

"Home Movies" is really the show that people can't get enough of," says Cartoon Network exec Mike Lazzo.

In the 'Swim'

Surreal cartoon series making a big splash with grown-ups

By MICHAEL GILTZ

t's Sunday night at 10, and you've just finished a tense, riveting new episode of "The Sopranos." How do you unwind?

One increasingly popular solution is to dive into "Adult Swim," a three-hour block of boldly bizarre animated shows on the Cartoon Network.

On "Harvey Birdman, Attorney at Law," you can find classic cartoon characters duking it out in court.

Recently, two characters from the '60s show "Jonny Quest," Dr. Benton Quest and Race Bannon, fought over custody of child hero Jonny and his sidekick Hadji.

"The Brak Show" — a spin-off from the channel's first breakout hit, "Space Ghost: Coast to Coast" — follows a former cartoon supervillain who finds himself in an outer space suburb.

And in "Aqua Teen Hunger Force," you'll find a series so profoundly odd that even Mike Lazzo, Cartoon Network's senior vice president of original pro-

gramming, has trouble putting it into words.

"It's about fast-food detectives that really don't solve any crimes?" ventured the 44-year-old Lazzo, laughing. "It's almost indescribable."

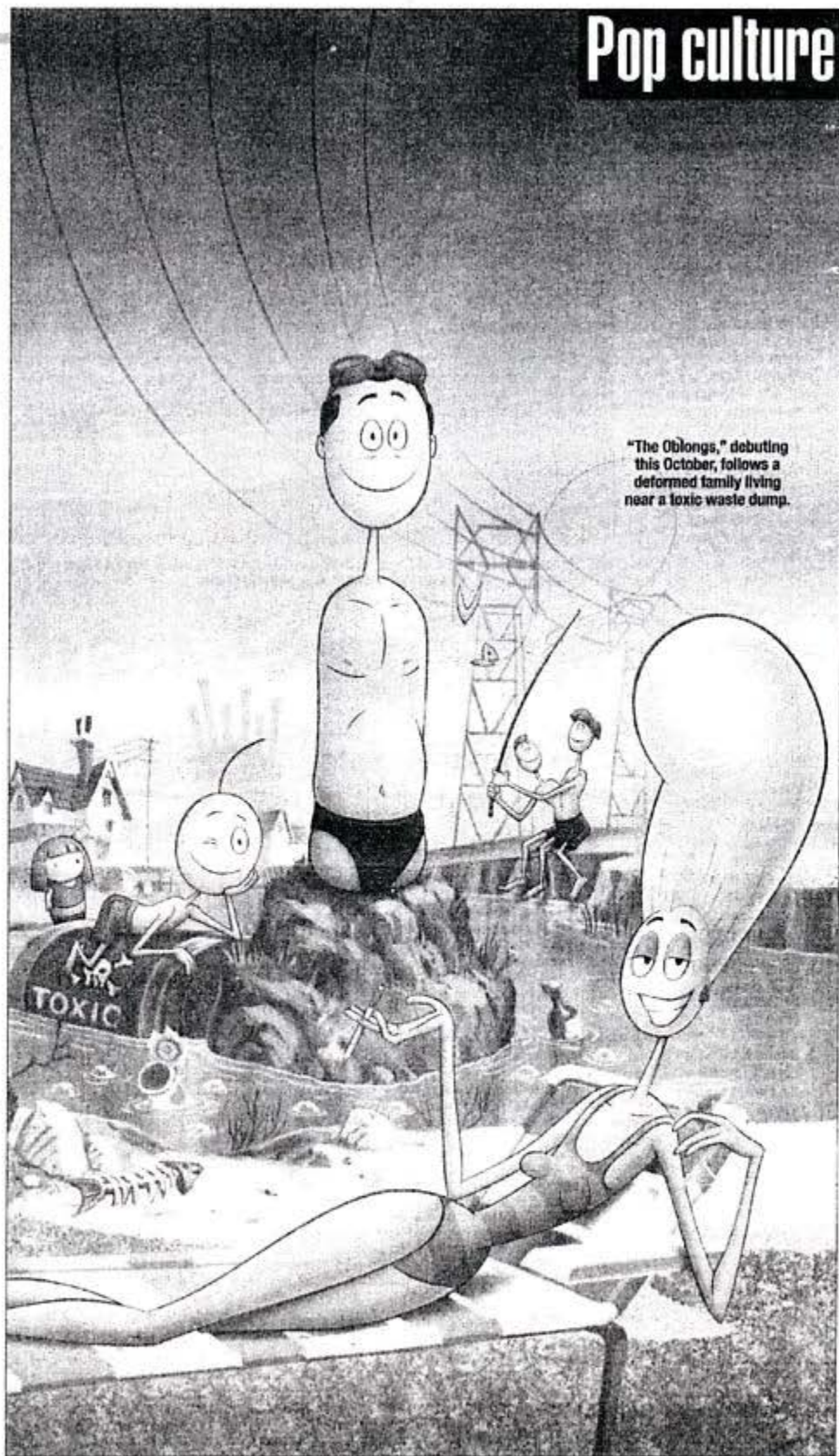
He means fast-food detectives literally: The show's three main characters are a soda, a box of french fries and a "wad of meat."

After a rocky debut last fall, the surreal show became a sleeper hit — and the numbers grow every time new episodes air.

Adult Swim will make an additional splash in October, when the breakout hit "Home Movies" debuts four episodes, along with a new series called "The Oblongs."

"The Oblongs" are a dysfunctional post-nuclear family living near a toxic dump (with all the deformities to prove it), while "Home Movies" follows 8-year-old Brendon Small, a movie buff who lives with his divorced mom.

The show originally aired on UPN for three episodes before it was abruptly canceled.



"The Oblongs," debuting this October, follows a deformed family living near a toxic waste dump.

"Home Movies" is really the show that people can't get enough of," said Lazzo. "We couldn't be happier that UPN quit making it."

"Adult Swim" is the logical next step for a channel that began with a steady stream of Hanna-Barbera reruns, hoping to get a few kiddies to tune in.

What they found was that adults were watching just as much, if not more, than the original target audience. And it wasn't just late-night insomniacs trying to lull themselves to sleep with repeats of "The Smurfs."

"It was everywhere," marveled Lazzo about the

adult viewers. "All day and night."

Little wonder, with acclaimed shows like "The Powerpuff Girls" and the brilliant "Samurai Jack" giving adults reason to tune in during the day.

With growing ratings come growing budgets, giving Lazzo the chance to

make his most expensive acquisition yet: the Fox series "Futurama," which will join the "Adult Swim" lineup in January.

"I think the first time my brother-in-law ever gave me a compliment was about the adult block," laughed Lazzo. "So it's working at least on a personal level."