

NAME DROPPING

Expert celebrity chasers tell us how it's done

By *Marta Acosta*

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

In this age of 24-hour news, we can spend all our waking hours catching up on celebrities, from cable coverage of their crimes, Web sites of their sightings, not to mention the many magazines and tabloids devoted to their lifestyles. Why are we so obsessed with the personal lives of famous strangers and why do these entertainers seek this intrusive attention?

"I have always felt that from the beginning of time that people watched other people. It's human nature," says Sally Van Slyke, former president of marketing, publicity and promotion for Universal Studios. Van Slyke, who grew up in Berkeley and has an MBA from Stanford, was an aspiring actor who worked as a page to get her foot in the door, and rose through the ranks to work with the biggest stars in Hollywood. When Van Slyke drops a name, it's an A-list, Oscar-worthy name: Steven Spielberg, Tom Hanks, Tom Cruise, Nicole Kidman, Bette Davis, Cary Grant, Al Pacino. . . .

Van Slyke is writing a book called "Wild Thymes" about her experiences and says, "The first half is about my time in Hollywood and the events and movie premieres



MIKE KEFKA / The Chronicle

Deborah Schoeneman is a former gossip writer for the New York Post.

that I did, like being stuck in Cannes with Ron Howard and Tom Cruise."

The title is a reference to her Walnut Creek catering company of the same name, which she bought after moving to the Bay Area 11 years ago to care for her mother. She held off on writing until now because Lew Wasserman, the legendary

powerhouse at Universal and MCA, asked her not to write a book until he died.

Other insiders aren't waiting for funerals before dishing the dirt. Deborah Schoeneman, a former contributor to the "Page Six" gossip column in the New York Post, wrote "4% Famous," a

► **CELEBRITIES:** Page D6

