

# Ottawa producer's offbeat fixit show wins Gemini award

BY TONY ATHERTON

TORONTO — Take one creaky Gatineau cottage, add two cheeky thirtysomethings with little affinity to hammers and saws, shake to the rhythm of an in-house band, and you end up with a Gemini award, a hefty brass squiggle that might be just the thing to shore up the sagging corner of the front porch.

At least that's the kind of improvisation that might cross the minds of Leigh Uttley and George Brook, the hosts of *Broken House Chronicles*, the off-beat home maintenance show on HGTV that last night took home the Gemini award as best practical information series.

But chances are the award, one of dozens presented by the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television this weekend to honour the best of homegrown television, will end up in the offices of Tim Alp, the show's executive producer and founder of Ottawa's Mountain Road Productions.

"We were a little shocked, actually. We figured the *Designer Guys* would win," Alp said after receiving the award. After all, he noted, the show's first season was only six episodes long.

Alp is a former community cable channel producer whose lofty ideas convinced him to launch Mountain Road in the '90s. In fact, his first series for HGTV, a series about home design for loft apartments, is called *Lofty Ideas*.

What endears *Broken House Chronicles* to viewers is the ineptness and playfulness of Uttley and Brook, former rock musicians who tackle the innumerable repairs on Brook's cottage in a manner that would make Bob Villa shudder — though they usually get it right in the



WAYNE CUDDINGTON, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

**Tim Alp is executive producer of *Broken House Chronicles*, which won a Gemini award last night.**

end. They perform costumed skits, give musical advice with the show's house band, and make delightfully irrelevant observations, like the fact that a stain on the ceiling from a leaking bathtub looks exactly like the late Jerry Garcia.

*Broken House Chronicles* was the only winner among several area nominees up for awards in the first two nights of Gemini presentations. Greg Lawrence, creator of the Comedy Network series, *The Endless Grind*, lost in the category of best comedy director to John Greyson of CBC's *Made In Canada*, while Chris Knight, producer of *The Great Canadian Food Show*, lost the information show writing award to Terrence Mckenna, who wrote the script for a CBC documentary of terrorism. In the category of best picture editing in an information program, *On The Road Again*'s Roger Lefebvre was edged out by an editor from TVO's current affairs series, *Studio 2*.

The Vanier-based Canadian Geographic Institute can bask in the reflected glory of the best-sound award presented to a

show about whales it sponsored for the Discovery Channel.

Ottawans still have a chance for some Gemini awards to be announced in the final presentation, airing tonight at 8 p.m. on CBC: 16-year-old actor Tyler Hynes, nominated as best actor in a TV movie or miniseries for his role in the CTV movies, *Tagged*; and Donna Leon, producer of the CBC Life & Times episode, *The Donald Marshall Story*. Hynes is also up for the Gemini's Hottest Star, chosen by popular vote over the internet.

The CBC's impressive haul of 30 Gemini awards includes a best newscast award for *The National*, a best information series award for *The Fifth Estate*, a best documentary series award for *Witness*, best special-event news coverage award for the network's response to Sept. 11, a best live sporting event award for *Hockey Night in Canada*, and a best sports program award for *The Olympians*, a series of profiles of past Canadian Olympic heroes.

The second most honoured network has been CTV with six awards, including a couple of supporting actor Geminis, one for Sam Waterston in the Alliance Atlantis TV movie *The Matthew Shepard Story*, and the other for Garry Chalk, a regular in the Vancouver-made cops show, *Cold Squad*.

CTV's Gemini tally is only one more than Bravo, whose five awards are mostly production Geminis for the arts documentary *Ravel's Brain*.

History Television and HGTV have four awards each going into tonight's gala, while Global has three, two of which are craft awards for a pair of U.S.-targeted syndicated series made by the Global-owned Firestone Productions; *Mutant X* and Gene Roddenberry's *Andromeda*.