

# Lollipop kid

By MICHAEL GILTZ

**T**ORONTO, Canada — Just a few blocks from a downtown police station in Toronto, a new police station has sprung up in an old school administration building.

It's the main set for "Kojak," a TV movie currently shooting and scheduled to air on the red-hot USA network in January.

In a classic "Kojak" scene, the detective who

is always ready to break the rules is being taken to school by a former partner, now his boss, Frank McNeil. The show gets all the New York authenticity it needs from its lead actors. Ving Rhames of Harlem

is the bald, fedora-wearing detective, and Bronx-born Chazz Palminteri is McNeil.

Yep, the classic New York detective — loved by cops in the '70s for realistically depicting police work — is still bald and hands out the occasional lollipop. But

Rhames, an executive

producer on the movie, isn't coasting on a few props and signature taglines.

"I'm really focused on the humanity of the character," says the 45-year-old actor, tossing his fedora on a police desk in a corner of the set. "I'm playing a man who happens to be a detective. It's trying to put the camera inside the man... Which I think is much more interesting than doing a movie about 'cops.'"

"I've got two children, and it's part of my job to make this world a better place before I leave the planet — if for nothing else than for the children, for my children. I think this is where Kojak is coming from, and he happens to do it through NYPD."

That's why we see Kojak staying up all night, pouring over the evidence in a case involving a serial killer who targets prostitutes with kids. As the sunrise floods his office, Kojak's eyes are opened to a crucial bit of evidence. But for Rhames, the concerns of Kojak are more than solving the case — even if the detective will do whatever it takes to accomplish that. "He is a man who

cares about the death of hookers, the death of anyone," says Rhames, who shot to fame as a menacing tough guy in "Pulp Fiction."

"But he's also a guy who does something that one has to question: Do the ends justify the means? He's very imperfect. Yet he deals with two kids who lose their mother to a crime. He deals with their father in prison. And Kojak helps get their father out of prison."

From "Charlie's Angels" to "Mission: Impossible," the re-invention of vintage TV shows is practically a cottage industry now. But when word got out last month that "Kojak" was being remade — with a black actor in the title role — it made headlines.

For Palminteri, it's that unexpected depth to the new Kojak that will win fans to this new movie.

"Ving puts a spin on it that is really his own," says Palminteri, 52.

"It's that quality you see of him in movies: He can be very tough and very mean, and then he can be extremely likable, and then he can be very funny. It's all those qualities in an actor you want to see, especially in television."

Both no-nonsense guys clicked immediately. Rhames mentions their faith as one reason (Palminteri is a serious Catholic), while Palminteri talks about their similar roots.

"Ving called me himself and told me he really wanted me to do this," says Palminteri. "We both come from the street, very meager as far as monetary things. We both come from the same yolk."



Ving Rhames fills the fedora of Telly Savalas (left), for the USA remake of "Kojak."

Louie D