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TOLL ON
TEENS

Shooting Stars Winner
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by Vivien Santana Hughes



Margaret Loesch heads The Hub network – a Hasbro/Discovery joint venture featuring familiar brands like *My Little Pony* and *Transformers* coupled with new programs like *Animal Mechanicals*.

Margaret Loesch: Heart of The Hub

I dare you not to smile when you're greeted by a 7-foot-tall Mr. Potato Head at The Hub's Burbank headquarters. The infamous spud couple even grace the restroom doors at the new network. "Someone just put Mr.'s mustache on Mrs. Potato Head," shares CEO Margaret Loesch, laughing at the playful streak that's a must for a team who's just launched a new children's cable and satellite network available to 60+ million homes. A joint venture between Discovery Communications and Hasbro Inc. (maker of said spud), The Hub debuted on 10-10-10, replacing Discovery Kids.

At the helm is industry veteran Loesch, whose resume reads like a Hollywood A-list party dreamt up by Brangelina's brood: Smurfs, Power Rangers, Muppet Babies, Transformers, Animaniacs, Richie Rich, G.I. Joe, Bear (of the Big Blue House fame), Spider-Man and various Superfriends. That's who you know when you've run Fox Kids Network, Marvel Productions and the Jim Henson Group.

A Southern girl who didn't know anything about the television industry, Loesch landed at ABC in 1971 as a clerk typist and moved up quickly. "I've always felt a little bit on the outside because I wasn't raised in this business, a little bit of an underdog," says Loesch, "but I've relished that because it keeps me connected to normal people!"

With a growing, prime-time audience of less than 200,000, The Hub is still small potatoes to established brands like Nickelodeon and Disney, whose viewership tops 1 and 2 million. "I have great admiration for what the competition is doing," says Loesch, mother of a 22-year-old son. "We can't be them, and we're not trying to copy them. We just want to be another choice."

You're five months in. What, if anything, has surprised you?

As a parent, I felt there was an opportunity for us to do something a little different:

Position this network as something that is always appropriate for kids, but that we grow throughout the day so, in the evenings, it's designed for the whole family to watch *together*. No kids' channel has started out with that aspiration.

Which shows are the highest rated?

Family Game Night. It's not a brand or a product. It was a promotion Hasbro did with Walmart, providing games for families to play after the stores closed. We turned it into a show. Now our operators are overwhelmed with families wanting to be on! And there's also *My Little Pony*, *Strawberry Shortcake*, *Pound Puppies* and a new series by R.L. Stine, *The Haunting Hour*. We're still the little guys and have a long way to go, but we're trending very nicely in the right direction.

Before the launch, there were some activists griping about a toy company running a children's TV network ...

I'm not sure what they were anticipating! We kept saying, 'We love our Hasbro brands and, yes, they're going to be on our channel, but not alone. We're going to have all kinds of brands and all kinds of programs, so please wait and see what we do.' Since our launch, I don't think we've received any criticism.

Being a TV exec, did you let your son watch all the TV he wanted?

The word is "moderation." I remember my mom coming in and turning off the TV in the middle of a show. I said I'd never do that to my child. Wrong! You just have to have some rules. But don't ever cut it off in the *middle* of a show ... wait until the end!

See videos, play games and, later this month, find out about the new fall shows at www.hubworld.com. F

Chat Room columnist Vivien Santana Hughes is a former *L.A. Parent* editor and the mother of three – two sons in college and (surprise!) a 5-year-old daughter. She never gave up her Saturday morning cartoons.

