

TV movie will focus on Skokie's Nazi battle

By DIANE DUBEY
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THE NAZIS are heading for Skokie again — this time, on film.

Skokie's traumatic year-and-a-half-long period of threatened neo-Nazi demonstrations, angry counter-rallies and prolonged legal battles will be committed to history formally next spring when CBS-TV presents a 2½-hour docudrama entitled "Skokie."

Coming nearly three years after the National Socialist (Nazi) Party of America dropped plans to rally in Skokie, the film, scheduled to air as early as May, will focus on a fictional family of Holocaust survivors living in Skokie during the 1977-78 "siege."

Danny Kaye already has been signed to play Max Feldman, the Holocaust survivor who lives in Skokie with his wife and teen-age daughter. Eli Wallach was signed Tuesday, Oct. 28, to portray Skokie Corporation Counsel Harvey Schwartz, according to producer Robert "Buzz" Berger who said he hopes to snare character actor Ed Flanders for the role of Mayor Albert J. Smith.

OTHERS WHOSE roles in the Skokie-Nazi conflict are part of the film include David Hamlin, then executive director of 'the Illinois chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union; David Goldberger, the ACLU attorney who defended the Nazis' First Amendment rights; Frank Collin, the neo-Nazi leader who now is serving a seven-year prison term for taking indecent liberties with a child; Skokie resident Sol Goldstein, a Holocaust survivor; Abbott Rosen, executive director of the Chicago Anti-Defamation League; and Aryeh Neier, ACLU national executive director from 1970 to 1978.

The script for "Skokie" was written by Ernest Kinoy, chief script-writer for "Boots" and writer of the screenplays for the TV special, "The Henderson Monster," and "The Deadliest Season," a CBS television movie.

Executive producer is Herbert Brodtkin and director is Herbert Wise.

THIS IS basically the story of what happened in Skokie between 1977 and



THE CAST OF characters in "Skokie," the made-for TV movie which will begin filming next month, will read like a local "Who's Who." Among those who will be portrayed are, from left, Skokie Mayor Albert J. Smith, Corporation Counsel Harvey Schwartz and Sol Goldstein, a Holocaust survivor. Schwartz, who will be played by Eli Wallach, said this week he would have preferred either Robert Redford or Burt Reynolds.

1978," Berger said Tuesday, Oct. 28. "We'll deal with some of the court cases that came up...with the ACLU's representation of Collin, with the reactions of a fictional family or survivors, and with the reactions of the mayor

and the various people around him."

Berger said representatives from the production company had been in contact with all of the people who are to be portrayed in the movie — except

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for Collin.

"We don't intend to talk to Collin. He's a minor character. There's nothing he could add that would be particularly insightful," he said.

Shooting is to begin in Skokie on Friday, Nov. 14 and continue through mid-December, Berger said. He and other members of the production company are expected to be in Skokie Thursday and Friday, Oct. 30 and 31, to scout local sites for filming and to sign actors. By Tuesday, Nov. 4, they will be back "for the duration," he said.

DEVELOPMENT OF "Skokie" has been in the works for more than two years, ever since Brodtkin and Berger finished work on "Holocaust," the NBC mini-series which focused on the experiences of a German Jewish family under Nazi rule.

The Skokie thing was coming to a head about that time and it looked like the Nazis were about to march," Berger recalled. "There was so much controversy that we knew this would make a wonderful show.

"There were so many good and wonderful people on both sides of the argument, arguing valid points on both sides and disagreeing all the way.

"There was so much conflict and the basis of all good drama is conflict....I think this is an important show to do because it is an example of the American system working and working at its best."

SCRIPTS ALREADY have been sent to the principals who will be re-presented in the movie, Berger said. He said several errors were pointed out by Mayor Smith and, subsequently, were changed.

"We're not anxious to do a disser-

vice to Skokie or to Mayor Smith," he said.

Berger was asked Smith's reaction to having the Nazi controversy, which generally is not considered one of Skokie's brightest moments, dredged up once again.

"I don't think there's any way he can avoid its being done without getting into another First Amendment case and I think Smith's a realist," said the producer.

Smith could not be reached for comment Tuesday, but Harvey Schwartz said the mayor's only concern was that the community be portrayed fairly.

Schwartz said his own primary concern is avoiding any inconvenience to the public during the filming. "It's obvious we're not going to have much to say about the content," he said.

IN KEEPING with network policy for docudramas, a large number of

names will not be changed for the film, a fact which isn't particularly pleasing to Berger.

While some pseudonyms will be used – Harvey Schwartz will be transformed into a character called "Burt Silverman" and David Goldberger will become "Herb Lewison" – the names of Rosen, Hamlin, Smith, Neier, Goldstein and Collin will not be changed.

Disturbed that the use of actors attempting to portray real people results in dramatization, not documentary or drama, Berger prefers that his movie be based on "dramatic truth, not historic truth."

But, since CBS "strongly suggests" that Skokie remain Skokie, that filming take place in the village and that as many characters as possible keep their real names, Berger said there won't be too much guessing about who's who when "Skokie" comes to Skokie – and to the country.