Is the media fair to fans of the 'Twilight' franchise?

During Jimmy Kimmel's special devoted to "The Twilight Saga: Eclipse," which aired on ABC last week, the host invited audience members to ask questions of the cast members assembled on stage.

A teenage girl who looked as sweet and innocent as a newborn Care Bear immediately stepped up to the mic and kicked off the Q&A by asking Taylor Lautner, very politely but with no apparent sense of shame, if he could take off his shirt so the crowd could verify that his abs are real. The request prompted a chorus of whoops and screams from the Twi-hards around her.

For the record, Lautner did not comply with the request. In fact, he looked a little embarrassed. And, perhaps, so were many of the "Twilight" fans watching at home.

There's a reason the mainstream media often depicts the admirers of the "Twilight" franchise as a bunch of screaming teen and tween girls: because many of them are. I've gone to my share of "Twilight" events. I've stood among the shriekers. And I have the semi-altered sense of hearing to prove it.

But the emphasis on the more hormonal aspects of the fandom sometimes obscures the fact that, as the Post's Monica Hesse pointed out last year, plenty of "Twilight" fans are intelligent women who could care less about Lautner's abs or the possibility of touching Robert Pattinson's deliberately tossed hair. In fact, as the documentary "Twilight in Forks" demonstrates, some of them are even guys.

Yet -- and I freely admit that I have been guilty of this on more than one occasion -- the language most frequently used to describe "Twilight" fans often makes them seem like a bunch of screaming ninnies.

Melissa Click, a professor at the University of Missouri, took note of this in a post on the site Flow TV.

"The media have belittled the reactions girls and women have had to the Twilight series and the actors who play their favorite characters, frequently using Victorian era gendered words like 'fever,' 'madness,' 'hysteria,' and 'obsession' to describe Twilighters and Twihards," she wrote, later adding, "These reports of girls and women seemingly out of their minds and out of control disparage female fans' pleasures and curtail serious explorations of the strong appeal of the series."
Those reports also sometimes frustrate "Twilight" fans, who appreciate the Bella/Edward experience for completely different reasons.

"We pick apart the books like we were in English class and we really delve into the lore and the sc-fi fantasy and the symbolism and all that stuff," says Britten Johnson, an administrator for Twilight Moms, the Web site geared toward adult female "Twilight" fans. "That’s what really gets us going."

Johnson, 34, says she and some of her friends in Twilight fandom have been bothered by segments like the one that ran last month on "The Oprah Winfrey Show" in which Ali Wentworth interviewed a few cocktail-sipping Twi-moms who host Twilight parties, complete with life-sized cutouts of Edward Pattinson.

"For the most part, most of the women I’ve met are not like that," the Fresno, Calif., mother of three says. "We really get annoyed with the way that the media portrays that."

Jen Yamato, a film critic for movies.com and writer who closely follows the "Twilight" series, acknowledges that some fans do squirm when they see fellow Cullenites asking questions like the ones posed during that Jimmy Kimmel Q&A. But she notes that there isn’t any animosity among Twilighters because of it.

"The 'Twilight' fandom is really one of the most inclusive fan bases there has ever been in pop culture," she says. "They are very welcoming."

In fact, Johnson says it's that welcoming spirit -- the sense of sisterhood born out of a shared interest in Bella Swan -- that has ultimately made "Twilight" so meaningful to her.

"We do like seeing the books portrayed in the movies, but we aren’t really oogling over the actors and screaming like banshees," she says. "We're really in it for the friends now, for the close connections we've made with other women."

What do you think? Does the media really get the "Twilight" phenomenon and portray its fans fairly? Weigh in with a comment.

By Jen Chaney | June 30, 2010; 3:45 PM ET
Categories: Movies, Pop Culture | Tags: Twilight
MU dangles bonuses to boost patient satisfaction

By T.J. GREANEY

The University of Missouri Health Care will offer incentives to employees to encourage them to meet benchmarks for patient satisfaction and hospital profitability.

The program, announced this morning at town hall meetings, promises to pay each employee an $800 bonus next year if the health system achieves a 90 percent patient satisfaction rate and a $30 million difference between revenues and expenses. The system is spending $1 million on employee education. If successful, the program would cost the hospital an additional $3.7 million in payouts.

Hospital leaders involved in crafting the program said it was important that incentives be equal across the board for all of the system's roughly 5,000 employees.

"The housekeeper, the clerk, the therapist, the nurse, the resident, they all get the same $800 because they all touch the patient," said Sue Kopfle, chief human resources officer.

MU Health Care contracts with Press Ganey, an outside firm, to conduct patient satisfaction surveys. This year, the hospital had a satisfaction rate of 88.1 percent. Kopfle stressed the improvement would be significant because changes typically are 0.1 percent to 0.2 percent.

Hospital CEO Jim Ross said that beginning today, the hospital will hold a series of workshops where employees will learn about patient- and family-centered care with "mentor" employees working in units that receive high scores.

"It's not just throwing out a goal," Ross said. "Leadership has to help lead to get there. It isn't just saying, 'Go take that hill.' We have to provide the tools."

Employees have begun making follow-up phone calls to patients after discharge to check on how well they've followed and understood treatment plans.

The hospital system has had margins of more than $30 million each of the past five years and does not anticipate difficulty continuing that streak. The new fiscal year begins tomorrow.

Kopfle said the program, if successful, might be extended beyond next year. She thinks the hospital system can get a 92 percent satisfaction rate or higher. Once the emphasis on service becomes embedded, she said, high performance can continue for years.

"At some point it's not money anymore — it's pride and it's a culture," she said.

The health system also is rolling out a five-year strategic plan.

Among other things, leaders say they want to begin "moving the needle" on some of the chronic diseases that cause Missouri to rank near the bottom in health indicators. Missouri has rates of obesity, smoking,
diabetes and high cholesterol that are well above the national average. MU plans to craft initiatives to address these problems.

"If you look at the mission statement for most hospitals and health systems, it says something about improving the life of Missourians," said Hal Williamson, vice chancellor for the health system. "But the fact is that is not a talk that people walk all the time. What we do too often is just wait to treat them when they come dragging in."

Reach T.J. Greaney at 573-815-1719 or e-mail tjgreaney@columbiatribune.com.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Tanning tax rolls out Thursday

By Melanie Barnes
June 30, 2010 | 8:20 p.m. CDT

COLUMBIA — Beginning Thursday, it will cost customers 10 percent more to use tanning beds.

The so-called "tanning tax" is the first provision to take effect in the federal Health Care Reform Bill that passed in March.

The tax on tanning services will help fund $2.7 billion of the total $940 billion cost of the health care bill, according to the Congressional Joint Committee on Taxation.

It applies to tanning beds that use one or more ultraviolet lamps with wavelengths between 200 to 400 nanometers. Not included are spray tans, tanning lotions and other sunless tanning options.

Although tanning salon owners and customers have opposed the tax as a deterrent to business, strong support has come from dermatologists who cite a link between cancer and tanning beds.

Karen Edison, chair of the MU department of dermatology, said Wednesday that anything to discourage tanning is a step in the right direction.

"The FDA has called UV light a carcinogen since 2002," Edison said. "There is no such thing as a safe tan."

According to the American Academy of Dermatology Association, ultraviolet radiation levels for indoor tanning devices can be 15 times greater than tanning outdoors. At the current rate, according to the association, one in five Americans will develop skin cancer.

Edison said she is concerned about the increase in skin cancer, especially melanoma, and premature aging of the skin in young women.
“We know that nearly 70 percent of those who go to tanning beds are women 16 to 29 years old,” she said. “I am seeing skin cancer in younger girls.”

John DeSpain, a dermatologist with the DeSpain Cayce Dermatology Center and Medical Spa in Columbia, also said he supports the tanning tax.

“I see people every day with skin cancer, some most likely from tanning beds,” he said. “Tanning beds cause health problems.”

Tanning salon owners, many of them women who own small businesses, worry that it will discourage customers.

Melanie Karrick, who owns Key Largo Fitness and Tanning, said she objects to the tax, although she does not yet know how it will affect her business.

“I have held my prices for many years,” she said. “It doesn’t help business owners or the customer. A 10 percent increase is very high.”

Rick Mount, owner of Profiles Tanning Salon on Vandiver Drive, said he has no official information about the tax.

“I have received zero paperwork,” Mount said. “All I know is that it is a 10 percent increase. I don’t know if it is just for packages or retail.”

He predicted that loyal customers will continue to tan because the tax is universally distributed.

“If people are going to tan, it’s not going to make a difference,” he said. “All companies are going to have the same tax.

Denise Hooton, of Columbia, who tans at Catch-A-Tan on Vandiver Drive, said the tax will not prevent her from continuing to tan.

“I don’t think it will affect my tanning, but I think it’s expensive enough as it is. I don’t think (tanning salons) need a tax,” Hooton said.

Gretchen Winkelmeyer, a junior at MU and indoor tanner at Pacific Beach Tanning Studios on Grindstone Parkway, also said she is not bothered by the tax.
“I think the tax makes a lot of sense since it is going towards health care,” said Winkelmeyer, who said she tans infrequently to avoid health risks. “I go into tanning knowing that it can cause cancer.”