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AMENDING THE BOOKS



"Campaign To Save Beverly Hills" finally reveals a prominent hotel is bankrolling its movement with a \$500,000 contribution.

By Andrea Simpson • page 18

people & profiles

Beverly Hills' Own "Dr. 90210"

From rags to riches, Dr. Robert Rey finds himself on reality TV.

By Tamara Schweitzer

Dr. Robert Rey has received international attention from his debut TV series, "Dr. 90210", on the all-entertainment channel, E! Network. As a result of his highly innovative medical techniques, Rey was able to peak the curiosity of E! producers, which, in turn, literally landed him the role of his life. *The Weekly* talks to Rey about his new-found fame.

"Dr. 90210" follows the trials and tribulations of your life as a plastic surgeon in Beverly Hills. What are some of the most interesting cases on the show?

We have a little bit for everyone. We have the cutting edge operations. The newest rage in Beverly Hills is the butt augmentation. Gone are the days of the little, tiny, skinny butts. Now the rage is for a butt that's just a little bit fuller. We've seen a 600 percent increase in butt augmentations. I've done several rock and roll stars and many times those butts aren't real. [The show] educates the public on plastic surgery, the newest

operations, how to take care of yourself, who is a candidate and who's not. You see me reject a girl. This drop dead, perfect looking girl shows up and wants plastic surgery, and I said, "Sweetie, you're perfect. There's nothing I can do for you." We also do a little pro bono, so it's not just frou-frou.

Many times in the show, you cannot help but cry. Once a month I go to a clinic in South Central L.A. and do some pro bono work down there. One of the episodes is dedicated to that. I go down there and I find this super sad story; this lady with little kids who lives in a trailer. This lady actually has four breasts. Talk about poor girl. So we fixed her and she becomes so happy. So we do pro bono, exciting trends, new operations.

You [also] come home with me; everyone likes the little dogs, we got the kids, I'm always in trouble with my wife, she's always yelling at me because I'm trying to find the balance between the profession and family, and it's a little bit difficult for me to find that balance. I usually start about 7 a.m. and

come home about 11 p.m. I finally hired a physician's assistant, [Hayley's idea] and it helps out a little bit [and] I'm starting to come home earlier. But we can all relate to that. I had one physician pull me over and he said, "Robert, I relate to your story. Because every guy wants to try to do a little bit better in their life." Every guy and gal has a dream. I'm basically the American dream. Here's [a guy] from the south of the border, and from a bunch of lucky turns and twists I end up having lots of opportunity and I make something of it. People can relate to that.

How were you chosen for the title role in "Dr. 90210"?

I arrived in California [after finishing residency] and I rented a little tiny apartment on Crescent Drive and I rented a tiny space on Spalding Drive [for an office]. Of course [at first] I had no patients. So, I would drive north for about six hours and I would be a general physician for the migrant workers. Six hours from here is a little town [in the Central Valley] called Dos Palos. On the weekends I drove up to Dos Palos and I was working with the migrant workers. I came back to my Latin roots and it really warmed my heart to be able to help these people. On the weekdays I would run back to Beverly Hills. They would pay like \$1,000 per weekend, and that way I survived. Lo and behold, my first patient walks in, circa 1999. This girl works at the E! Channel. She walked in, but I didn't know she worked there.

The nice thing about Harvard Medical School is they taught me some really neat things. They taught me how to do the breast



Dr. Robert Rey stars as the "Dr. 90210"

augmentation through the belly button. The whole idea of plastic surgery is making people beautiful. Then why put two holes on their chest? The belly button is a scar that nature left behind. Doesn't it make sense to put a scar in a scar, so you're not adding a new scar? I did an operation like that on this [first patient], which not too many people in town were doing at that time, or even today. Every time a producer would walk into the E! Channel she would tell them that she got her breasts done this way. And they would ask her who did it, and she would say Dr. Rey in Beverly Hills.

Not surprisingly, two months later I get a

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with this Mormon family. My mom finally snuck out and ran away from the clutches of my father and she made it to America. So then [me and my siblings] go live with her, and we end up settling in Arizona. I went to high school; I got accepted to Cornell University, but I couldn't go of course, because I was a poor Latin kid. I ended up going to Arizona State University and I ended up graduating number one in my class in chemistry. I ended up going to Boston for medical school, and I went to Harvard University for graduate school. From there I did an internship and then I went to UCLA to do a residency. Then I did two years of reconstructive training and I went back to Harvard Medical School for a cosmetic fellowship. I finished this monstrous 18-year training at 36.

My last day of residency at Harvard, my professor walked up to me and said, "Robert, the big day has arrived, you're done. Where are you going?" I said, "I'd like to go to Beverly Hills." And he says, "Why?" Well, it's kind of like Frank Sinatra said. He said, if you've conquered New York, you've conquered the free world. I figured Beverly Hills was the place for me. Plus, I had nothing to lose. Beverly Hills is the mountain top of plastic surgery.

What is it like doing plastic surgery in Beverly Hills, considering that Beverly Hills and Hollywood are the meccas of reinvention?

Everyone makes fun of the film industry.

Everyone makes fun of frou-frou Hollywood. Let's not forget, before we make too much fun of this area, that we add to America's gross national product trillions of dollars. In a country that's losing its exports to the rest of the world, one of our biggest exports is the film industry. Not only does it bring a fortune to America, it helps proliferate throughout the world ideas of democracy and of a better life. However, to be in the industry, it's bone crushing competition. Every single day I meet these actors and celebrities; everyone thinks these actors are dumb, everyone thinks these producers are crazy. I've gotten the opposite impression. They're very smart, they're very professional. They come to plastic surgeons because it's an extremely competitive field. There's nothing wrong with looking your best. After all, you're there to entertain people. On the screen they create fantasy. At 36 I finish and I'm ready to head to Beverly Hills. Basically, one out of every 12 of the world's plastic surgeons are within two miles of my office. It's massive competition. But that's good for the consumer when they come into Beverly Hills.

How do you think the show portrays the plastic surgery industry?

Sometimes the criticism that people can voice towards us-- and there's very little criticism-- is why put plastic surgery on TV? Because it educates the public that medicine is not a fix all. We've come a long way in 50 years. World War II is basically where plastic surgery had its birth. With the carnage of

war, we learned a lot about how to fix the human body. It educates the public that yes, we can make their life better, but we're not going to make you a multimillionaire, we're not going to make you Miss America, we're just going to improve what you have. So it educates the public with the reality of plastic surgery, with the new techniques. It gives them more choices. Business has gone up by 32 percent.

But the criticism is that if it's good for plastic surgery, haven't some of these shows gone out of control? Let me address that issue because it comes up a lot. Basically, it's a maturation process. Some of the shows have gotten a little bit too edgy. I think this idea of pitting one emotionally challenged gal against the other in a competition is going a little bit too far. My show represents a maturation process, there is no competition, we don't do 13 operations on the same person, we don't pay these people, they are my actual patients. I think the public has received it very well. We get about 900 e-mails a night, and maybe two or three are bad, so I think people respect what we have done. 330 million people watch the E! Channel every night. Donald Bull [is our producer]. We got really lucky, we signed a great producer. Donald puts a lot of charm of Beverly Hills in the show; the streets, the house, the little commerce. That's piped into 330 million homes every night.

Since you've been on the show, do people around Beverly Hills and elsewhere recognize you more? What's that like?

I had to go promote this summer and when I landed in Brazil, I felt like the Beatles landing in New York. There were thousands of screaming people. I'm thinking, "Wait a minute, I just went to medical school, what is this?" In Brazil, I would walk into these stadiums, they have these huge screen drops and they were flashing "Dr. 90210" scenes, and Madonna South America, we're all on the stage together, and it's like, "Oh man, this is out of control."

When we walk in the streets [in Beverly Hills], Rodeo Drive has lots and lots of tourists, so they come up to us and ask to take a picture. We don't mind, we're so grateful to them for helping out the ratings. We walk around and people recognize us.

I went to LegoLand with my family, and I kind of forgot that we had a TV show. I'm not acting or dressing recognizable, but one person recognizes us and then another and another, and then it got out of control. It got so bad that I actually had to go sit behind a bush because I just couldn't handle it anymore. It took me off guard.

Do you think the show provides an accurate portrayal of the person you are?

The show is like a novella, like a soap opera. It's very different than other shows. The shows are tied in, so you grow with me. The first episode, I'm kind of new, I'm trying to get established, I'm trying to spend time with my patients. As you become more and more comfortable with your job and start to change your goals, you can relax a little and

spend more time with your family.

When [the show] first came out, I'm struggling to get my practice up and running, I'm trying to spend time with my patients and I don't have much help. In the first episode, I barely made it to my daughter's birthday party. My wife is upset with me and I'm trying to find a balance between profession and family and I'm not doing a good job.

As the season progresses, you observe that I hire physician's assistants, that I plan a very romantic getaway with my wife. As the year progressed, I spend more and more time with my family. This is where there's a little interjection of drama. Donald [Bull] sat down with me one day and said, "No conflict, no TV show. You choose Robert. You can have conflict at work, or you can have conflict at home, your choice. Obviously, I don't want to have conflict at work. I don't want the patients suffering. I don't want something going wrong. My wife and I we're like rocks, we're tight and we're going to be together until we die. So I could take a few hits at home. There's a little conflict, sometimes nudged on, at home, which gets resolved. Does it depict me as I am-- it depends on what episode you're watching. If it's towards the end of the season, yes, if it's earlier in the season, maybe not 100 percent. No one wants to watch you go home, take your shoes off and read the newspaper. There's got to be a little bit of conflict.

How do you want people to perceive

you when they watch the show?

I want people to think of me as here is a guy who's not perfect, who's struggling to find a balance in life between profession and family, but [who] unequivocally truly cares about his patients, cuts no corners and treats medicine not as a business. To me medicine is not a business and I even say so in the show. This is not a dollar bill; this is somebody's daughter on the table. This is not business growth, somebody cried over this girl when she went to school for the first time, somebody stayed up with this girl all night when she had her first flu. I do not make medicine a business; medicine to me is a religion. I've been really fortunate. I have one of the lowest infection rates, one of the lowest complication rates in this area. I want them to remember a doctor who really cares about his patients, has the cutting edge technology, treats medicine as a religion, but has his vulnerabilities. I'm definitely a family man. I'm not a playboy.

Do you feel now that you are a part of the Beverly Hills community?

We have only been in town six years. It was only until recently that I started to become established. We are just now starting to participate in the community a little bit. We are very involved with my daughter's school-- Beverly Hills Presbyterian. Our daughter is three and our little boy is four months. I finally put down roots, we love this community, we have some awesome friends here and it's just a wonderful place. ■

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