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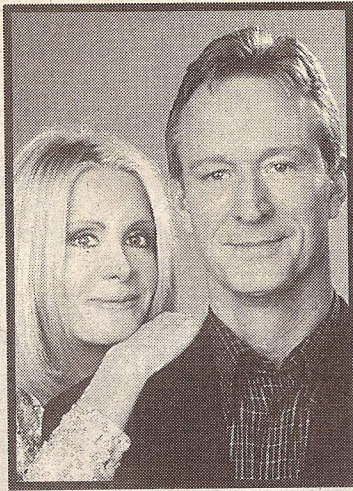
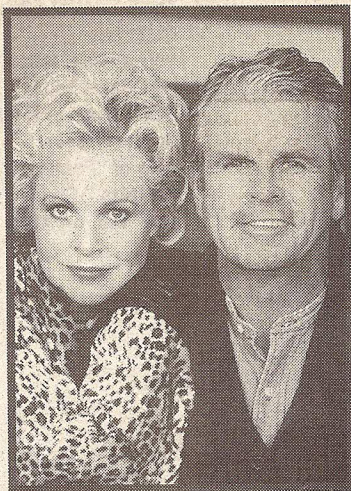
les Times®

Viewers can
count on
more joy
and bedlam
in 'Knots
Landing'
as Donna
Mills, Michele
Lee, Joan Van
Ark and the
gang reunite
on CBS

BACK IN THE SAC



Tying Up Some 'Knots'



"LANDING" COUPLES REGROUP: Cul-de-sac residents, from left, Anne and Greg (Michelle Phillips and William Devane), Val and Gary (Joan Van Ark and Ted Shackelford), Karen and Mack (Michele Lee and Kevin Dobson).

BY SUSAN KING TIMES STAFF WRITER

You can go home again. Just ask the cast of "Knots Landing," who reunite for the four-hour drama, "Knots Landing: Back to the Cul-de-Sac," airing Wednesday and Friday on CBS.

Making the movie, explains Kevin Dobson, "was like meeting an old friend you haven't seen in a couple of years. You pick up where you left off." "It's that wonderful thing about revisiting the past," says Michele Lee. "It's never the same, but for some reason it's as if we never left. We went through marriages, deaths, boyfriends and breakups and god knows what during the course of 14 years."

It's been four years since "Knots Landing," the spinoff of "Dallas," left the airwaves after a remarkable run. "Knots Landing" ties with "Dallas" as the second longest-running dramatic series in TV history—14 seasons. ("Gunsmoke," which ran for 20 seasons, is first.)

The majority of the series' regulars are back for this project, including William Devane (Greg Sumner), Kevin Dobson (Mack MacKenzie), Michele Lee (Karen MacKenzie), Donna Mills (Abby Cunningham), Ted Shackelford (Gary Ewing), Joan Van Ark (Val Ewing) and Michelle Phillips (Anne Matheson).

Of course, the writers have filled

the four hours with enough romance, murder, dirty dealings and other juicy plot developments to get fans tied up in "Knots" once more.

Mack and Karen's stable marriage is on the rocks because of Mack's midlife crisis and the fact that they disagree about whether to tell their adopted daughter Meg (Francesca Smith) her father is the powerful Greg Sumner.

Meanwhile, Val is working on a screenplay with a boozy Hollywood hunk of a writer (Michael Woods), who seems more interested in seducing her than in completing the script. Greg's niece Kate (Stacy Galina) returns to the California cul-de-sac with a 4-year-old blond daughter she claims is fair-haired Gary's child. The scheming Abby is so desperate for money to pay back taxes that she moves in with Karen and Mack. She makes a big mistake, though, when she goes to Greg for help.

Lee says fans have been asking her for four years when there would be a reunion movie. "We had such an enormous audience," she says. "It's been relentless."

If it was up to Dobson, the series never would have ended. "It was a miscalculation," the actor insists. "I think CBS, in their determining they wanted to move on to something else, was premature in yanking this. It wasn't ready to go. This show was on for 14 years. I always said it would go for 20. If I hear the excuse from whoever 'they' are that it was too expen-

sive [to produce], everybody made their money. We had a running relationship with the public."

Last year's successful "Dallas" reunion movie was just two hours. "Knots" executive producer Michael Fierman says "Back to the Cul-de-Sac" warranted four hours because "there were more characters who had to be serviced. We needed more time. If [the cast was] going to be gracious enough to come back and do a reunion picture, we wanted to be able to serve our top people properly."

Donna Mills, who left the series after nine seasons to concentrate on producing and starring in TV movies, says it wasn't easy getting a script everyone liked. "We kind of had to fight to get a lot of it to be the way we wanted it to be," she says.

"I wasn't going to come back and do some character somebody else had written that they thought was Abby and wasn't," she explains. "We all became very protective of our characters. I think that's one of the reasons why the show lasted so long, because our characters stayed true to themselves and didn't go off into total, weird tangents."

Dobson acknowledges he was a tad apprehensive at first about a reunion. "[I thought] they are just going to show people around, but it has a nice story and it's strong."

Just as in the original series, "Back to the Cul-de-Sac" has its share of funny moments, especially in the scenes involving Karen and Abby.

"One of the nice things about 'Knots' is that we always had a sense of humor about the show, about each other and what people do in life," Mills says. "Even if you don't like somebody you kind of laugh about it sometimes. We tried to make it not too deadly serious all the time. I think that helped the show a lot."

Lee says that she and Dobson "had the kind of fun an actor would have playing out-and-out comedy. [And] I did scenes with Joan Van Ark that were out-and-out girlfriend stuff."

Audiences, Lee says, especially identified with Karen and Mack. Whenever there was a suggestion of attraction between Mack and another woman, "we started to get major mail. The women were furious [because of] what he represented. Mack represented what they wanted their husbands to be."

"You could touch these characters," Dobson says. "You knew them. They were your neighbors, your relatives. So it was easy to relate. They weren't out of touch [with reality]."

Fierman believes the actors' loyalty to the series ultimately led to its longevity. "We didn't have a large turnover," he says. "We had a wonderful nucleus of actors who stayed with the show. I don't know if we would have been able to accomplish that run if we started losing actors early."

"Knots Landing: Back to the Cul-de-Sac" airs Wednesday and Friday at 9 p.m. on CBS.