

● REALLY BIG SHOW

'Gary the Rat'

'Frasier' channels long-toothed lawyer



Kelsey Grammer (right) is the voice behind the rat in "Gary the Rat" on TNN Thursday night.

By MICHAEL GILTZ

WHAT does Dr. Frasier Crane have in common with a six-foot tall rat who's also a practicing attorney? More than you might expect, according to actor Kelsey Grammer who plays Crane on the long-running NBC sitcom and voices "Gary the Rat," a new adult animated series on TNN.

"Gary has some of the traits of Frasier Crane," admits Grammer.

"He loves fine art, is very well dressed and has social skills. Of course, his motivations are different. Gary is out for himself and Frasier actually is trying to do something good for the world."

Part of a TNN block that includes "Ren & Stimpy's Adult Cartoon Party" at 10 p.m. and Pamela Anderson as an exotic dancer turned superhero in "Stripperella" at 11 p.m., Grammer's character is a slimy lawyer who wakes up one day transformed into a giant rat.

But isn't that redundant?

"I certainly mean to cast no aspersions on the legal profession," says Grammer in the smooth, unctuous tones that make him ideal for voice work.

He's also voiced Sideshow Bob on "The Simpsons" and lends his vocal talents in a lead role in "Toy Story 2." He is Stinky

Pete the Prospector, a cunning and manipulative character with a kindly exterior.

Gary the Rat, however, doesn't disguise his dark side, Grammer says.

"He has pretty much compromised any decency in his life, which is why he is visited with this horrible manifestation ... [Gary may try to] reclaim his dignity — and maybe even his humanity, eventually — but that will take about 200 shows," the actor explains.

In the funniest moment of the debut, Gary is cross-examining a little girl while defending a tobacco company. Out of nowhere, he pulls out a cloth doll and says to the girl, "Show me where the man touched you."

"What man?" coos the girl, confused.

"That man!" exclaims Gary, pointing at the prosecuting attorney.

Like an evil Perry Mason, Gary takes on any client, whether he's representing his boss' wife in a divorce case or defending a hospital being sued for gross medical malpractice.

"He seems to win them all; he's amazing that way," says Grammer.

"You've got to try and win. Winning is more important than justice. Winning is justice and that's the kind of guy I want working for me."

Whenever possible, Grammer likes to record scenes like an old radio show, with all the cast members in one room. He also likes to be surrounded by old friends.

Among the guest star voices to listen for: David Hyde Pierce, Ted Danson, John Mahoney, Mary Stuart Masterson, Brooke Shields, and Joe Pantoliano.

But for now, this is still a side gig from "Frasier," which is headed into its final season. For the occasion, Grammer has enticed back head writers Christopher Lloyd and Joe Keenan, who've worked on the show in its glory days.

"They've been out trying to develop some other stuff and it's a very tough world out there," says Grammer, perhaps unconsciously admitting one reason why they've been reluctant to call it a day on "Frasier."

"Some things catch on and some things don't. But we've had such a great time together. It's nice to have all our friends back and do this with the family we grew up with."

The same formula could also make a hit of "Gary the Rat."

GARY THE RAT
Thursday, 10:30 p.m., TNN