

NEWS LATEST NEWS NEWS



Orbach

"Law & Order": Over 1 Billion Served

by Joal Ryan

May 12, 2004, 5:45 PM PT

One day, we'll all work for McDonald's. Until then, we'll have to make do with [Law & Order](#).

NBC marked its first day as the newly vast NBC Universal Wednesday by ensuring that the already vast *Law & Order* franchise will keep cranking out the fries on its network

through 2008.

The Peacock issued two-year pickups to *Law & Order*, [Law & Order: Special Victims Unit](#) and [Law & Order: Criminal Intent](#).

advertisement

Additionally, it formally announced the fourth *Law & Order* series, *Law & Order: Trial by Jury*, to bow in the fall.

"I've been on the air at NBC continuously for the past 20 years and this new deal means that I could be as lucky for the next 20," franchise founder [Dick Wolf](#), who worked as a writer on the network's *Hill Street Blues* and as a producer on *Miami Vice* in the 1980s, said in a statement.

Wolf launched his own golden-arches empire with the premiere of original-recipe *Law & Order* in 1990.

Come the 2004-05 season, nearly 20 percent of NBC's prime-time lineup will be devoted to hand-held shots of New York actors trying to crack the cases that *just turn their stomachs*.

Add to that tally the *Law & Order* reruns that air on seemingly endless loops on cable networks TNT and USA, and TV historian Tim Brooks said the "beginning of the end of the franchise" may be at hand.

"You certainly have a great deal of *Law & Order* to choose from. It's a recipe for decline," said Brooks, coauthor of *The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network TV Shows: 1946-Present*.

It also doesn't help, Brooks said, that CBS has proved equally adept at cloning its own crime franchise. Contemplating a fall lineup with four *Law & Orders* on NBC and three *CSIs* on CBS ([CSI](#), [CSI: Miami](#), [CSI: New York](#)), Brooks said: "You can certainly have one a night, but when you have two a night..."

tonight on

101 Best Kept Secrets: What stars *don't* want you to know; new, 10 p.m.



TODAY'S NEWS

FIRST LOOK: [The News in Brief](#)

[Ronald Reagan Is Dead](#)

[J.Lo & Marc Anthony: They Do!](#)

["Harry Potter" Truly Wizard](#)

FRESH FEATURES

Fashion Police: Oh, baby! Kate Hudson shows the world she's back in fighting form

Answer B!tch: Why can't big-buck stars get buck naked for their own sex scenes?

The Awful Truth: Halle rocks, Paris sticks by Nick, Olivier dines like a diva

Heatwave: How does Harry walk through walls? Potter's magic secrets are revealed!

Renewed through June 2008, *Law & Order* is now ensured of a 15th and 16th season, which will move it past the likes of *Knots Landing* (1979-93) on the list of TV's all-time longest-running network dramas and comedies. It'll have to last into the next decade to catch prime-time's ultimate marathon runner: *Gunsmoke* (1955-75). It'll also have to take out Fox's still going [The Simpsons](#), which has one year seniority.

Law & Order: SVU, meanwhile, is locked in through season seven; *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*, through season five. *Law & Order: Trial by Jury* apparently will have to get some ratings before NBC renews it through the 22nd century.

Attracting ratings hasn't proved too difficult for the existing *Law & Orders*. All three are among this season's 25 most watched shows. *Law & Order* remains the standard-bearer, averaging 15.9 million viewers. *Law & Order: Criminal Intent*, aka the one with [Vincent D'Onofrio](#), is booking 13.3 million; *Law & Order: SVU*, aka the one with [Mariska Hargitay](#), is drawing 12.6 million.

While Wolf's series have prided themselves on staying fresh and budget-conscious with revolving-door casts, Brooks warned that this month's [departure](#) of [Jerry Orbach](#) after 12 *Law & Order* seasons was a "major, major change" from which the drama may not recover.

Orbach is expected to pop up on *Law & Order: Trial by Jury*, although no cast has been announced.

We hear the Hamburglar does a great heavy...

[*! message board](#)

[print this story](#)

Related Links

- [News: Orbach leaves *Law* beat](#)
- [News: Mariska's *Law* love match](#)
- [News: Waterston reups for more *Law*](#)

[all news stories](#) 

• [help](#) • [about E! Online](#) • [site map](#) • [membership](#) • [newsletter](#)

Use of this site signifies your acceptance of the [Privacy Policy](#) and

[Terms of Use](#). Copyright © 2004 E! Entertainment Television, Inc. All rights reserved.