

WTTW11 NEWS RELEASE

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WILD CHICAGO AND BEN HOLLIS RETURN TO WTTW11

Original host of *Wild Chicago* takes viewers on an *Illinois Road Trip*

7-part series to premiere in Spring, 2006

Chicago – October 10, 2005 – WTTW11's ***Wild Chicago*** is back, and it's hitting the road!

Original host and creator **Ben Hollis**, who left the program in 1992, will again don his trademark pith helmet and khaki suit as intrepid explorer and video navigator for a wide-ranging journey beyond the urban jungle and into the wilds of Illinois. In the spontaneous, free-wheeling spirit of WTTW11's long-running series that spawned it, *Wild Chicago's Illinois Road Trip* will explore the surprising, the eccentric, the offbeat.

This series of lively half-hour programs, made possible in part by the Illinois Bureau of Tourism, will be offered to public television stations across the state. It will cover seven major geographical areas of Illinois: Northern, Southern, Central, Western, Southwestern, Chicago, and its suburbs. As this program will demonstrate, no matter what travelers seek in Illinois they can find something to suit their style -- from outdoor activities, vineyards and historical and cultural offerings to one-of-a-kind tourist attractions. From the Interstate to Main Street, Ben (who will also serve as co-producer) producer/editor Tom Siegel, and his *Road Trip* crew will comb the prairie and peek between the cornstalks, finding those unexpected destinations, undiscovered treasures, and fascinating people that make Illinois what it is today: about 400 miles long and 250 miles wide.

The series began shooting last week at the Blue Sky Vineyard near Makanda, Illinois. On this trip Ben and Tom also visited Metropolis, the "official" home of Superman, and Jane, the only teenage T-Rex fossil found to date, at the Burpee Museum in Rockford. Each subsequent episode, covering a different region, will feature two marquee destinations plus a variety of other offbeat places that Ben and the *Wild Chicago* team discover along the way. The expected premiere of the series will be sometime in April, 2006.

If travelers want to visit the sites that are featured in *Wild Chicago Illinois Road Trips*, Illinois offers multiple scenic ways to get there. The state is home to well-known heritage trails and scenic drives including Route 66, Great River Road and the Spoon River Valley Scenic Drive. Visitors will find the journey to the sites on the show to be as much fun as their experience when they arrive.

"I'm so excited to be bringing *Wild Chicago* back to WTTW11," says Hollis. "And in going farther afield, I fully expect to uncover jewels that practically nobody knows about," he added. "As one of *Wild Chicago's* original cameramen/editors I am very proud of WTTW11's role in creating a truly unique programming franchise," said Tom Siegel. "As Producer of this new series, I'm looking forward to pushing out beyond the boundaries of Chicago and covering new territory," he added. "I'm delighted to see Ben and this program return to our air – it had many dedicated viewers, and showcased so many unique people and places over its long history," agrees V.J. McAleer, WTTW11's Senior Vice President of Production. "Ben's enthusiasm is, and always has been, infectious," he added.

Eight-time Emmy winner **Ben Hollis** is no stranger to Chicago television audiences. Since leaving WTTW11, he created, hosted and produced *Ben Around Town*, a lively arts program that aired from 2000-2003 on WYCC Channel 20. In between, he created *Ben Loves Chicago* for WPWR, which ran for three seasons, and was a contributing reporter on WLS's long-running hit show, *190 North*. He also has the coveted Studs Terkel Award to his credit. Prior to his TV career, Ben performed as an improv comedian, and as a singer/songwriter all over town. He's also been a copywriter and producer of many corporate videos.

Co-producer and editor **Tom Siegel** is a 20-year production staff veteran with WTTW11 with 3 Emmy Awards to his credit, for individual excellence in editing and videography, and as a producer for the documentary *A Journey of Remembrance*. He is also the recipient of a national CEN award for Children and Youth Programming. Aside from *Wild Chicago*, Siegel has played a significant role in the production of *Chicago Tonight*, *Artbeat Chicago*, *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, *Chicago Stories*, *Soundstage*, and several other WTTW and PBS programs. Prior to his tenure at WTTW11, he held positions with NBC News at WMAQ in Chicago, Warner/Amex Communications in Rolling Meadows, including MTV, Nickelodeon and the Movie Channel.

The Illinois Bureau of Tourism is proud to provide support for this series. For more information on these unique Illinois attractions visit www.enjoyillinois.com.

Now its 50th year, **WTTW11** reaches 4,000,000 viewers a month over four states and enjoys the largest public television audience in the nation. It is the most-watched television station in America.

Contact:

Julia Maish
jmaish@wttw.com
(773) 509-5551