

Students learn it's not all glitz at Ritz conference

By Sandra Silva

ABOUT 100 students from the Gulf Coast High School Academy of Sports and Entertainment congregated at the Naples Ritz-Carlton November 20 to attend the fourth Annual Student Conference, where they met professionals from the sports, entertainment and marketing industries.

The Academy's Student Conference was created to provide opportunities for individual growth, as well as career advice for students pursuing sports- and entertainment-related careers.

"We hope that you enjoy your day and consider one of the featured sports and entertainment marketing occupations as a possible career choice," said Academy Director Kevin Schell.

B.J. Lattanzi from Collier

County Public Schools said it was an honor to help promote and organize the conference. "Others look to you as a model to follow," she said to the students.

Peter Thomas, the keynote speaker, was introduced by Larry Block, of Block & Block Marketing Company, which helped organize the Conference. An award-winning narrator for TV, radio, commercials and film, Thomas spoke passionately about his more than 50 years in the business, before inviting a few volunteers to read some scripts. Students read scenes from *Nova*, *Forensic Files*, the upcoming Robert Kennedy documentary and even some AFLAC commercials (the ones with the duck) — just a few of the many jobs Thomas has. "There is a lot of talent here," he said of the students who read.

Thomas spoke of his life

growing up in Pensacola, where his father taught him how to picture images in his head while reading. "That has shown to be immensely helpful in my work because it puts the feeling in the word," he explained.

A documentary about Thomas' life, created as a tribute for the man who was named 2004 Humanitarian of the year by International College, was presented to the students as proof that successful careers go together with sterling character.

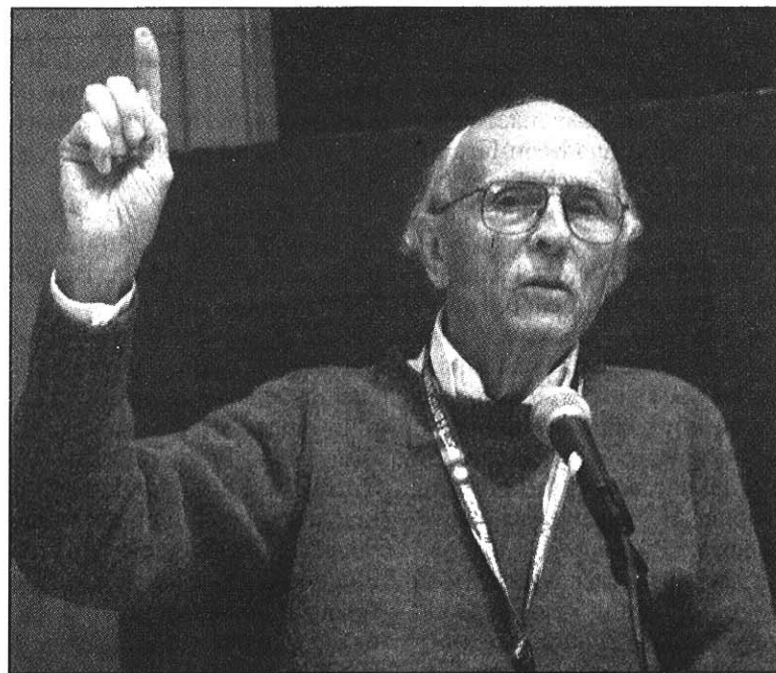
"It's so cool that all of us have heard him before on TV and now seeing the real person is great," and "I would love to have his job," were some of the things the high school students had to say after Thomas' presentation.

After this first presentation, the school assembly separated into smaller groups, each of which attended two of the five lectures offered in the conference.

Bill Daubmann, Collier County's Entrepreneur of the Year for 2004, gave students tips on how to start their own business and the responsibilities that come with it. He also talked about his business, Mr. ShowerDoor, a Naples company specializing in the fabrication and installation of high-quality glass shower enclosures.

In a separate conference room, Geri Muck, owner of Protocol Models on the Gulf, talked about the benefits, risks and responsibilities that come with modeling and acting.

"You need to believe in yourself and have courage to say no when asked to do something that



PHOTOS BY SANDRA SILVA

Award-winning television and radio narrator Peter Thomas.

goes against yourself," she said to the group of 15. "Models sell products; if someone asks you to pose nude, what do you think you are selling? Say no."

Muck invited model Jessica DiTomasso to talk about the behind-the-scenes of modeling. DiTomasso talked about her experience in Milan, in photo shoots and also demonstrated a few catwalk skills. "You are your own business when you are a model, and that is a lot of serious work," she said.

Drew Steele, one of the most popular DJs for local radio station WXKB-FM, B103.9, gave youngsters a few insights into the music industry, including information on how new stations are

created, how to produce music, and how the radio market works. "Networking is everything," he explained.

Other speakers included Jason Camp, on Sports Marketing; Debra Newman, on public relations; Judy Bricker of Northern Trust Bank, the lunchtime speaker, and Justine Waldman of WFTX, FOX 4 TV, on how to become a television news reporter.

The Ritz-Carlton, Northern Trust, Block & Block Marketing, Germain Arena and the Ft. Myers Miracle sponsored the Conference. For more information on Gulf Coast High School and the Academy of Sports and Entertainment call 377-1544.



DJ Drew Steele, left, Debra Newman, Bill Daubmann, Jason Camp, Larry Block and B.J. Lattanzi.