## High ambitions amid endless 'Lean On Me'

PARTRIDGE from 1E

which went off the air 30 years ago after a hugely successful run.

Co-executive produced by original Keith Partridge and heartthrob David Cassidy, In Search Of follows the quest of several contestants chosen at open auditions that were held here last weekend. More tryouts will be held in Los Angeles, New York and Minneapolis. Ultimately, eight contestants for each role will enter a sevenweek competition to find the ultimate neo-Partridges, the next Cassidy, Danny Bonaduce, Susan Dey and Shirley Jones.

Ryan and all of the other auditioners have been told to select a few 1970s songs from a list of 15 available on VH1's Web site. Like many other would-be Dannys, he will be singing Three Dog Night's jaunty Joy to the

But in an attempt to zig when the rest of the redheaded competition is zagging, Ryan's other selection is Cher's Gypsies, Tramps and Thieves. A bold choice, to be sure.

Inside the theater, mercihely away from the heat, a shaggy-haired, twentysomething Keith wannabe is singing Bill Withers' Lean On Me in a clear, beautiful voice. Producer Jeff Margolis, VH1 executive Jeff Olde, casting director Tara-Anne Johnson, and original Partridge Danny Bonaduce lean forward to listen.

Technically, they're looking for a "triple threat," veteran producer Margolis puts it, someone "who can come in, sing, do comedy and resemble the original cast. We want people who can have fun with the characters."

Casting director Johnson says that at least two of the songs, Lean on Me and Band of Gold, are being sung repeatedly and, frankly, are beginning to get on the judges' nerves.

"But if the 101st time someone does Lean On Me. they nail it, they're going to stand out," she says. "Otherwise, it's 'Great, another Lean On Me."

Crystal Dawn Heffernan is about to deliver yet another Band of Gold, and she's going to stand out. The 17-yearold Boynton Beach resident is wearing a poncho. Laurie wore ponchos. Crystal borrowed it from the costume room at Dreyfoos School of the Arts, where in the fall she will be the thespian president of the senior class.

However, she's prepared to miss part of her senior year to go to L.A. and star on a TV show.

"I don't like reality shows at all, but it sounded like a great audition to go to," says Crystal, who has introduced herself to the judges as Crystal Dawn, which would have been the best 1970s stage name ever.

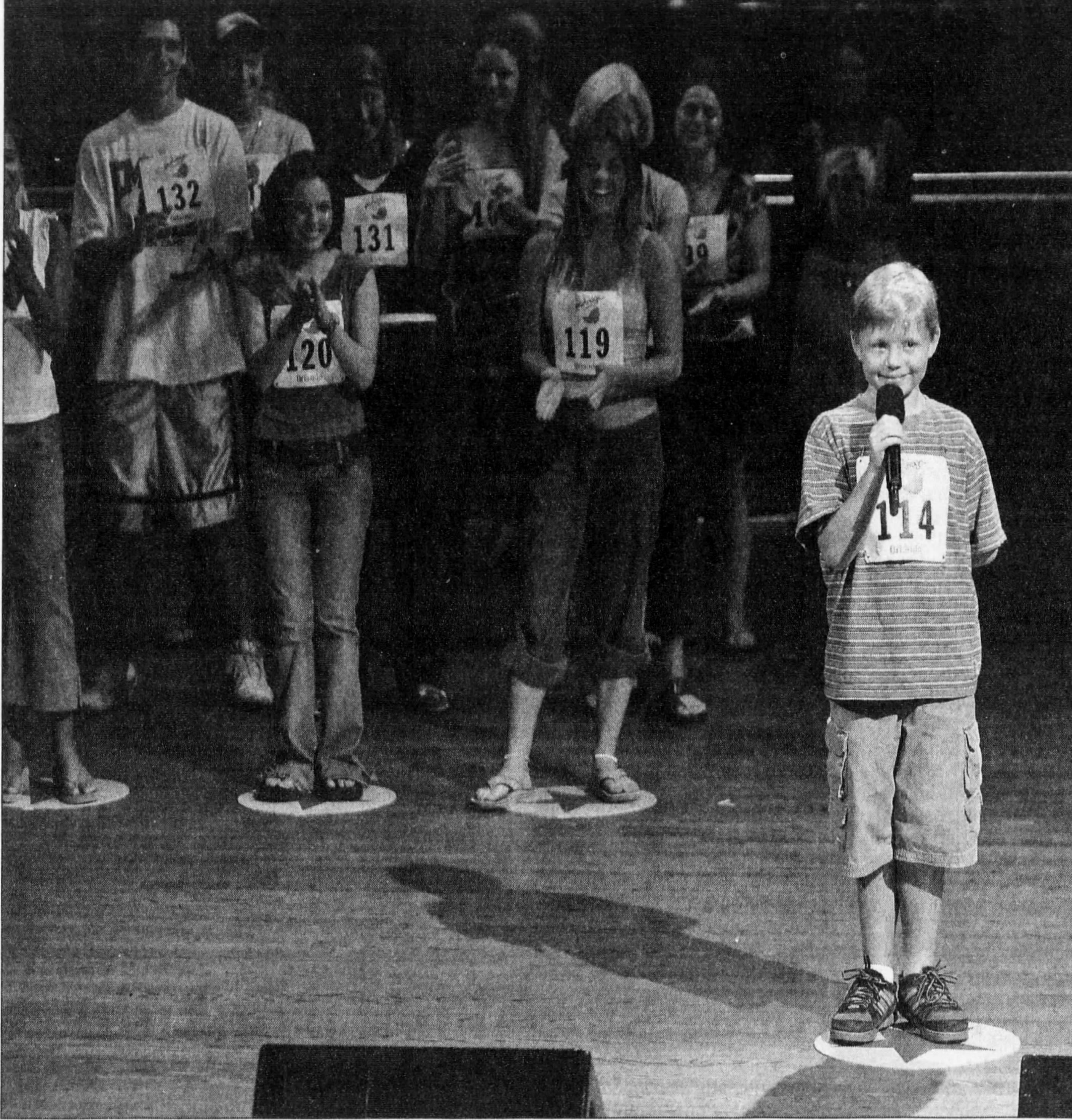
"I met Danny Bonaduce, and he asked me that if I became famous, would I be like Britney Spears and become a lunatic," she says. "I told him no. I want to be a good role model."

Ironic, considering some of Bonaduce's post-Partridge antics.

Anyway, back downstairs, Kelly Knapp of Lake Worth and Mindy Dolandis of Boca Raton both wait on the sidelines for their Lauriewannabe daughters to sing. A camera guy walks by and asks the parents, "If your child is picked, can you give us a big 'Whoo'?"

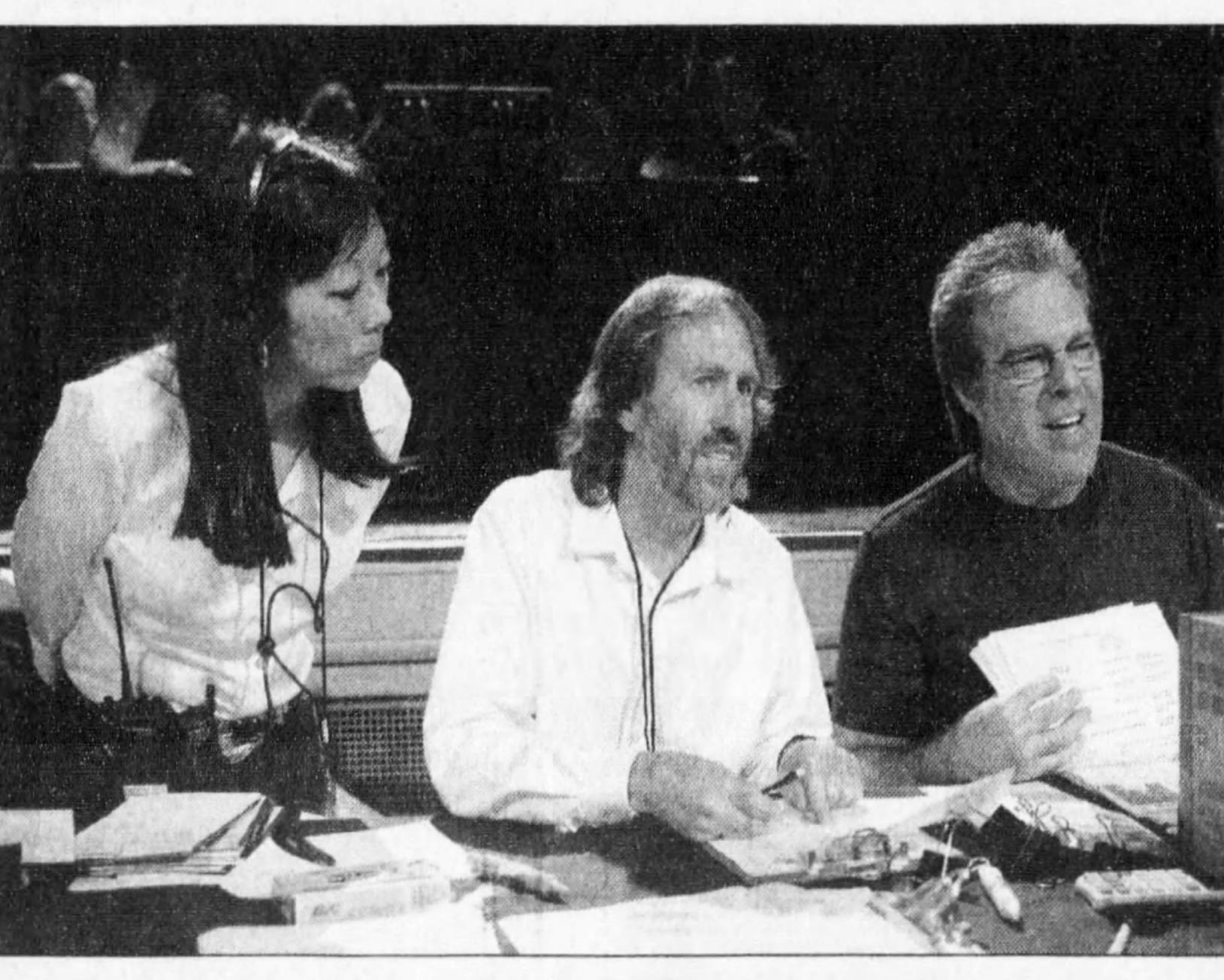
"You want a cartwheel, too?" a father deadpans.

Dolandis' daughter Chloe, a bubbly 19-year-old who speaks in exclamation points, is called to take her place with the semifinalists, while Knapp's daughter, 17year-old Susan Dey lookalike Amber, appears not to have been chosen. Until.



Photos by PRESTON MACK

Ryan Richard Thomas of Jupiter, auditioning as Danny, was a hit singing I Think I Love You, which was the No. 1 song for three weeks in 1970.



Producers (from left) Gloria Fujita O'Brien, Mick McCullough and Jeff Margolis judge the talent during the open casting call for In Search of The Partridge Family at Orlando's Hard Rock Cafe.

A pair of Laurie hopefuls, Crystal Dawn Heffernan (left) of Boynton Beach and Chloe Dolandis of Boca Raton, ham it up after the open casting call. Both are in the running for the role originally played by Susan Dey.

"I'm sorry," audition moderator Carrie Anne Inaba says. "We've got one more.

Relieved, Amber Knapp steps forward with the rest of the semifinalists as her mother smiles. The two head upstairs so that Amber can practice Joy to the World. She sings, animated, into a block of wood, which is standing in as a microphone.

Not that this fazes Amber, who is home-schooled —"My sister has an amplifier with a microphone, but before she got that I was practicing with a phone, a spoon, whatever I could find," she confides.

Chloe Dolandis, the current Miss Florida Atlantic University, has already been on TV, singing Martha and the Vandellas' Heat Wave for the notoriously tough audiences on Showtime At The Apollo "Amateur Night." ("I didn't win, but I didn't get booed off either!")

Landing the role of Laurie Partridge could be Chloe's big break. It's already provided her a reason to buy a poncho: "I got this yesterday!" Chloe enthuses. "I wanted an excuse to buy one! I crochet, too. I want to make one!"

Chloe is one of the few wavy-haired Lauries; most have optioned for the stick-

straight Susan Dey look. But there are definite factions among the Lauries, the largest contingent of potential Partridges. You've got your hippie Lauries, your modern Lauries, one or two Britney Lauries, and even one lone black Laurie.

"I know that Laurie wasn't black, but I wanted to audition anyway," 12-year-old Victoria Rehman of Orlando explains before launching into a spirited version of The Jackson 5's I'll Be There. The judges, impressed with her spunk, send her to the next round.

"Wasn't that great?" Bonaduce says later. "And she sang a song by Michael Jackson, who isn't black either!"

Right before lunch, little Ryan Thomas, the "Danny" wannabe from Jupiter, comes forward to sing the Partridge Family hit I Think I Love You. Sighs and murmurs of "He's so cute!" rise among the waiting moms and various crew people, and Ryan passes to the next

After lunch, the Dannys are the first group to have their callbacks, where they'll be singing with a full band. This time, Ryan does Gypsies, Tramps and Thieves. He doesn't hit every note. But a 9-year-old boy singing Cher

is, well, adorable, and he's soon on his way to the second day of auditions.

The Lauries are next. Crystal Dawn sings, followed by Amber, and then Chloe, who nails Midnight Train To Georgia, even though "I know I didn't sing the right words, but I was confident in my performance, and pretended I knew what I was talking about."

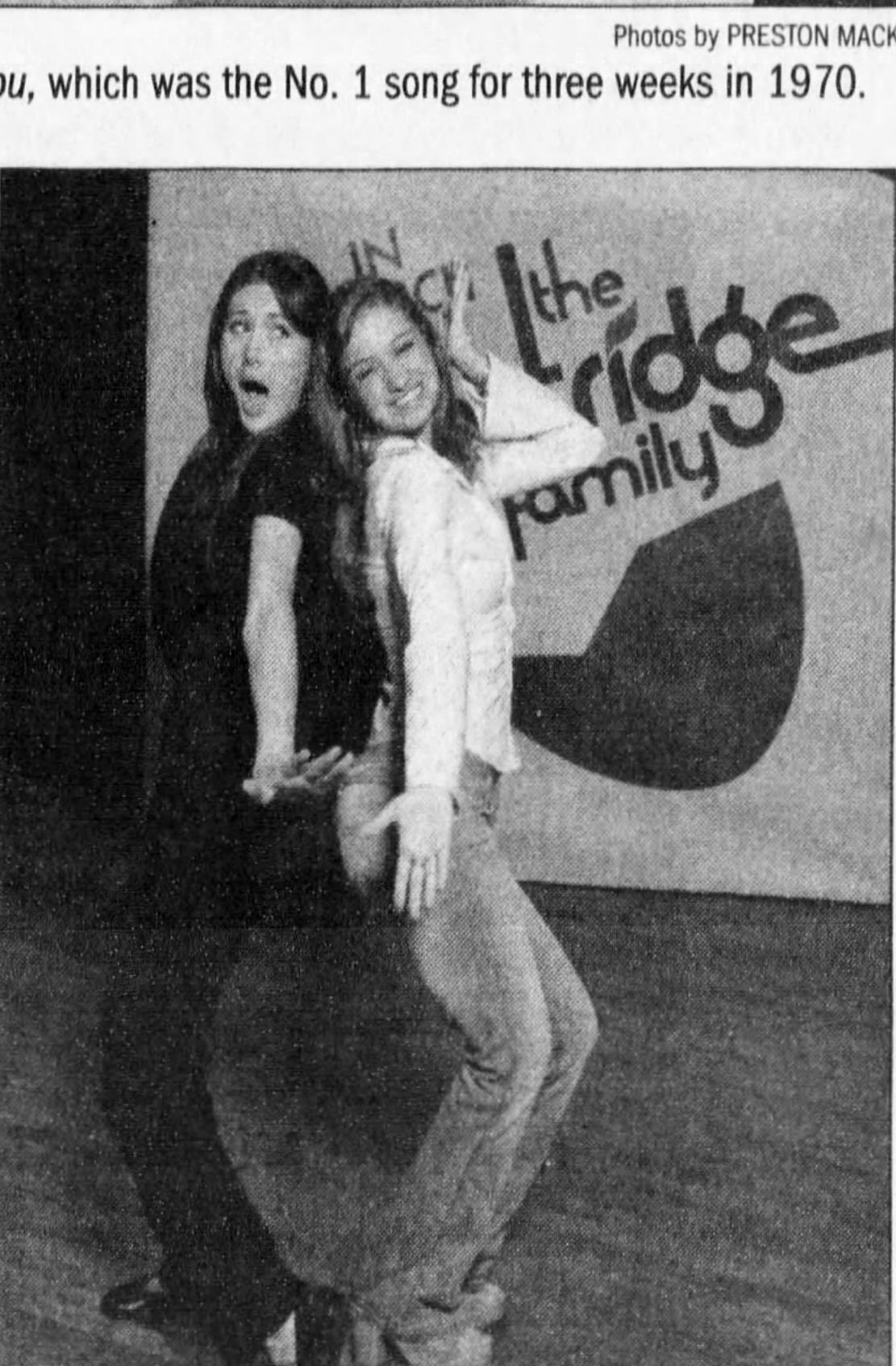
The judges don't seem to mind, because she, Crystal and Amber are among the 14 Lauries called back for tomorrow's acting tryouts. Kelly Knapp goes to inform her three younger daughters of their sister's success and tell them that they'll now be able to go ride some rides.

Outside in the hallway, several semifinalist Lauries crowd around Danny Bonaduce for the cameras, as a subdued Crystal Dawn, sans poncho, reflects on the day.

"This is fun," she says, stretching. "I'm not trying to think further than tomorrow. I'm tired, but this is what I want to do, so I can't help but be happy."

Sounds a little like the lyrics to a certain theme song we know.

Epilogue: Last Sunday, two of the Palm Beach County finalists, little Ryan Thomas



and Amber Knapp, find out they will travel no further on this Partridge bus. Ryan is "disappointed," dad Jeff reports, and Amber "is excited to have gotten as far as she did," mom Kelly says. Amber has even signed up already for SunFest auditions.

Meanwhile, things are looking up for Chloe Dolandis and Crystal Dawn Heffernan, who are still in the running to be Laurie finalists. There are still three more audition stops to go, so on Aug. 6, after the finalists from those cities have been selected, Chloe and Crystal will find out whether they'll be among the eight final Lauries to move on to L.A.

'It's been a really great time!" Chloe reports on Sunday. "Tve made some really great friends already . . . but oh my gosh! It's just getting started!"

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days (left) and now.



## Cassidy: Mood then, now similar

Los Angeles Daily News David Cassidy talks about plans for the new reality show.

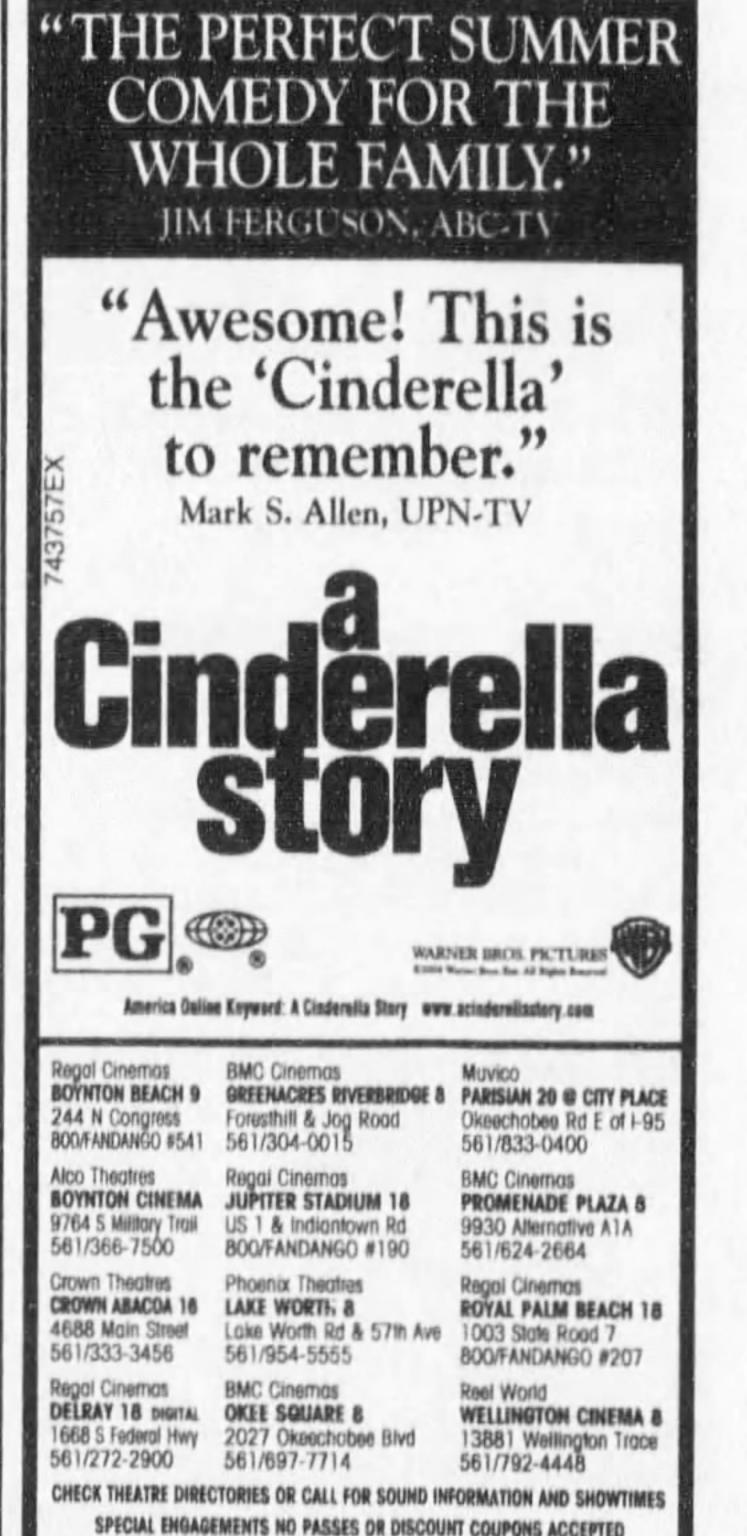
On the new show: "We want to do it right. I've been carrying the torch for the last 25 years, and I want to make sure the show will be funny and have integrity. We don't want to taint the brand of the show I will forever be associated with.

"I've turned down an awful lot of money to do a network reunion special in the past," he added. "This new show is not that. This is a scripted show with a new cast. We're going for talent, not look-alikes."

Why the original series remains popular: "It caught people's imagination. Here was this family bonding over music. Yes, there was bickering and conflict, but for people who were in unhappy homes, they really identified with the show. That was part of the magic. It was the last gasp of innocence."

On working with Danny Bonaduce again: "We haven't performed together for many years. He's an extremely funny guy. I've always been one of his strongest advocates even when he made some poor decisions in his life. We genuinely care about each other. We have a very comfortable rapport that could be a bit like Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis — Dino was always the straight guy but very funny, and Lewis was a fulltime comic. I don't know if I would go that far, but I love working with Danny."

On why he got interested in the 'Partridge' life again: "I wasn't lured by the money. But what we're faced with in America and the world, I think, is not unlike the mood of the country when we were in Vietnam and The Partridge Family originally aired. What we're experiencing now with Iraq — it's time to get happy."



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## Bonaduce won't abide a 'cute kid' as new Danny

▶ BONADUCE from 1E

Q: Do you have any advice on what it takes to be a Partridge?

A: I don't have any say whatsoever in the selection. But if you're going to be me, you need a good legal defense team.

I'd like to see a hideous kid get the part, because I like being the 44-yearold who played Danny Partridge, and I'll be damned if I'll help hire a cute kid to replace me.

Q: How about the others?

as talented as David Cassidy is as a musician, as good an actor as he was, you really need to be the cutest guy on your block. And you'll need puka shells. And Shirley Jones, she was an Academy Award winner for Elmer Gantry, so

A: To be Keith, I've got to tell you —

these are huge shoes to fill, big clown shoes to fill. You really need to be able to sing and act — and be able to drive a multicolored bus. That bus was the seventh Partridge, the Peter Best of vehi-Q: What's your favorite Partridge

Family memory?

A: There are so many. I thought the show was kind of cool, but when the entire sixth grade beats you up, screaming "You're gay!" it's not so cool. But my favorite memory is when David Cassidy and I stole the school bus. We had no idea how fast the whole

thing had spread, so we found out you can't drive a multicolored bus with "The Partridge Family" written on the side of it down Hollywood Boulevard and not get noticed.

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