



munity itself, but, as I said, this wasn't going to be a Ken Burns documentary, so a minute was about all we got, and it's hard to get a real feel for what is unique about Ellenville from just that.

Then, one of us was pre-selected to play the final game, the one that would decide if we all went home with a big prize or a just a consolation prize. When Javier Gonzalez was picked, about 190 persons clapped most enthusiastically... thrilled that *they* wouldn't have to shoulder the burden! A truly fine choice, he was greatly cheered, and given a seat by a monitor in a mock living room area, where we could watch him watch the rest of the show. His job? Remember the names and faces of everyone from Ellenville who showed up from then on, and match them at the end of the show. Guess all right, and we all win; miss one, and... awww! Boooo!

Javier was very terse and contained in all his responses, as if afraid to say anything embarrassing! Hooray! Maybe my columns *had* made their point! Indeed, all the other participants were also very guarded in their speech, mostly just saying "Yes," "No," or "I don't know." In fact, if you timed all spoken dialog, I'll wager that Vaughan has about 95% of it, and that all the Ellenvillians together don't add up to more than two or three minutes, total! So, blessedly, in this regard, nobody from our team made a verbal fool of himself or herself... they simply didn't have the time!

The first gag segment premise was that someone in Ellenville had been outed for seemingly risqué behavior. (Uh oh, as I feared! This can't be good!) Well, it turned out that the spouse was in on the gag, indeed, helped make it possible; the humor came from just how oblivious the subject was to what was happening! It was kinda silly and belabored, but the mark took it calmly and well, gave the right answers, and was nicely rewarded for being a good sport.

Between segments, off-camera, "Q" came out, told jokes, ribbed the audience, and offered gift certificates for answering some movie Oscar trivia questions. (I won a small gift for stumping *him* with a trivia question. Alas, millions won't get to see that!) Uh, no bathroom break allowed, though. Then we found out what the big prize we could each win was... not shabby for just showing up!

Next segment was wish fulfillment. Two members were plucked out (Johnny knew *just* what seats they were in!) and their application answers were shown to the question: "What would you secretly want, but would never buy for yourself?" The first one was small, silly, potentially embarrassing... but we were all laughing too hard to notice. This was just a set-up for the *really* big wish which was... Ah, I can't tell you! You'll have to tune in and see!

After each commercial, we got to see one local join the band for their musical intro. Brief, but not something silly, like musically



"playing" one's skull or zipper. Also, looking at the audience, and at each of the selected persons, one clearly saw the broad diversity of Ellenville - white/black, old/young, professional/laborer, etc. And those picked were among the nicest and most deserving individuals

and families possible, and not a "character" in the bunch. If not quite PBS, at least this was not "Fear Factor." So far, so good.

Next up was this very, very busy workaholic who was shocked to find out that things at home were not as believed to be when we all left town that morning, and that the antidote was at hand.

Then the dreaded "Naked Calendar"! Again, if you don't really know who the individuals are, some of the humor will be lost, and I guess we could have done without it altogether and have been none the worse for its absence. (Hey, they're not *really* naked, but thanks to "Austin Powers"-like placement of props, some a bit risqué, it seems so. Clearly, this and other material was filmed in the weeks leading up to the show, in and around the Village.) Yeah, it was funny, but silly; the participants seemed to enjoy their five seconds of fame, but will pay for it by being known for this... for life! Then there was a brief infomercial parody and, at last, the big contest.

Now, those of us following along, who also know many of the selected persons, weren't stumped by the choices; but it wasn't up to us. We were twice reminded to be absolutely silent and give no help to Javier. Was he really struggling, or was he told to stretch out the naming for suspense? Did he win the whole enchilada, or go home the goat? Sorry, but my lips are sealed. For now. The end.

So, after three hours we were ushered out (after signing *more* papers), made the *very* necessary pit stop, were handed a bag of chips and bottled water (Hey, we were supposed to be fed *dinner!* Grumble, grumble.) and put on the bus, in the dusk of NYC. Two hours later, home again.

So, what's the final score? Well, most everyone seemed to have fun there, despite the long waits and sitting around. No Ellenvillians were "harmed" in the making of this show, and those who were the butt of some gags took it stoically, and were reasonably-well-compensated for playing along. Village Manager Auerbach, who claims this is just the "buzz" Ellenville needs to make it into the big leagues, is likely over-selling it. But, I, the skeptic, was probably overly-worried. In the end, it's probably a wash; it won't much either help or hurt us. In a week it will be old news and forgotten, except by the direct participants. Alas, the jaded TV critics haven't been so kind to the first airings: "cheesy" "annoying" "wacko" "kitsch value but little else" "obnoxious and ridiculous" "It isn't a pretty sight." Honestly, if I weren't *at* the show, and Ellenville weren't one of the picked locales, I doubt I'd be watching any of it.

Even more than Javier, the person with the most riding on him was Mr. Auerbach; after all, he grabbed onto this long-shot early on, shepherded the MKOT crew around town scoping sites and people, talked it up breathlessly, secured audition rooms, and, it seems, got to present an Ellenville solar system that essentially revolved around *his* view of it. That he guided them to mostly the right tips and leads, given the constraints of the show itself, is to his credit. Still, I wouldn't bank Ellenville's future on this one roll of the dice, or make too much of it. And we likely dodged any real negative flak, too.

Was this essay, and my final opinion, affected by the results of the final contest? No, I don't think so; win or lose, I was determined to be objective, and unbribable. I'm not displeased with the mini-Ellenville I saw (assuming the final edit doesn't warp it!), but I'd still like to see Ken Burns and PBS take a crack at our portrait!

The casual viewers (and MKOT's been slipping in the ratings each week so far, so we will guess that will be "low millions") won't learn much about us that's truly worth knowing, other than we seem to be a diverse and decent bunch of folks, capable of laughing at ourselves, but not letting ourselves be made into complete laughingstocks by a hyper host and some city slickers. OK? (all photos Copyright © 2005 ABC, Inc / Heidi Gutman, photographer, and reprinted with their permission)

The Last Word

You may have noticed the mention that this was the last issue of *Wawarsing.Net* I will be editing. I notified the *Chamber Board* of my decision after the August issue. This is not the time or place to elaborate on why this is so, but I will be contacting our regular contributors soon to express my personal thanks for all their help; without them, and the loyal advertisers who kept *W.Net* in the black, this unique opportunity to serve my community wouldn't have been possible. I thank those *Chamber* members who trusted me enough in 2002 to give me this gig on faith, and gave me great latitude then in exercising editorial judgment. I thank my wife-and-partner Dianne, who wrote, took pictures, proofed/corrected, organized, ran interference, and put up with my crazy schedule.

I will miss it all very much, but I now have a backlog of chores to address concerning my house, village, country, and planet. Peace.