry professionals through guest lectures, internship programs, and special events. She points out that high-level executives within entertainment teach for both the graduate certificate program and the undergraduate BCA program, bringing a real time working knowledge into the classroom. Alan Berger, senior agent at Creative Artists Agency, conducts his night-time graduate course out of CAA’s Century City headquarters, where Henry Winkler, former Disney-ABC TV Group President Ben Sherwood, and NBCUniversal Vice Chairman Ron Meyer have given talks. Anne Globe, Chief Marketing Officer for Skydance Media, teaches the Producing and Marketing Feature Length Films class for the undergraduate BCA program, where guest speakers have included Paramount Pictures Executive Vice President David Waldman and Bad Moms producer Suzanne Todd. Also within the BCA curriculum is Television: Integrating Creative and Business Objectives, taught by producer Scott A. Stone, which has hosted top level executives in television including Showtime Senior Vice President of Programming, Randy Runkle, SCA ’89, and William Morris Endeavor partner and agent Nancy Josephson. Further exemplifying SCA’s learn-by-doing approach, Stone last year arranged for students to view



(Opposite Page) Philanthropist Patricia W. Mitchell bequeathed funds to support entertainment business programs at USC, UCLA and the University of Michigan in honor of her husband, television pioneer John H. Mitchell. (TOP) SCA alumnus Bill Allen, trustee of the Patricia W. Mitchell Trusts. (ABOVE) Bonnie Chi, is the inaugural holder of the John H. Mitchell Endowed Chair in the Business of Entertainment

actual TV pilots written, directed and produced by students at the film school. Splitting his class into groups and acting as content buyers for various networks/program services, BCA students were asked to watch the SCA pilots through the lens of their particular program service, then decide how the projects fit their exhibition and financial strategy.

BCA success stories include sports technology entrepreneur Kai Sato ’07. “The beauty of this program is that you have these business kids, like I was, earning this unique degree by taking classes from industry executives,” says Sato, who runs Kaizen Reserve, Inc. and chairs the BCA Network comprising past and present participants. “You learn so much in this program about crafting a narrative and thinking about who your audience is.”

Sato cites lessons learned through his United Talent Agency internship and Wednesday night classes conducted by William Morris Agency’s

then-president Dave Wirschafter as being especially useful in his entrepreneurial career. “In film or television, you’re investing a lot of money, which is very similar to venture capital,” he says. “That’s why it’s critical to drill down into what your ultimate story or tease is going to be so you can figure out how to execute it. Being involved now in a media business that generates a lot of content, the things I learned from the BCA program are extremely useful.”

Johanna Byer ’09, Senior Vice President of Film and Television for Gaumont Film Company, credits BCA for landing her the internship with Brillstein Entertainment Partners that directly led to a job at the venerable talent management firm even before she graduated. “The program does a wonderful job of preparing you to at least have a fighting chance at making it in Hollywood,” says Byer. Hired by Gaumont in 2017 to launch the French company’s U.S. operations, she notes, “A lot of schools concentrate on the theory of film, but USC and the Business of Cinematic Arts teaches you what to do on a day to day basis. In this industry, every day you’re selling a movie, or selling a star or selling a director. But the most important thing is knowing how to sell yourself, and that’s what the BCA program taught me.”

## A Diverse Talent Pool of Mitchell Scholars

The \$10 million “Mitchell Scholars” endowment, funded by \$5 million in Mitchell Trust dollars and \$5 million in matching funds from USC sources, will expand ongoing efforts to support talented students from diverse backgrounds. As Dean Daley observes, “These are not cheap educations, and right now 70 to 80 percent of our students need financial aid. We want to make sure qualified people who don’t come from rich families have the opportunity to study here if they’re interested in the business of entertainment.”

Trustee Allen hopes the scholarship program attracts student from a wide variety of backgrounds. He says, “Diversity was really important to John, which I discovered when I went through his archives and came across memos he wrote to other TV executives urging them to hire more women and people of color. And quite frankly, when I went to USC in the seventies, most of my classmates were white males. Even then, it struck me that we needed to do a better job of diversifying the industry so, at CBS I helped manage the network’s minority writers program. When I shared that experience with Pat, she agreed that this gift should help students who wouldn’t normally find pathways into the industry. Especially now that television and movies have become a truly global industry, we want to create opportunities for people from different cultures to create and distribute content throughout the world. These diverse voices are only going to enhance the industry’s economic fortunes and improve the creative product itself.”

With the initial Mitchell gift scheduled to take full effect next year, Allen notes that more money will become available in the form of matching funds aligned with like-minded donors. He says, “I still have \$20 million left and I believe many leaders in this industry are looking to further the ethical, multi-disciplinary training of a more diverse candidate pool. For the next round, I openly invite those leaders to avail themselves of matching dollars from the Mitchell Trusts. If potential donors ask me, under certain scenarios, ‘Do you want to advance our mutual interests?’ -- the answer is ‘Yes!’”