

Blockbuster Hobby Promotion

Coin collecting could really take off. All it needs is a little star power and some direction from Hollywood.



THE COIN market needs more celebrities. Big-name, headline-grabbing, *Entertainment Tonight*-type celebs. Sure, we have our own superstars, but frankly, as famous and important as they are to most of us, they don't have much name recognition outside the hobby (except for Jim Halperin, whose best-selling 1997 futurist novel about cryonics, *The First Immortal*, was back in the news last year when late Hall of Fame ballplayer Ted Williams was flash-frozen like a TV dinner).

"Numismatics" can be more than just an answer in *The New York Times* crossword. In fact, it can become as popular as NASCAR® racing or Pokémon™ cards (oh, sorry, they're not popular anymore). We merely need Hollywood celebrities to help promote the hobby. The few such headlines who've been involved with coins for a short period certainly attracted positive attention for numismatics. Kermit the Frog™ was "spokesfrog" for the United States Mint when the 50 State Quarters™ Program was introduced. (Maybe if Kermit had launched the golden dollar, it wouldn't have croaked.)

Actress, director and producer Penny Marshall was master of ceremonies when California kicked off a design competition for that state's quarter dollar last August. A coin collector, Marshall said her first name came as a concession to her brothers who were saving their pennies for a pony, but got a baby sister instead.

Last fall, she and basketball star Shaquille O'Neal were prominently featured in a public-service announcement about the California quarter design project.

More recently, actor, screenwriter and producer Harold Ramis served as the humorous emcee at the launch of the Illinois quarter in early January. "The back of the coin shows cars stalled on the Eisenhower Expressway," he joked. The comment got tons of news media attention.



Don't recognize Ramis' name? Surely, you know his movies. He acted, directed and/or produced such blockbusters as *Ghostbusters* (both I and II), *Analyze This*, *Analyze That*, *Groundhog Day*, *National Lampoon's Vacation* and *Caddyshack*. That got me thinking. What if Ramis produced motion pictures with numismatic themes? Think of the huge hobby promotion with films such as these:

Slabusters: A small team of fearless, consumer-protection advocates face a ghost of a chance while using slime-filled weapons against damaged or doctored coins encapsulated by ghoulish certification companies with monstrous grading standards.

Slabusters II: Another supernatural romp filled with coin karma, this time pitting the jumpsuit-clad Slabbusters team against a possessed dealer determined to impose his malevolent, 500-point grading scale on the hobby.

Groundhog PNG Day: Bill Murray (played by numismatic columnist Colonel Bill Murray) portrays an amusing but bewildered collector who must repeatedly relive the same day at a coin show until he realizes "Early American Coppers" is not an organization of colonial-era police officers.

National Lampoon's Convention: Hapless Chevy Chase falls on his face while navigating obstacles as he attempts to get from one end of the crowded bourse floor to the other at the ANA World's Fair of Money®.

Anneal This: A perfect portrayal of the underside of the hobby planchet—comedy and crime—this film tells the story of a mobster mintmaster who undergoes psychoanalysis after experiencing panic attacks and the inability to strike anything. (Followed by the not-as-funny sequel *Anneal That*.)

Okay, so maybe numismatically themed films are not the solution to successful, widespread promotion of the hobby. Then what's the answer? Simple. Put pop-culture personalities in our pockets and purses. We should portray celebrities on our circulating coinage, not just hire them to advertise numismatics. And the first person depicted on the new designs should be Elvis Presley. He'd instantly become the "King of Coins." Of course, Congress first will have to eliminate the pesky federal regulation that prohibits portrayal of any living person on our money. *donnpr@aol.com*