

Thank you very much for your kind donations

Madcap antics, international stars and a host of top local and national entertainers has made Telethon the success it is today — but at its heart is a commitment to the WA community.

Bret Treasure, whose father, Brian, was the first general manager of TVW Channel 7, says that the first time he saw his father cry was in 1968 when he realised that the Telethon total was going to exceed \$100,000.

Forty years later, the 24-hour televised appeal has raised \$90 million for medical research, the money going, in part, to the establishment of a world-leading medical research unit and state-of-the-art medical facilities.

In the early days, Telethon was a folksy affair, flying by the seat of its pants and relying on spirited banter between familiar faces and madcap antics of people willing to make fools of themselves for charity. But as the years went by, the 24-hour period became far more structured, attracted visitors from overseas and interstate, and became an important vehicle for the station to show off the stars of its most successful shows.

The international stars have been stellar — Sammy Davis Jr, Stevie Wonder, Celine Dion, Michael Jackson, Harry Connick Jr and Julian Lennon. Lennon was so moved by what he saw during his weekend in Perth that he made a personal \$100,000 donation.

Telethon weekend developed into one long party. Thousands made the trek to Tuart Hill to hand over their

Right: Jeff Newman with artist Pro Hart.



coins and see a star close-up. It was the one night of the year when small children were allowed to stay up late — but not too late because in the small hours content became a bit racier and more scantily clad.

Others hung on the telephone for hours, eager to make their pledge, speak to a favourite personality and have the chance to have their name read out by yet another star. Such excitement.

Today, Telethon has outgrown the TVW studios and now takes place at the Perth Convention Exhibition Centre.

In charge of the first Telethon was Max Bostock, later chief executive of TVW and the man who put so many of the channel's first productions to air: "The atmosphere created in the studio, and the whole building, by the crowds and the talent, is something I have never

experienced before or since," he said. "In fact, I believe the policy of inviting viewers into our premises for this, and other shows, has a lot to do with TVW's success in the early days."

Mr Bostock went to New Zealand to help produce that country's first Telethon and also produced the national Olympathon to raise money for the 1984 Olympic team.

The man in charge now is executive producer John Crilly, and he's been doing the job at Seven for 25 years (and before that, many years with Appealathon, down the road at Channel 9). That means he spends a sleepless weekend once a year and manages to keep a cool head as mayhem reigns around him.

He said part of the power of Telethon was the fact that it was live television, the like of which, in these pre-recorded days, we saw rarely. →