

## FINDING TIME FOR WORTHY CAUSES

MLM president Mark Landesman receives this year's *Variety* Business Managers Elite Award

By IAIN BLAIR

**B**usiness managers oversee all aspects of their clients' finances, and help them invest smartly and build and retain wealth. But business managers can also make a big difference in the lives of others with their ongoing charitable work and causes.

That's why *Variety* is honoring Mark Landesman, president of ML Management Associates of New York, at its annual invitation-only Business Managers Elite breakfast Oct. 27 in Beverly Hills.

Each year the prize recognizes a business manager not just for impact on the business management profession, but also for a strong commitment to philanthropy.

Landesman's main charitable cause is the nonprofit Count Basie Theater in Red Bank, N.J., a major cultural arts center that enriches the surrounding communities by providing educational outreach and artistic experiences.

Landesman began his career in 1981 at a New York accounting firm. He got into the business "in a rather weird way," he says. The firm handled a lot of people from NBC's "Saturday Night Live." Among them, he adds, "was this up-and-coming comedian Eddie Murphy. In 1986 I found myself on a bus with him on his tour. I was a huge fan, and over the next few years we got to know each other really well."

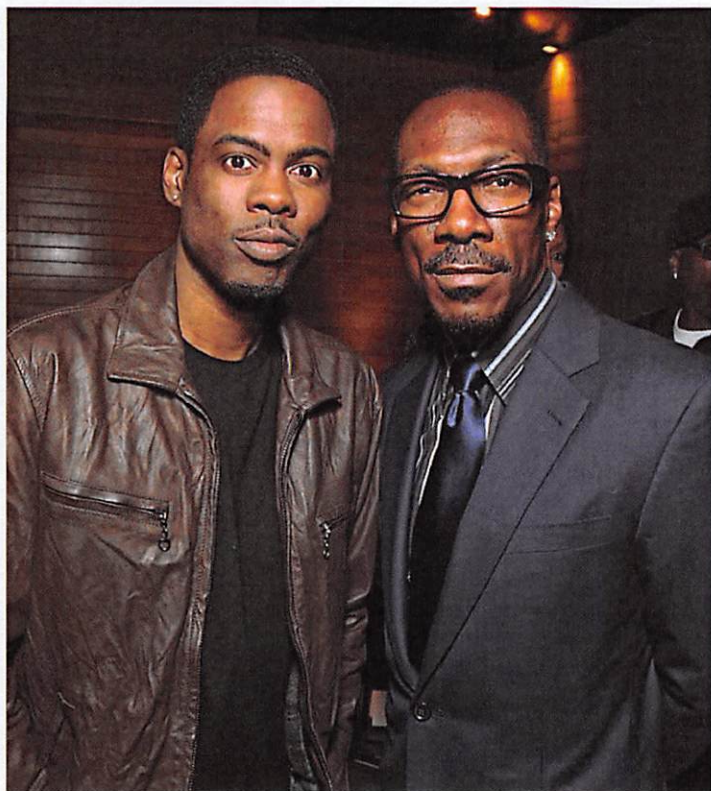
It was the beginning of a long, close, professional and personal relationship that endures to this day. "When I →



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I picked the Count Basie Theater because many of my clients have played there.”

Mark Landesman





← left the firm and started up my own company, Eddie was our very first client," he recalls. "Usually when you start up, you're hoping to one day find that one big client, but for me it all began with Eddie, and he changed my life. He took an average CPA from New York and turned me into a very successful one."

In 1988, Landesman became the VP and CFO of Eddie Murphy Prods., and shortly thereafter ML Management Associates was established, as Landesman also began representing Arsenio Hall and Chris Rock, both of whom are still clients.

"I got thrown into the comedy business in a very big way, with these three huge clients right out of the gate," Landesman says.

Next year MLM celebrates its 30th anniversary, which has grown substantially over the years. Landesman now represents well over 100 A-list actors, comedians, writers and directors, including Zac Efron, Tracy Morgan and Tina Fey, and employs

a staff of 40.

"We're the gatekeepers for our clients, and we have to do good business to maintain those clients," he reports. "One of the big challenges is in turn teaching them good business strategies, as they're in the arts and focused on their careers."

He adds, "I wish everyone would listen to us and our advice, but not everyone does."

But there's another dimension to Landesman's interests. Just as important as his work and career, he says, is his interest in charities and philanthropic causes.

"Some years ago, my partner Paul Zukowski and I decided we needed to do a little more, to give back after so much success," he says. "And I chose to get involved in the Count Basie Theater in Red Bank, New Jersey. One of the reasons I picked it is [because] so many of my clients have played there over the years, and I got to know all the people involved."

The nonprofit is one

**Dynamic Duo**  
Chris Rock and Eddie Murphy are among Mark Landesman's longtime clients with successful careers in comedy and TV.

of New Jersey's premier centers for cultural arts and is dedicated to fostering inclusive artistic experiences and creative exchanges of ideas. It partners with schools and other institutions to educate, inspire and create culturally enriching experience throughout the region.

"It's so important locally, as a lot of the schools in the area have drastically cut their budgets for the arts," he says. "People go to the theater at night to see all these great shows, but what they don't know is that during the day, it runs all these after-school programs for the kids as well as summer programs."

Landesman concludes: "I've been very fortunate, so it's a great way to help people and give back to the community." ■

# WATCHING THE MONEY

These Hollywood confidants preserve their clients' wealth while preparing them for the realities of a disruptive era

## HOWARD ALTMAN

Partner, Grant, Tani, Barash & Altman

Altman increasingly sees an equity component in employment contracts, especially those involving transactions with digital media or startups. "Often the deal terms may have more emphasis on equity and options than they do in upfront compensation," he says. Getting a piece of the action is also on the rise in client investments. Altman focuses on film and TV talent, and entertainment executives. He also handles his company's administration. "I was at a dinner once with someone who didn't understand what a business manager does. I finally told him, 'It's like what's on the side of a police car: we serve and protect.'"

to ensure that the recipient is worthy. Barash handles film and TV talent, entertainment executives, and family offices for non-entertainment clients. He believes that you get what you pay for. "Someone once told me if a service provider's fee is 'free,' then it's too expensive," he says.



## EVAN R. BELL

Managing Partner, Bell & Co.



## LIZA DE LEON

Administrative Partner, Bell & Co.

Bell feels that the skinny service of just bookkeeping and tax preparation is increasingly being passed off as business management. He stresses that true business management includes crafting a financial roadmap with saving, making every transaction tax-efficient, and constant review. "A good business manager is life changing," Bell says. Besides managing the firm, Bell works with clients such as filmmakers Steven Soderbergh, Cary Fukunaga and Gavin O'Connor. De Leon supervises the firm's account executives, who handle day-to-day expenses, income and cash-flow projects for clients. They founded the firm in 1985. →



## COREY BARASH

Partner, Grant, Tani, Barash & Altman

With storms, wildfires and other natural disasters increasing charity needs, Barash says those fortunate to be working in entertainment should be philanthropic. "But like anything else, you have to have to do your due diligence," he says. This includes making sure that overhead at the recipient organization isn't excessive. He also cautions that receiving organizations may promote their connection to a donor, so it's important