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Hollywood Exclusive by Marilyn Beck & Stacy Jenel Smith

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Rocky Carroll: No End in Sight for 'NCIS'

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Breathe easy, "NCIS" fans. Despite the Mark Harmon series' [advanced](#) age (12, which is Methuselah in TV series years), nobody is looking at a farewell just yet. That's according to Rocky Carroll, known to "NCIS" followers as NCIS Director Leon Vance.

"Our show is such an anomaly," notes Carroll, who plays the role on spinoffs "NCIS: Los Angeles" and "NCIS: New Orleans" as well. "Not even shows known as hits, like 'Breaking Bad' or 'Everyone Loves Raymond,' are on for 12 seasons — at this level of quality and success."

Yes, "NCIS" has been a top-10 show since 2008, with viewership numbers that continue to dwarf other series. "I think it's a real testament to the [network](#). The executive branch of CBS that was there in the '90s when I started doing 'Chicago Hope' is still there," Carroll says, referring to network chieftain Les Moonves, who began his tenure in 1996. "That stability is some of the reason why 'NCIS' is still on the air."

As far as the cast, Carroll notes, "Sure, some actors find it difficult to keep playing the same character, looking for [new things](#) to do. But look at the flip side: Nothing like this is going to come again for any of us."

For Carroll, fresh challenge recently arrived in the form of an opportunity to direct tonight's, Feb. 3, [episode](#) of "NCIS," "We Build, We Fight."

"It was fun, exciting, unnerving, surreal a little," he says with a smile.

The 51-year-old Ohio native, who honed his craft as an actor on the New York stage — including Joe Papp's "Shakespeare on Broadway" series — had been talking to showrunner Gary Glasberg about taking on directorial chores for awhile. "But I didn't know I would have the opportunity to direct this season."

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The "Cristela" team is staying optimistic about its future, though the fledgling ABC series starring funny lady Cristela Alonzo is widely considered to be on the bubble. "We're recording our last few episodes of season one," notes the show's sexy ...

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DEAR STACY: What has Sarah Michelle Gellar been

up to? I was sorry to see "The Crazy Ones" get cancelled, and then of course to lose Robin Williams was such a tragedy. - Marcia W., Albuquerque, New Mexico
DEAR MARCIA: Gellar, whose "Veronika Decides ...

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> [Chad L. Coleman Talks About 'The Walking Dead' and What's Ahead](#)

For weeks, followers of AMC's "The Walking Dead" have been teased with hints and guesses about a death in the Feb. 8 first new episode of the hit series to air this year. Don't read on if you have yet to view it and want to watch that revelation

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DEAR STACY: Seeing Geraldo Rivera on "Celebrity Apprentice" sparked an odd conversation between my husband and myself. Didn't Geraldo once have plastic surgery on TV? My husband thinks I am imagining things. — L. B., Warren, Ohio
DEAR L.B.: In ...

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He was called in to meet with Glasberg and "I thought I would get the standard speech about how a lot of people want to do it, and maybe he'd say they were giving me an opportunity to follow one of the directors around, and maybe two years from now I would get a chance.

I was expecting that.

"Instead, he asked me if I wanted to direct 'three [episodes](#)' from now.' There was suddenly a vacancy that gave me an opportunity. I didn't have time to obsess over it too much." Carroll says he did shadow James Whitmore Jr. one of "NCIS's" regular directors, to take in the entire process before he took the reins.

"We Build, We Fight" has Harmon's Gibbs character and team investigating a possible hate crime, the murder of an openly gay [service member](#) who is set to become the first openly gay Medal of Honor recipient. The show episode also has Gibbs' former flame Hollis Mann (Susanna Thompson) aboard the investigation, and Palmer (Brian Dietzen) and wife Breena (Michelle Pierce) getting ready for the imminent arrival of their baby.

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As "NCIS" jumps into February sweeps, the enticing fare continues with an episode Feb. 10 that goes back in time to a story of teenage Tony DiNozzo (Michael Weatherly) — and a Feb. 17 episode in which Gibbs seeks justice for Sergei Mishnev's shooting of ex-wife Diane (Melinda McGraw).

Carroll, whose family includes wife Gabrielle and daughter Elissa, makes it clear he has no intention of staying behind the camera. Acting "is my first love. I'm still learning my way 25 years in." However, he did enjoy his directorial [adventure](#), and would like another crack at it. "I think if I had another opportunity, it would be less of an out-of-body experience for me. I would be less likely to be awake at 3 a.m. staring at the ceiling," he admits.

"NCIS" fans, aware of his directing assignment, have been supportive.

"That's another thing," he says. "We have such an amazing following, not only here but in [Australia](#), India, France — a global following. When you have people around the world cheering for you, the decision is clear: Let's keep going."

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