

Karen Feld

Lecturers tell all about it

The platform industry has come a long way since Ralph Waldo Emerson received a fee of $5 plus oats for his horse for lecturing. "Lecturers today represent one of our most inflated commodities," says Dan Moore, director general of the International Platform Association, the professional organization of the speaking circuit.

Today, self-proclaimed experts in almost any field earn tens of thousands of dollars per talk. Speakers — Robert Kennedy Jr., Virginia Gov. Doug Wilder, Playboy CEO Christie Hefner, comedian Pat Paulsen and film star Jayne Meadows — showcased their talks at the annual IPA convention at the Mayflower Hotel last weel. Charles Keating, the former owner of Lincoln Savings and Loan, told the group "How to Save Three Hundred Billion Dollars," while Art Linkletter talked about "The Most Unpredictable Audiences of My Career."

Charles Keating insists he did "nothing wrong" in the management of the Lincoln S&L. "Only the Congress has the power to wreck the institution," he said. Keating says he refuses to appear before the House Banking Committee because "it's a hanging jury."

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One way to get the attention of a media big shot is to send him a chain letter. An executive chain letter is making the rounds among the superstitious in Washington, New York and Los Angeles. This isn't the old-fashioned kind where you send postcards or booze. This is a good-luck letter with scary threats if you dare break the chain. It arrives complete with a packet of cover letters signed by VIPs who sheepishly feared the worst if they didn't instruct their secretaries to pass it on to five friends.

Washington Post executive editor Ben Bradlee sent it to friends with a note: "A man will do anything out of fear."

Art Buchwald mailed it to female pals including Cosmo editor Helen Gurley Brown with a letter: "This is the best sex I ever had. The last person to break this chain was seated next to Morton Downey Jr. at her next dinner party."

Just when former American University President Richard Berendzen, who resigned after it became known that he had made obscene phone calls from his university office, thought his problems had been resolved, he's about to be slapped with a lawsuit. Susan Allen, the Virginia woman whom he called, who ran a day-care service, has retained an attorney to sue him for emotional distress. Following public disclosure of the calls, Dr. Berendzen was treated at the Johns Hopkins University sexual dysfunction clinic.

Supreme Court nominee David Souter has been making the rounds, meeting with key senators on Capitol Hill. He ducked a question about exiled New York Yankees owner George Steinbrenner. "Any kind words for George Steinbrenner?" Judge Souter cautiously replied: "I wouldn't touch anything that hot." Imagine the "hot" issues he'll face on the Supreme Court if confirmed.

Even with an $85-million annual income, Pat Kluge was short of cash the other day. The 41-year-old estranged wife of Metromedia founder John Kluge couldn't pay a $72 traffic fine in Charlottesville, Va. The court wouldn't accept her check after the judge reduced her charge from reckless driving to improper driving. She'll have to reimburse her attorney from the settlement she receives from the nation's richest man. Perhaps, she should consider a chauffeur.

These are the "Capital Connections."