

LOTTERY: TV show may be just the ticket

Continued from Page 1

few weeks, the show has been syndicated and is now seen on stations in Peoria, Rockford and the Quad Cities.

The show, Sharp will tell you, has turned out to be more work than any of the lottery officials anticipated. Each week on the set, Sharp is on hand, along with at least one other high-ranking lottery official whose job it is to monitor the game and make sure it is run according to lottery guidelines.

And all of this comes only after a long process of randomly selecting contestants. To be eligible, players need only purchase an instant lottery ticket with three matching television screens hidden on it. About 3,000 winning tickets are sent to Springfield each week. Out of those, 100 are drawn and verified, and the six winning players are drawn from that pool.

The game requires no skill. During up to five rounds of play, players pick numbered squares on a board. Behind each square are dollar amounts ranging from \$100 to \$300 in rounds one through three. In the final two rounds, amounts are increased to \$200 to \$500. At the end of the five rounds, the player with the most money wins \$100,000.

The remaining players go on to a bonus round where they can win up to \$10,000. During all the rounds, there are other squares on the board that can wipe out a player's cash, double a prize amount, or offer a chance to win a new car.

Each contestant is also matched with two "at home" players, chosen in the same way as the show's contestants, who can win up to \$500, depending on how their contestant fares.

Since September, when the show premiered, more than \$2 million has been given away. And "The \$100,000 Fortune Hunt" has consistently been at least the second-rated slot in its 6:30 p.m. Saturday time slot, coming in after "Wheel of Fortune," lottery officials say.

The contestants are as diverse as the millions of people who buy lottery tickets each week:

■ Louis Davidson, 34, is from Danville. He is married, has one daughter and works as a general maintenance foreman. He plans to use his winnings for his daughter's education.

■ Mariene Mikos, 57, is a Chicago resident, wife, mother and paymaster at the Polish Roman Catholic Union fraternal organization.

■ Forrest Adrow, 37, of Chicago, is a hair stylist who enjoys working on cars. If he wins the big prize, he plans to study real estate and share the money with his family.

■ Roger Molski, 50, is an insurance salesman from Flossmoor, who enjoys sports in his spare time.

■ Ed McGuiggan, 32, is an operating engineer from Calumet City. Whatever money he wins, he plans to put under the mattress with the rest of his savings.

■ And then there's the final contestant, Daniel LaFauce, not yet 30. He and his wife, Debbie, are just getting settled in life. Along with their two sons, the couple lives in a rented house in Streamwood. During the day, Daniel works as a computer machinist. At night, Debbie works as



Debbie and Daniel LaFauce celebrate winning \$100,000.

Daily Herald Photo/Mark Welsh

a nurse's aide. In his spare time, Daniel coaches boys basketball.

Round 1: Davidson picks square 13, an unlucky number to most, but lucky for him, yielding \$500. Mikos, a little lady with a will to win, counters by picking square 35. She's in second place with \$200. Adrow picks square 11, and comes away with \$200. Molski goes for square seven and also nets \$200, creating a three-way tie for second place. But McGuiggan picks square six and comes up with \$300. He is quickly matched by LaFauce, who finds \$300 under square 29. In the control booth, director Robert Seid is calling out camera angles and listening as Davidson nervously taps on his microphone, causing an unnerving thump.

This is a group that producer Kathy Rivera calls a great team of players. They are lively, fun and excited — all good qualities that will help make the show more entertaining for viewers.

For Rivera, whose Barrington-based production company has generally been involved in documentaries, the game show represents a fun and challenging change of pace.

"We are not like other game shows where they screen contestants to get people who will be lively. We just get whoever comes, but they've been wonderful," Rivera said.

Still, because the contestants could be virtually any lottery player, Rivera has had to plan for all contingencies.

"We are prepared for anyone," Rivera says. "Contestants can be handicapped or non-English speaking. One week, we had to have paramedics here because a lady was epileptic. She ended up winning."

Rivera's first contact with the contestants begins with the night she calls them at home to tell them they will be on the show and what they need to do.

Contestants actually win more than the money they gather during the game. They arrive in Chicago on the night before and check into a ritzy Chicago hotel. From there, they go by limousine to an elegant restaurant. Dinner, the hotel and limousine rides are all on the lottery.

"We try to give them a really good time and make them feel special, like stars for a day," Rivera said.

Round Two: Mikos begins and adds \$100 to her score, followed by Adrow who gets \$200, Molski who gets \$100, McGuiggan who gets \$200, LaFauce who gets \$300 and Davidson who adds \$300. The tension begins to build. None of the bad "lose money" squares have shown up yet.

On the day of the taping, contestants are briefed by Rivera.

"Mostly we just try to calm them down," Rivera said. "We tell them to relax, we teach them the game, answer their questions and tell them to have fun."

Helping ease the tension are the show's co-hosts, Jeff Coopwood and Linda May Kollmeyer. Coopwood, an actor by training, serves as comic relief, easing the contestants into calm as he works his way down the row, joking with them and challenging them to have fun.

Kollmeyer is model beautiful, not surprising since that is her main profession. Between takes, she talks quietly to herself, going over the script she will read from during the show. And though Kollmeyer is blond, dolled up in glittery \$1,000 dresses each week and turns the number squares on the board, both she and Coopwood insist this is no Pat and Vanna act. Instead, they like to think of their work as a partnership, with shared responsibility for keeping the show going.

They also understand that, unlike other game show hosts, the two represent more than just the show. They also are very visible members of a

state agency.

"We are employees of the lottery so we can't play and neither can any other member of our family living in our house. My mother moved out when I got this job," Coopwood quipped.

It's round three. Mikos loses it all after hitting bankrupt. No matter, she is determined to make a comeback. LaFauce and Davidson are in the lead, LaFauce with \$700, Davidson slightly ahead with \$800. During a break between rounds, the audience gets a chance at raffle prizes. One wins a sneaker telephone, another a coffeemaker and others get lottery tickets. Kollmeyer has her makeup checked. An accountant from Deloitte & Touche secretly puts the prize amounts on the board for the next round. Now the time is coming fast. Family members in the audience are given instructions. If their player wins, they should feel free to get excited, but not too excited until they are led to the stage, lest they should trip over an electrical cord.

As the last round is played out, an assistant on the crew is given the unpopular task of writing the winner's name on the mock check.

"I hate doing this," she says. "There's not enough time and it makes me too nervous. I have to write the name in the time it takes Sharon Sharp to walk over here and get it after somebody wins."

After a few unlucky turns by other players hitting those negative numbers, LaFauce comes up with \$400 and the win. It becomes clear that his wife and mother needed no encouragement to be excited. They join him on stage, crying and quivering with excitement. Debbie hugs both hosts, Sharp, her husband and then Sharp again. She holds her husband's arm in a death grip. Sharp presents them with the hastily written check for \$100,000.

"I don't believe it," LaFauce says later. "We're going to buy a house and a new car and put the rest in savings. This is tremendous."

The numbers LaFauce picked were birthdays, and "my niece gave me a lucky number, 18, and I saved that for last," he said.

For some viewers, this may not seem like high drama. The game moves quickly, but with little suspense other than who might win the \$100,000.

The remaining players now prepare for the bonus round, where they can trade in their prizes for something of greater value, perhaps even \$10,000. Davidson, a one-time \$100,000 favorite, turns in his \$1,100 for a \$3,800 home entertainment center. Mikos comes away with \$1,500, Adrow with \$3,000, Molski with \$4,500 and McGuiggan with \$4,000, after trading in his \$700 for a final square.

Within an hour, the whole thing is over. The players stand around for pictures and Adrow smiles, saying he's not disappointed to have won \$3,000 instead of \$100,000.