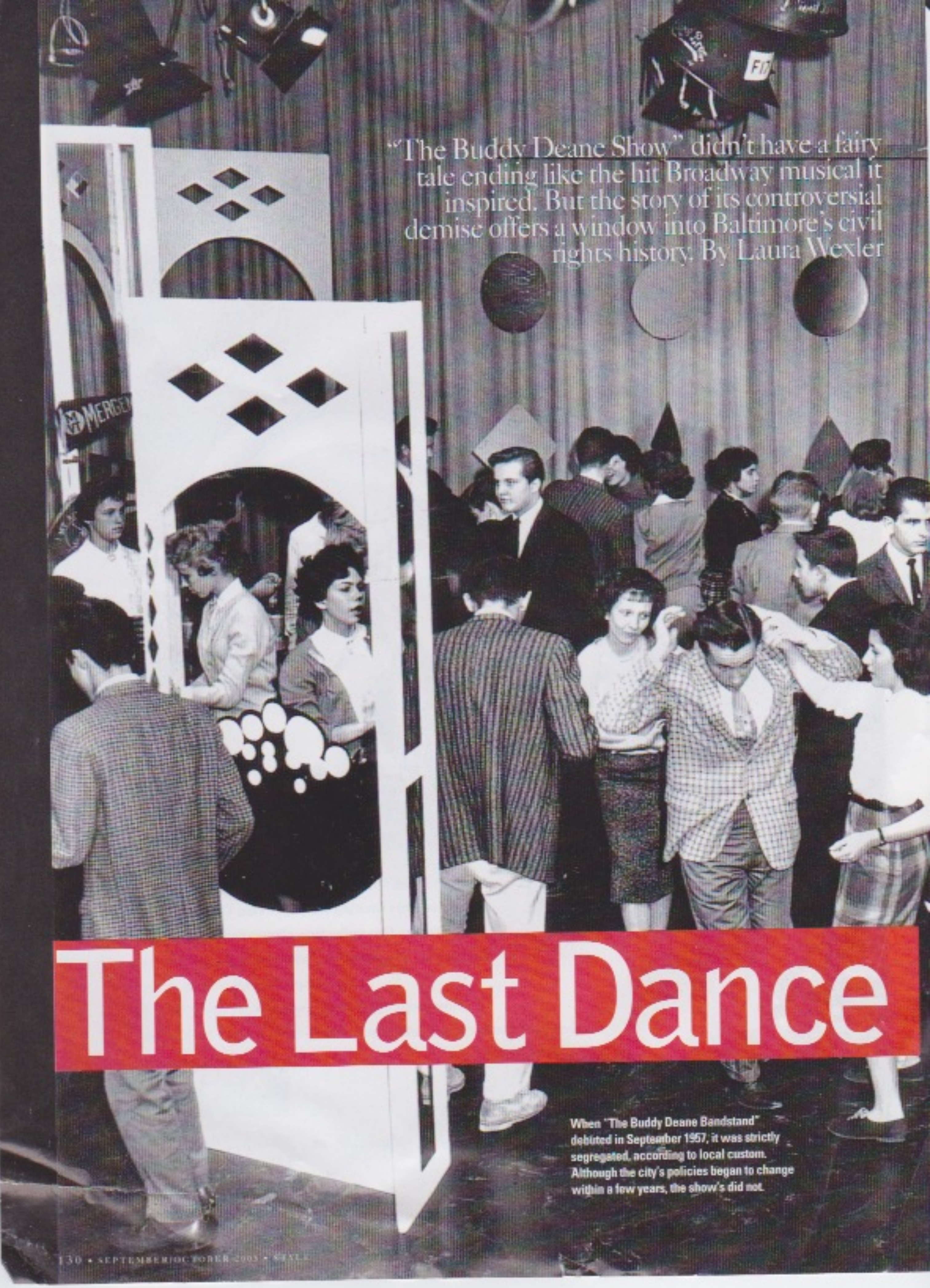
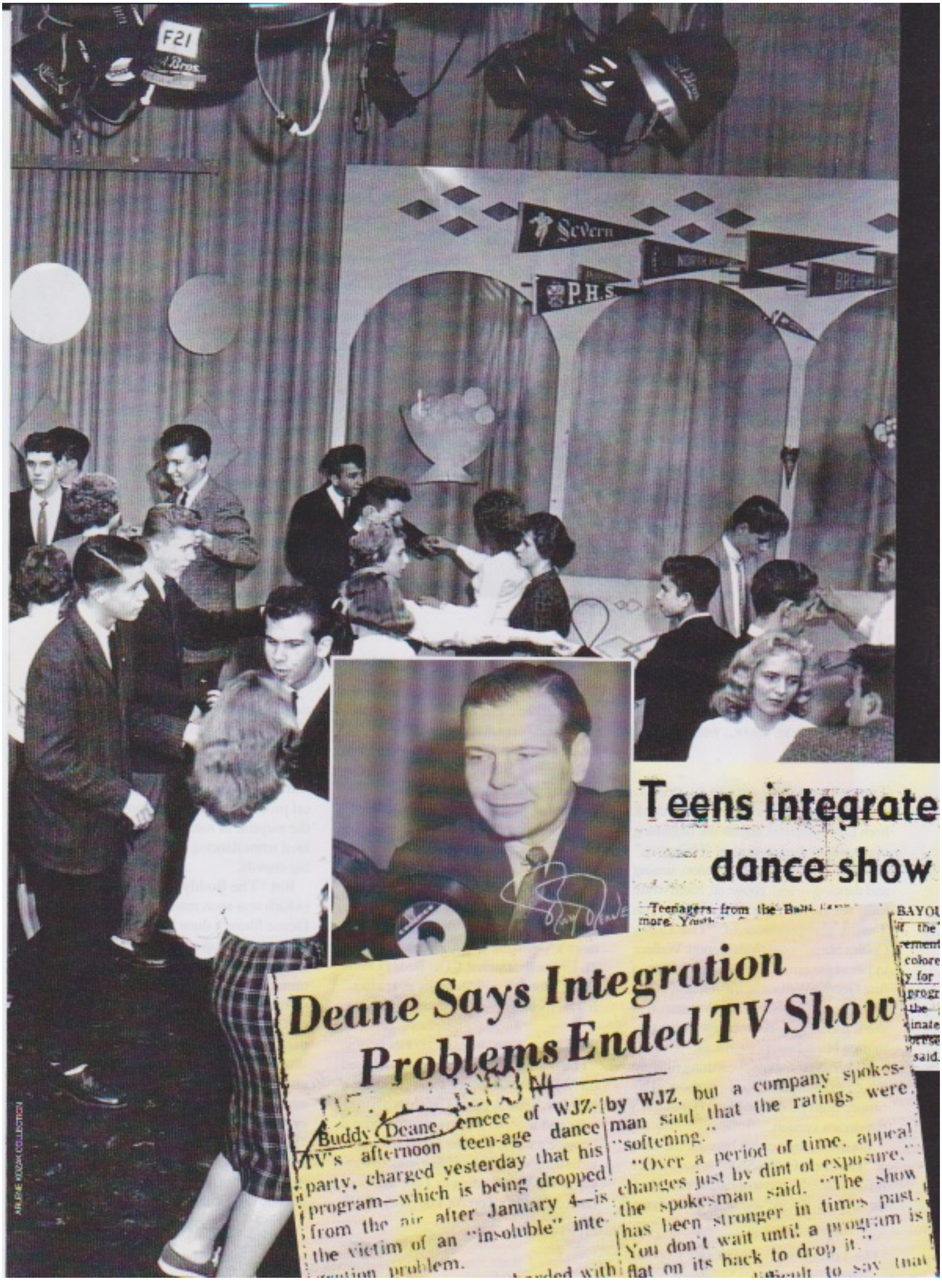


The Last Dance

"The Buddy Deane Show" didn't have a fairy tale ending like the hit Broadway musical it inspired. But the story of its controversial demise offers a window into Baltimore's civil rights history. By Laura Wexler

When "The Buddy Deane Bandstand" debuted in September 1957, it was strictly segregated, according to local custom. Although the city's policies began to change within a few years, the show's did not.



ARLENE KOZAK COLLECTION

Teens integrate dance show

Teenagers from the Balti-
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Deane Says Integration Problems Ended TV Show

Buddy Deane, emcee of WJZ-TV's afternoon teen-age dance party, charged yesterday that his program—which is being dropped from the air after January 4—is the victim of an "insoluble" integration problem.

arded with

by WJZ, but a company spokesman said that the ratings were "softening."

"Over a period of time, appeal changes just by dint of exposure," the spokesman said. "The show has been stronger in times past. You don't wait until a program is flat on its back to drop it."

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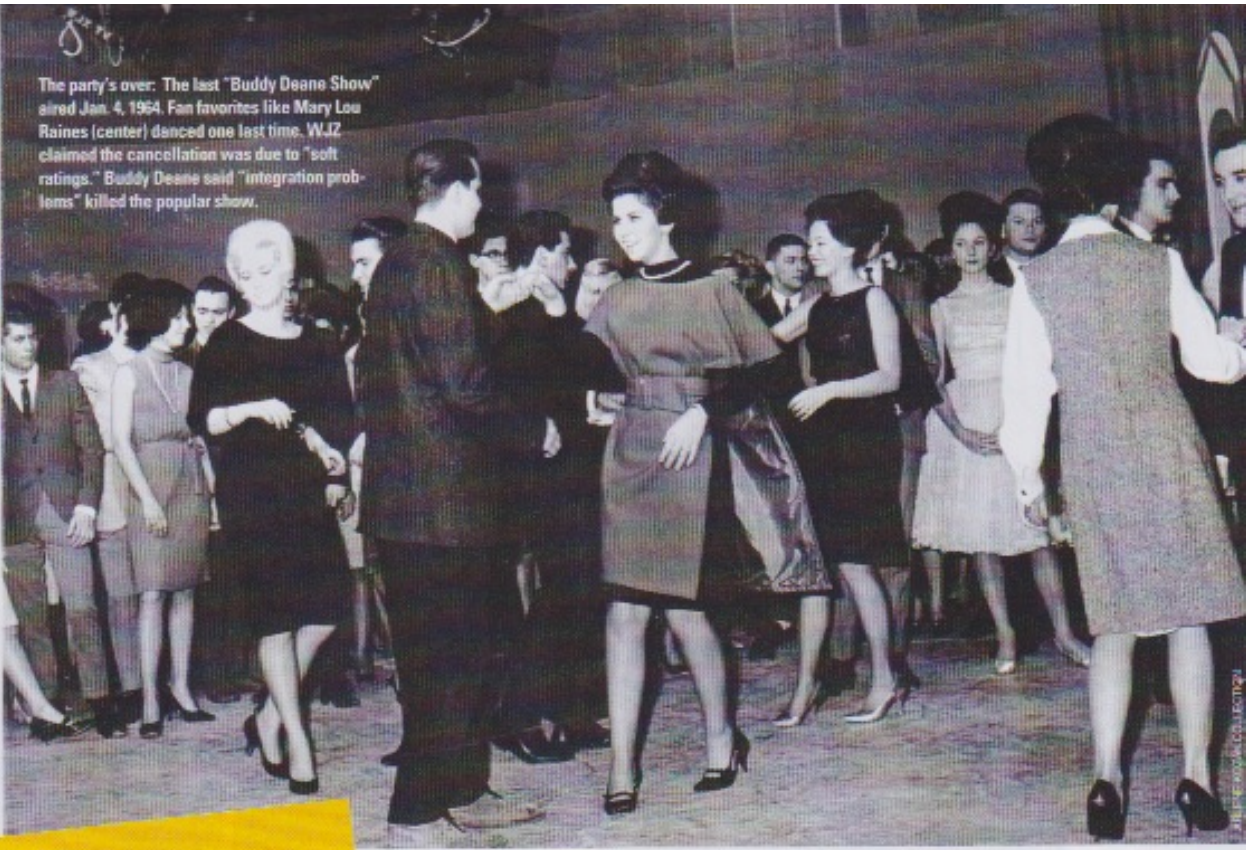

The party's over: The last "Buddy Deane Show" aired Jan. 4, 1964. Fan favorites like Mary Lou Raines (center) danced one last time. WJZ claimed the cancellation was due to "soft ratings." Buddy Deane said "integration problems" killed the popular show.

[illegible] COLLECTION

"The Corny Collins Show" is... now and forever more... integrated!

THIS DECLARATION, PROUDLY UTTERED by Tracy Turnblad, a chubby white chick from East Baltimore, signals the beginning of the end of the hit musical "Hairspray." After her decree, there is jubilation, singing and dancing— and, above all, blind white folks seeing the light. Even Velma Von Tussle, the producer of "The Corny Collins Show" who rivals George Wallace in her segregationist convictions, does a fine George Wallace at the musical's end: She not only comes to accept integration— she'll also happily begin a new career promoting black beauty products.

"'Hairspray' makes everything turn out right," explains the Broadway show's Baltimore-born producer Margo Lion. "It's the dream version."

It's the dream version because the story of "The Corny Collins Show" is really a thinly fictionalized account of Baltimore's "Buddy Deane Show"— with one major modification: "The Corny Collins Show" integrates successfully while "The Buddy Deane Show" was canceled in January 1964.

At the time, Buddy Deane, who died this past July at age 78, said his show was "the victim of an 'insoluble' integration problem."

But what exactly does that mean? And how exactly did "The Buddy Deane Show" end? The fairy tale finish of "Hairspray" has been thrilling audiences at Broadway's Neil Simon Theater for the past year, and will do the same at Baltimore's Mechanic Theatre Sept. 9 through 21. Unlike the musical, "The Buddy Deane Show" doesn't end "happily ever after." It's far more interesting than that.

THE BEGINNING IS EASY TO PIN DOWN. "The Buddy Deane Bandstand" debuted on WJZ-TV Channel 13 at 3 p.m. on Monday, Sept. 9, 1957. The show's namesake and host, an Arkansas native who'd become a wildly popular DJ on Baltimore radio station WITH, made a smooth transition to TV. According to Tony Warner's book, "Buddy's Top 20: The Story of Baltimore's Hottest TV Dance Show and The Guy Who Brought It To Life" (2003), the show instantly rocketed WJZ's lagging ratings to the top of the market and became, for a time, the top-ranked local production in the nation— much to the surprise of many who predicted that local teens dancing on TV wouldn't draw big crowds.

But "The Buddy Deane Bandstand" (which was soon renamed "The Buddy Deane Show") drew huge crowds. Hundreds showed up at WJZ's studios on TV Hill to audition for a spot on the Committee, the group of regulars who danced on nearly every show. Thousands wrote to the station requesting the free tickets that would allow them to be guests on the show. And even more tuned in every afternoon six days a week to dance in their own cramped living rooms, just like Tracy Turnblad and Penny Pingleton in "Hairspray."

"Our ratings beat out soap operas," says Arlene Kozak, then in her 20s. Her official title was Deane's secretary, though she

Right: **Inside WJZ's studios in June 1962, Buddy Deane interviews Ray Charles in front of a whites-only audience.**

Far right: **Outside the studios on "Ray Charles Day," members of the Baltimore integrationist organization Civic Interest Group demonstrate against the show's segregated policy.**

COURTESY THE AFRO-AMERICAN ARCHIVES

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BUDDY DEAN'S DANCE SHOW

actually served as his first lieutenant and unofficial den mother to the Committee members. "Do you know what it takes to beat out soap operas?"

The show's cult-like local status is well-documented in newspaper and magazine articles, and wittily illustrated via "The Corny Collins Show" in "Hairspray"— both the musical and the original John Waters' movie, which came out in 1988. And just like "The Corny Collins Show," "The Buddy Deane Show" was openly and completely segregated.

"When the program commenced, segregation was the rule in Baltimore... The movie theaters were segregated, the restaurants were segregated, the buses were segregated. It was a completely segregated society," Deane told author Warner. "When my show went on, management discussed the matter and decided they would follow 'the local custom' of segregation, and we were going to have separate but equal."

What "separate but equal" meant in terms of the show was that the Committee would consist entirely of white dancers, and nearly every day of the month would be for white guests only. As was the custom of the era, the show often invited black entertainers— Ray Charles, Chubby Checker, Chuck Berry— to perform for its whites-only audiences. There was no problem with that, recall those who worked on the show— it was social integration that was taboo.

To provide the "equal" in the "separate but equal," WJZ management and Deane conceived of a system in which black children and teenagers would be invited onto the show on one Monday each month, usually through church groups or Boys or Girls Clubs. Among Buddy Deaners this day was known as "Special Guest Day." Among black kids in Baltimore it went by the name "Black Monday."

"They played really great R&B music on Guest Days," recalls Warner, who watched the show as a boy. "It was a different kind of music and a different kind of dancing. It was great."

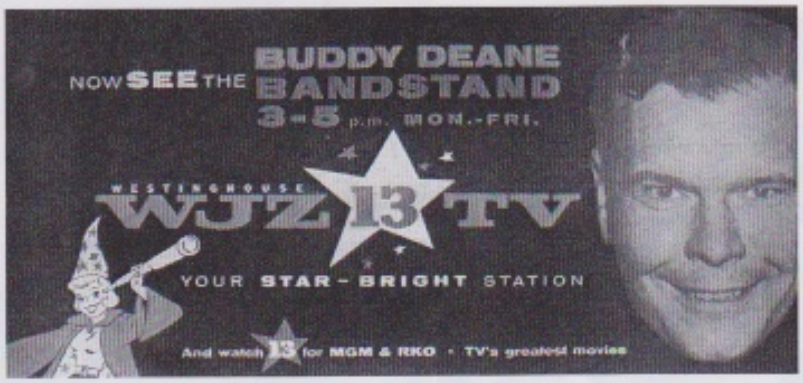
Bob McKenzie, who served as the teen assistant responsible for supervising the dancers, remembers that Guest Days were more hectic than usual. "The kids didn't know the rules: stay in the light, don't talk on the set and so on," says McKenzie, now a facilities manager for Comcast. "But I never had any problems and the kids seemed happy to be there."

No doubt some black kids were happy to be there. Kozak, who sent out the guest tickets, remembers that black parents would request tickets for their children on Guest Days. "They'd ask, specifically, to come when the black groups were coming," she says. "Schools being integrated was one thing, but dancing cheek to cheek on TV was another. It was the way things were."

THE WAY THINGS WERE, HOWEVER, WAS not how everyone felt they should be. In 1958, for example, the Baltimore City Board of Education— which had desegregated schools in the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954— withdrew support of the show as a result

Buddy holds the microphone as Smokey Robinson of the Miracles is interviewed by Baltimore DJ "Fat Daddy" on a "Special Guest Day," otherwise known as "Black Monday."

REPRINTED FROM "BUDDY DEANE'S TOP 20"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In 1957, Baltimore public transit buses carried advertising billboards for the new two-hour, weekday show originating from TV Hill.

of its segregated policies. And though Gwinn Owens, WJZ's editorial director from 1958 to 1978, has some fond memories of "The Buddy Deane Show"— he remembers returning from lunch one day to discover teen idol Fabian using his phone— he also recalls that he and other station staffers were uncomfortable with the practice of Guest Days. "I felt a sense of guilt when the black kids would show up to dance," says Owens.

"I thought the segregation was abusive against black children," says Homer Faber, a retired economics professor and former dean at Morgan State University who had a 20-year career on WBAL-TV as one of the hosts of "Look At It This Way." "It was another part of the scene that openly discriminated on the basis of color. 'Buddy Deane' was just one more thing that said, 'No,' to black children."

Indeed, some black— and white— kids in Baltimore who loved dancing and rock'n'roll nonetheless refused to support the segregated show. "'Buddy Deane' was something I didn't care about," says Janice Green, a black student attending Western High School at the time. "It's not something I rushed home to see."

Though Green and her friends danced to records in their basements, they never requested tickets to attend Guest Day. And the only reason she watched "Buddy Deane" was to see the black groups, or to watch Committee member Mary Lou Raines do some of the moves Green and friends had taught her in the gym at Western.

"It didn't bother me that Mary Lou took our dances back to the show," says Green, now a branch chief in the usability section at the Center for Social Security Administration. "She was just using some of the steps we did while cutting up in gym class. And even though they were our moves, she always did them 'white.' We'd get a kick out of it. We knew the truth. And we knew that she knew the truth."

GREEN'S REAL-LIFE MEMORY OF TEACHING a white girl to dance has its fictional parallel in the scene in the musical "Hairspray" in which a black boy named Seaweed teaches Tracy Turnblad the dance that wins her a spot on the coveted Committee. A later scene in "Hairspray" features Tracy, Seaweed and friends picketing "The Corny Collins Show" to protest its segregated policies. That, too, has its basis in reality: On an afternoon in late June 1962, 20 white and black members of the Civic Interest Group (CIG), an integrationist group founded at Morgan State and comprised of college and high school students throughout the city, picketed WJZ.

That day, Ray Charles, who had just released a hit album, was scheduled to appear on "The Buddy Deane Show" (in front of a whites-only audience, as it was not Guest Day). As Deane recalled in Warner's book, the kids were hoping to prevent Charles from entering the studio. What they didn't know was that his performance had been taped several days earlier, so he wouldn't actually be coming to the studio that day.

The pickets' signs— "Buddy Dean (sic), Do You Have Georgia on Your Mind?" and "Segregation— Hit the Road Jack"— played off Charles' song titles. And, as an article in the June 30, 1962, edition of *The Afro-American* reports, "The demonstrators shattered the usual calm surrounding the broadcast studio as officials, employees, police, reporters, cameramen and spectators converged on the scene."

"We did our best that day to get arrested, and they did their best not to arrest us," says Marc Steiner, a local public radio host who attended the protest. At the time, he was a 16-year-old City College student and a member of CIG. And that June day wasn't the first time he'd traveled to TV Hill. A few months earlier, he and some other high school students had tried to integrate "The Buddy Deane Show."

"We had just formed the first integrated fraternity at City called Bigotry or Brotherhood. And one day we were sitting around talking on the lawn and we said, 'We got to do something about The Buddy Deane Show,'" says Steiner. "We decided to write to get tickets. Each ticket was good for two people. So the white guys would ask black girls to be their dates and the white girls would ask black guys. The plan was to try to get into the show with interracial couples."

Steiner remembers that he and his group showed up at the WJZ studios with their tickets, ready to dance. "They blocked the doors and wouldn't let us in," he says. "We sat on the steps awhile and then they told us we would be arrested if we didn't get off the steps."

Steiner and his integrated group didn't get on the show that day. But, more than a year later, on Aug. 17, 1963, another integrated group did. And, even 40 years afterward, that day lives in infamy as the end of "The Buddy Deane Show."

"When the studio doors opened, the black kids from the bus— and the white kids from the cars— just rushed in. The object was to catch the TV station off guard, which we did."

BUT THE END REALLY BEGAN IN JANUARY 1962, when Westinghouse, the liberal media company that owned WJZ and several other stations in the nation, selected a man named Herb Cahan to be WJZ's general manager.

In the musical "Hairspray," the TV station management is portrayed as ardently segregationist. "Integration is the new frontier," Tracy proclaims early in Act I. "Not in Baltimore," retorts producer Von Tussle.

In reality, Herb Cahan was a passionate integrationist, and though he died in 1989, he's remembered as "an idealist who thought the station could be used as a force for change," says Owens.

Shortly after he took the helm in 1962, Cahan decided "The Buddy Deane Show"— as popular and as lucrative as it was— would either fully integrate or end, according to Owens, Kozak and others who worked at the station.

"Management made all the decisions," says Kozak. "They came in and said, 'You will do this.' They wanted to do it overnight and have black and white kids dancing cheek to cheek."

Years later, Deane would recall Cahan stopping him in the hall at WJZ and asking, "Why haven't you integrated that program?"

Jane Cahan Baron says that question sounds like something her husband would have said. "Herb wouldn't hear of anything not being integrated," says Cahan Baron, who remarried after her husband's death. "He thought it was sinful. They'd say it was a sign of the times, but Herb refused to accept it."

"My father was not flexible when it came to issues of discrimination," says Julie Cahan, Herb and Jane's daughter and a Baltimore realtor. "When I was growing up, we lived in Mount Washington and Meadowbrook pool was just down the block. I wasn't allowed to go to the pool because it wasn't integrated."

Since 1958, Owens had been writing the editorials that the general manager read on the air several days each week, conveying the station's position on local current events. These editorials always had a liberal bent, he says, but when Herb Cahan came to the station in 1962, they "really got on a crusade." Owens wrote— and Cahan read— editorials supporting CIG's efforts to integrate Northwood Shopping Center (an effort that began in 1953, predating the Montgomery Bus Boycotts in 1955), the sit-ins in Route 40 restaurants, and the efforts to gain civil rights for blacks in Cambridge, Md.

So, by 1962 and 1963, WJZ's editorial position supported integrated movie theaters and restaurants, yet its most popular show remained segregated. That disconnect did not go unnoticed by Cahan and program manager Win Baker— or by higher-ups at Westinghouse. As Owens says, "The station management felt they were being hypocrites if they supported integration on the air, but had a segregated show."

When Julie Cahan saw the movie "Hairspray," she saw the station manager (portrayed by Divine in one of his few onscreen male roles), and wondered, "Is that supposed to be my father?"

Owens took the alterations in the movie and musical a bit harder. "'Hairspray' got it backward, making it seem like the TV management were bigots," he says. "To tell you the truth, I really resent that."

DURING THE SHOW'S HEYDAY, AND IN THE years following, some people concluded that, as an Arkansas native, Deane was a racist who didn't want his show integrat-

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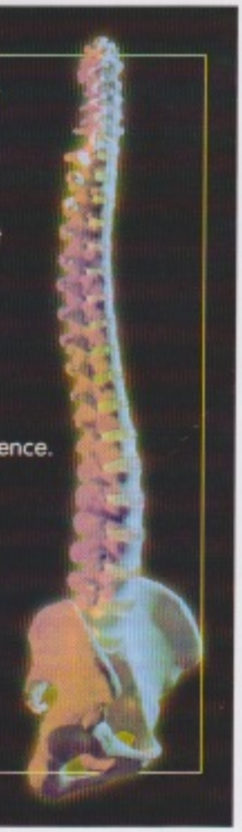

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The Last Dance

(continued from page 135)

ed. That appears not to be the case. He was personally friendly with many black DJs and entertainers, and was deemed by James Brown "the first white man to put me on TV." But he did not share Cahan's idea that TV should be a force for change. Television and entertainment in general, Deane seemed to believe, should reflect the mores of society— not try to change them. As John Baker, a director and producer at the show from 1963 to 1964, says, "Buddy didn't want his show to be a guinea pig."

In the end, Deane didn't have the luxury of choice. Because on the afternoon of Aug. 12, 1963— a Black Monday— a group known as Baltimore Youth Opportunities Unlimited (BAYOU) got tickets for "The Buddy Deane Show" and forced everyone's hand.

There was nothing too unusual about the group getting the tickets— Kozak says she issued them to any black group that wrote with a request. However, when the black teenagers from BAYOU showed their tickets and gained entrance to the studios, several carloads of white kids entered with them.

What Kozak didn't know when she sent out the tickets was that BAYOU was the Baltimore branch of the civil rights organization Northern Student Movement— an integrated group.

"A number of our kids had complained about Black Monday," remembers Bill Henry, then-head of BAYOU and now a counselor for Project Place, a transitional housing facility for homeless people with special needs. "And so we came up with a plan that was fairly simple. We hired a bus from the Baltimore Transit Co. to take the black teens over that day. The bus driver left our office at 622 N. Aisquith and drove up to TV Hill. When the studio doors opened, the black kids from the bus— and the white kids from the cars— just rushed in. The object was to catch the TV station off guard, which we did."

Oliver Green, who drove the bus that day, said that all he knew in advance was that his job was to safely transport a group of black kids to and from TV Hill. He was pretty surprised once he learned of the surprise integration. But, he says, "it appeared well-arranged and orderly from the outside."

On the inside, however, there was panic, according to Baker, who was working at the station that day. But it was live TV and the show had to go on. And so those tuning in to "The Buddy Deane Show" that Monday witnessed the unthinkable: black and white kids dancing together.

Janice Green remembers seeing the show and imagining the station's surprise. Her younger sister Mary Curtis remembers, too.

"A white guy would grab a black girl and the screen would dissolve into squiggles and squares— like the producers were trying to hide what was really happening," says Curtis, executive features editor and a columnist at *The Charlotte Observer* who mentioned the experience in her review of "Hairspray" earlier this year. "I've never forgotten it."

Bill Henry also watched that day. "I remember that the lights on the show got so dim the kids were silhouettes," he says. "But you could still tell it was white and black kids dancing together."

On the matter of the surprise integration, memories get fuzzy. Some recall that Buddy Deane was in the studio, although he said he wasn't. Some claim the Committee members ran screaming from the studio when they saw the integrated group. That's unlikely given that on Black Mon-

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> **“Saving the show became my priority—I believe the kids’ priority, also,” said Buddy Deane. “The show was more important than segregation or integration to us.”**

day, no Committee members aside from the teen assistant were on set. And some claim the cars that delivered the white kids bore New York license plates—proof, they say, that “outsiders,” not Baltimoreans, were stirring up trouble.

“These people were imports,” says Kozak, who says she was on vacation that day and turned on the TV in her home to see the kids dancing together. “It was a set-up. Because, with the black community in Baltimore, the segregation wasn’t an issue.”

After the show aired, WJZ got bomb threats, hate mail, arson threats—sometimes so close to air-time that “The Buddy Deane Show” was broadcast from the relative safety of the parking lot. Julie Cahan remembers receiving threats at her house. And, Kozak says, black people, as well as whites, called to complain. Like many, they thought the station had knowingly invited the integrated group to dance on the show.

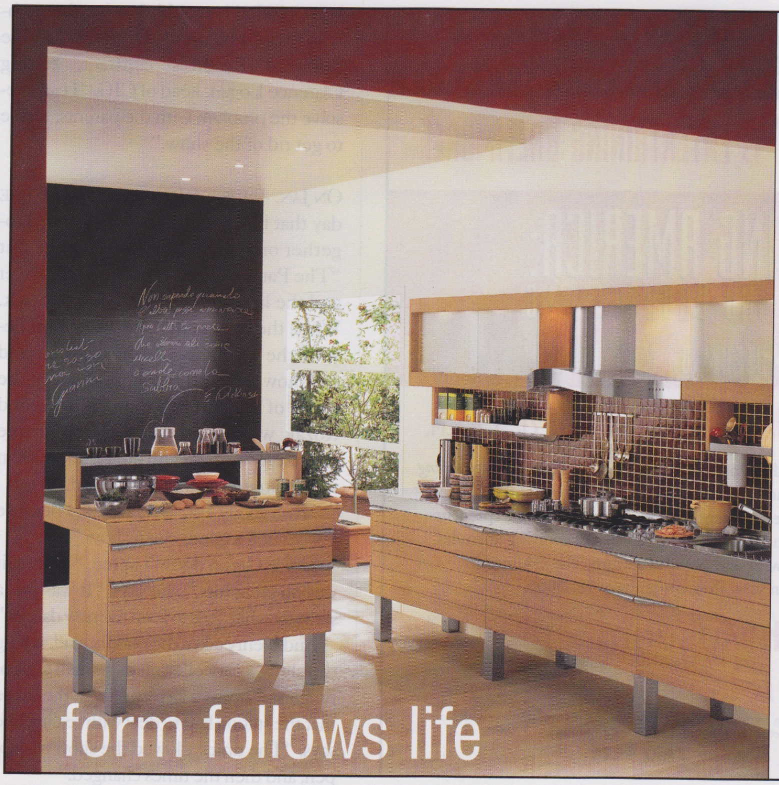
In an article in the Aug. 17, 1963, edition of *The Afro-American*—the only media attention that the surprise integration seems to have garnered—WJZ’s program manager stated the show was featuring “more and more integrated groups.” However, no one interviewed for this article remembers any other than the one that surprised everyone on Aug. 12.

COMPARED TO OTHER EVENTS IN 1963—in April, a white Baltimore postman named Bill Moore was shot dead while attempting to deliver a letter to the Mississippi governor, and, closer to home, protests at Gwynn Oak Amusement Park starting on July 4 resulted in the park’s desegregation on Aug. 28—the surprise integration of “The Buddy Deane Show” was a minor incident. But, as bus driver Oliver Green and others remember, “It was an event that turned things around.”

The surprise integration, says Baker, made the station management “feel invaded, with their backs pushed against the wall.” And according to Kozak, the near-hysteria that greeted it showed station management that “they couldn’t just integrate overnight.” After meetings with Deane and with Committee members, the station management evidently came to conclude what Deane and Kozak had said all along: though the kids themselves wouldn’t mind it, the parents of Baltimore’s white teenagers—especially the white girls—would not tolerate integrated dancing.

“There was a lot of discussion among the Committee members, especially among the girls,” remembers McKenzie. “There was fear that a black boy would ask a white girl to dance in front of the camera and if she said no, what would happen?”

According to Warner, Deane asked Herb Cahan to grant him some time to meet with the Committee members’ parents and find a black couple to join the Committee. “We



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(continued from page 167)

should have found a way to make things work early on," Deane told Baker years later. "We didn't. And later on, saving the show became my priority— I believe the kids' priority, also. The show was more important than segregation or integration to us."

Thirty miles south of Baltimore, "The Milt Grant Show" did "make things work." "We invited school groups only on the show— no one from the general public," says Grant, whose popular bandstand show ran from 1956 to 1962 on WTTG-Channel 5. "So, after D.C. schools were integrated in 1959 or so, we had integrated groups of dancers. If people called to complain, we said, 'It's a school policy. Talk to the schools.'"

Grant remembers that the integrated dancing on his show never caused unmanageable hysteria or outcry— in fact, some of their regular dancers were black. "The solution we had was a good one," says Grant, now president and CEO of Grant Communications in Florida. "The way we treated integration made all the difference. Some people solve it. Some don't."

By fall 1963, Herb Cahan had evidently concluded he couldn't solve the problems with "The Buddy Deane Show". He canceled Deane's contract, telling Clarence Logan, head of CIG, "I can't resolve the problem with the parents. I have to get rid of the show."

ON JAN. 4, 1964, 4$^1/_2$ MONTHS AFTER THE day that black and white kids danced together on the show, Buddy Deane put "The Party's Over" on the record player and the lights on the set faded to black. When the song ended, he walked off beyond the TV lights into the darkness and the show went off the air forever. In the wake of the cancellation, Deane and Kozak were stunned, the Committee members were sad and angry, and Cahan was frustrated and disappointed.

"Everybody lost," says Kozak. "Because it was such a good, clean show."

Janice Green doesn't agree. "To me, it was no great loss," she says. "It was just a show for white kids to learn the new dances."

And Henry takes the middle road, seeing the show's cancellation as a small sign of progress. "It was a victory only in the sense that the station had to deal with reality," he says. "The times allowed the show to happen, and then the times changed."

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THE ASSOCIATED STYLE JewishTimes CITYPAPER

Looking back on it, some people still believe that if Cahan had fully integrated "The Buddy Deane Show," there would have been violence. That suspicion, however, must be balanced against the fact that there were threats of violence when swimming pools and theaters in Baltimore integrated, and that ultimately did not stop the integration.

Others believe that, had WJZ management been more patient, the show could have slowly integrated and stayed on for another decade or so. And still others think that, by 1964, the show had run its course. After all, the music was changing along with the times.

When a reporter from *The Sun* inquired about the cancellation of "The Buddy Deane Show" in late December 1963, a WJZ spokesperson said its ratings had "been stronger in times past. You don't wait until a program is flat on its back to drop it." It was then that Buddy Deane, enraged at the allegation of soft ratings, shot back, uttering that loaded phrase— "victim of an 'insoluble' integration problem."

By calling his show the "victim" of an "integration problem," Deane asserted that integration killed his show. In truth, what killed his show was both the reaction to integration, and the fears of that reaction.

In that *Sun* article, printed on Dec.14, 1963, Buddy Deane went on to say that the station was being bombarded by complaints both from segregationists and integrationists. "You're in trouble if you do and in trouble if you don't," he said.

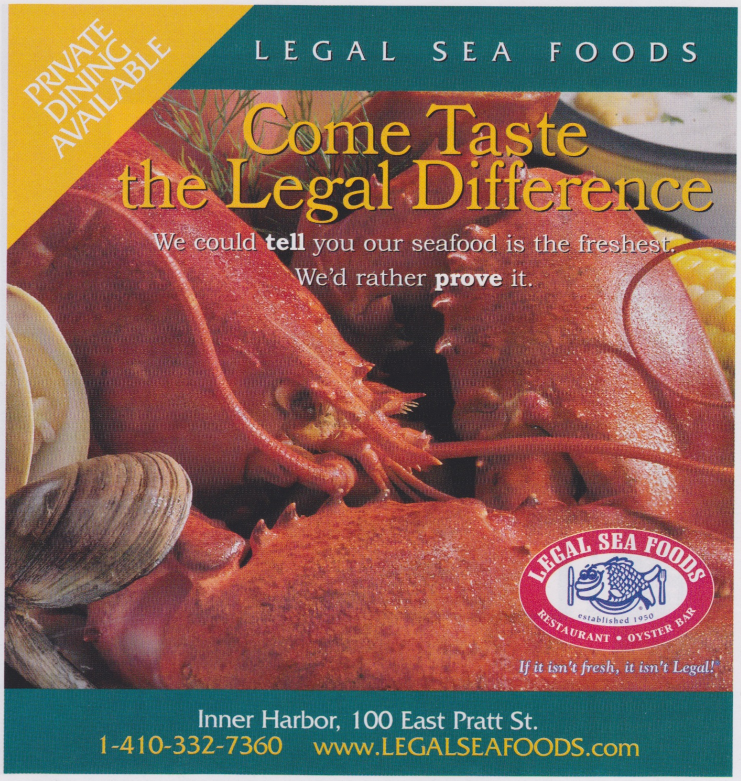
He was right about that. "The Buddy Deane Show" occurred at an awkward, confusing, transitional moment in history— caught between a rock and hard place if there ever were one. Its story— the true story— would make a great movie. ☐

Laura Wexler is a senior editor at Style. *Her nonfiction book, "Fire in a Canebrake," the story of the last mass-lynching in America, was published earlier this year.*

A BUDDY DEANE MEMORIAL SERVICE will be held on Sept. 20 at 3 p.m., at Grace United Methodist Church, 5407 N. Charles St.

CELEBRATION DANCE AND TRIBUTE TO BUDDY DEANE, with special appearance by singer Ronnie Dove, will be held on Saturday, Sept. 27, from 8 p.m. to midnight, at the Timonium Fairgrounds. Tickets, $25. Call 410-477-3511.

A new edition of Tony Warner's book, **"BUDDY DEANE'S TOP 20,"** goes on sale Sept. 10 at online booksellers, Hometown Girl and Greetings and Readings; or by e-mailing tonyw@arkansas.net. Warner will be signing books at Hampden Fest (Sept. 20, 1 p.m.-3 p.m.), at the Baltimore Book Festival (Sept. 21, 1 p.m.-4 p.m.) and at Greetings and Readings (Sept. 27, noon-2 p.m.). He'll also sign books at the Celebration Dance.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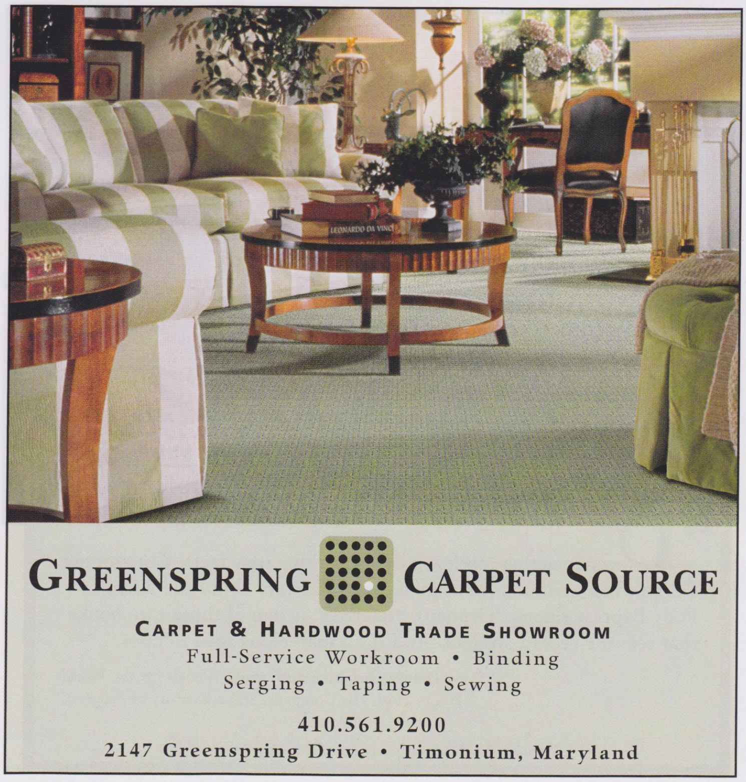
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