

# TV host is all smiles

BY LYNN ELBER  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

## LOS ANGELES

For TV and radio host Tavis Smiley, 2006 was one for the books, and the best-seller lists.

Smiley celebrated 15 years in broadcasting, wrote a memoir focused on his childhood and education and was the force behind another book, "The Covenant with Black America," an examination of black social and political concerns.

Smiley's "What I Know for Sure" and "The Covenant," which he conceived and vigorously promoted, both landed on The New York Times' list of top-sellers.

Smiley, 42, who hosts the PBS show, "Tavis Smiley" and Public Radio International's "The Tavis Smiley Show," doesn't plan to slack off in 2007. A sequel to "The Covenant" is in progress and his annual symposium, "State of the Black Union," which airs on C-SPAN, is set for February and will expand from one day to two.

His career path hasn't been entirely smooth, as he recounts in his memoir. His tenure at Black Entertainment Television ended with a messy firing that drew viewer protests, and he had a falling-out with National Public Radio.

But Smiley, who boosted himself from a trailer park to Indiana University despite his parents' opposition, has a fierce drive that's reflected in his dynamic, rat-a-tat speech and his tightly scheduled days.

**AP: Your memoir recounts your journey from rural Indiana to the national stage. How do you view the distance between your past and present?**

**Smiley:** For me, not a day goes by, first, that I'm not grateful for the opportunities I do have. Secondly, where I don't take them seriously, ... There are a lot of people watching, listening and reading, hoping that you're going to ask the right question, praying that you're going to raise the right issue, that nobody else raised.

**Q: Do you see this as a pivotal time for activism among black Americans?**

**Smiley:** Absolutely. Three reasons, right quick: The fact "The Covenant" went to No. 1 without mainstream media support. ... Which means that everyday black

people put this book on the list.

Second, look at the midterm elections. There's no way Democrats do that without their primary, most loyal base, black folk. Three, "The State of the Black Union." It's Feb. 9 to 10 this year in Jamestown, Va., and the energy and expectation around that event (show) there's a lot of energy for some change in black America.

**Q: Does the buzz surrounding Barack Obama as a possible contender for the White House indicate America is ready to elect a black president?**

**Smiley:** I think we are, but it's got to be the right person. And I think in some ways Barack has the right image. Whether he has the right agenda and whether he can sell that agenda is another issue.

## Tavis Smiley thinking big for 2007 after year for the books

Tavis Smiley's "What I Know for Sure" and "The Covenant" both made The New York Times' best-seller list.

AP PHOTO



# Get fill of fresh food at Mexican eatery

La Bamba is a production of Chicago-bred brothers Ramiro and Antonio Aguas, who launched this quick-service burrito and taco chain in 1987 in Champaign-Urbana, Ill., appealing to the Mexican munchie needs of University of Illinois students.

They followed in 1989 with an outpost in West Lafayette to entice Boilermaker scholars. Campus oriented locations in Kentucky, Wisconsin and Ohio followed, all with late closing times to appeal to student lifestyles.

It competed with similar concepts offered by national chains Qdoba and Chipotle Grill.

There are now 27 locations in the Midwest, armed with a great marketing slogan: "Burritos as big as your head."

I checked out the La Bamba on the southside, at U.S. 31 and Shelby Street, a functional outlet with booth seating. Customers order off a huge wall menu right at the grill, where the burritos and tacos are created for all to see.

There are three sizes of burritos, featuring soft flour tortillas and meats such as diced steak, shredded marinated pork, shredded barbecue chicken and spicy Chorizo sausage.

The regular burrito (\$4.91) is about the size of foot-long sub. The super burrito (\$6.31), fashioned in a girth I suppose could be eaten by one person, is indeed as big as the average human head.

I made do with the regular roast pork burrito, with the shredded marinated pork joined by a bountiful allotment of refried beans, chopped onions and tomatoes, cheese, lettuce, sour cream, avocado and a signature hot sauce.

La Bamba makes a point of informing customers that no fryers or freezers have been used in the preparation of its foods. Fresh and grilled ingredients are fashioned into the burritos, tacos, quesadillas and Mexican white bread sandwiches, *tortas*.

All are constructed in full view of the customer, neatly and fully wrapped in the flour tortilla, which is lightly, tastily and effectively seared on the flat iron grill.

The final result is an impres-



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**Address:** 7910 U.S. 31 South (U.S. 31 and Shelby Street), Indianapolis

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**Credit cards:** Major cards accepted  
**Entrée price range:** \$3.50 to \$6.30

sively hearty and remarkably tidy sandwich, with the refried beans holding the other ingredients together nicely, and the flavorful marinated pork coming through prominently.

I also sampled the chicken taco, with onions, tomatoes and cheese, holding the lettuce, in keeping with my belief that fresh, leafy vegetables as a sandwich ingredient unduly undercut the flavor of the ingredients I really care about.

The taco in its double soft flour tortilla shell was satisfactory but it took a back seat to the majesty of the burrito.

If you want more exotic flair and authenticity from your taco, tongue and tripe are among the taco meat options.

La Bamba also lays on large flour and corn quesadillas and nachos.

Many might find the munch-worthy menu appealing to wrap up weekend revelry, which is why La Bamba makes its specialties available until 4 a.m. on Friday and Saturday nights.

*Veteran restaurant critic Reid Duffy writes a weekly review for the Daily Journal. Comments may be sent to letters@thejournalnet.com.*

## AT THE MOVIES

### 'BLOOD DIAMOND'

Leonardo DiCaprio gives another hefty performance as an amoral diamond smuggler in director Edward Zwick's African foray.

Set in Sierra Leone in 1999, "Blood Diamond" tells the story of a smuggler (DiCaprio) who agrees to help a villager (Djimon Hounsou) locate his family in return for being led to a large diamond that Hounsou's character has hidden.

The movie captures the brutality and corruption surrounding Africa's trade in so-called "conflict diamonds." An unfortunately preachy ending makes this hard-core helping of action a little too self-conscious about expressing its social conscience.

Jennifer Connelly appears as a journalist who's attempting to write an investigative article on the illicit diamond trade.

**Rated:** R, strong violence and language

### 'CASINO ROYALE'

Daniel Craig does superlative work as the new James Bond. "Casino Royale" has its share of chases, but director Martin Campbell isn't afraid to slow down and make room for a high-stakes poker game that pits 007 against an adversary (Mads

Mikkelsen) who funnels money to terrorist organizations.

The movie has an appropriately expensive look, but this Bond has a leaner, meaner feel that compensates for an excessive running time (2 hours, 24 minutes) and a few dull spots.

**Rated:** PG-13. Intense sequences of violent action, a scene of torture, sexual content and nudity

### 'CHARLOTTE'S WEB'

Julia Roberts heads a big-name voice cast in this charming, live-action adaptation of the classic E.B. White story about the friendship between Wilbur, a pig, and Charlotte, a spider.

A bit of humor enlivens the proceedings, which also explore such worthy subjects as mortality, the meaning of friendship and the importance of tolerance. A fine family film.

**Rated:** G

### 'DREAMGIRLS'

Full of strong performances and outside musical energy, "Dreamgirls" has all the makings of a big-time holiday hit, and it deserves to become one.

As you may know from all the pre-movie hype, Jennifer Hudson is the movie's great discovery.

Hudson, an "American Idol" contestant who didn't win, delivers a knockout blow as Effie White, the initial lead singer of a group called The Dreamettes.

Her rendition of "And I Am Telling You I'm Not Going" — a heart-wrenching, show-stopper of a tune — has "bring down the house" written all over it, and all the talk you've heard about an Oscar nomination seems entirely justified.

**Rated:** PG-13, for language, some sexuality and drug content

### 'THE PURSUIT OF HAPPYNESS'

Will Smith's low-key performance adds credibility to an inspirational tale about a homeless man who takes care of his young son (Smith's real-life son Jaden), completes a no-pay internship at the investment firm of Dean Witter and generally tries to stay afloat.

Based on a true story, "Pursuit" may not be a classic, but Smith does this character justice.

The movie also does a good job illustrating the catalog of woes that Smith's Chris Gardner faces as he attempts to pull himself out of destitution.

**Rated:** PG-13, some language

## TAKE IT HOME ON CD

### OH! GRAVITY

On Switchfoot's third major release, *Oh! Gravity*, the band's bright modern rock sound maintains its indie rock spirit but still sounds tailor-made for radio airplay.

But Switchfoot seems to carry more substance and wit than most of their peers.

Frontman and songwriter Jon Foreman doesn't like what he sees in the world today — greed and avarice are among his favorite targets — but the music doesn't offer complaints so much as it tries to rise above such hollow pursuits as money and adulation with brains and humor.

On the fantastic "American Dream" Foreman quips, "When success is equated with excess. The ambition for excess wrecks us. This ain't my American Dream. I want to live and die for bigger things."

The rhythm of bassist Tim Foreman

and drummer Chad Butler is rock solid, and Jerome Fontamillas (keyboards) and Andrew Shirley (guitars) round out one of the most upbeat, intelligent units you're likely to hear.

Standouts include the snappy title track, the driving "Dirty Second Hands," "Awakening," the cheeky "Amateur Lovers" and the lilting "Yesterdays."

This is an outstanding record in every sense.

Young Jeezy (Def Jam/Corporate Thugz Entertainment)

### THE INSPIRATION

Young Jeezy's latest release might better be called "The Resignation" than "The Inspiration."

The Atlanta-based rapper's follow-up to 2005's platinum-selling *Ler's Get It: Thug Motivation 101* is identically themed and similar sounding to its predecessor.

Young Jeezy (aka Jay Jenkins) takes a caustic look at peddling drugs, his message falling ambiva-

lently between condemnation and endorsement. It is what it is: You can make a lot of money selling drugs, but you'll be running from the law and probably die young.

That's not very inspiring and not the least bit enlightening, yet there's something mesmerizing about his focused fatalism.

The only color in this bleak aural landscape comes from the rapper's own supporting vocals, and even then his ad-libs and trademark cynical laugh become redundant.

However, R. Kelly's showy guest appearance on the sixth track, "Go Getta," introduces a shift in tone for the remainder of "The Inspiration," which subsequently features singer Keyshia Cole doling out soul on "Dreamin'."

But the message never really changes, and ultimately it's Young Jeezy's blunt, undecorated realism that proves most addictive on *The Inspiration*.

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