

**ua Ellen' sitcom suffers
m sexuality content**

LOS ANGELES (AP) — "Seinfeld," which is about nothing, is wrapping up a nine-year run covered with glory as the most popular sitcom. "Ellen," a show that is very much about something, is dying a slow and painful death. "Seinfeld" isn't popular because it's about nothing, and "Ellen" isn't facing cancellation because it has a point to make. The difference between the two is more

fundamental, at least in TV terms: One is funny, the other isn't anymore.

"I'm gay, the character's gay and that's the problem everyone has with the show. It's just too controversial, nobody wants to deal with it," star Ellen DeGeneres said last week on "Entertainment Tonight," the TV program.

She's right when it comes to the network. ABC undoubtedly would love to bid goodbye to the headaches "Ellen" has brought it — but it couldn't, and wouldn't, if the ratings for the show (9:30 p.m. EST Wednesday)

were high enough.

There is room on sitcoms for messages, sermons, even politics, when they are the seasoning in the stew. But when comedy becomes afterthought, too much is being demanded of viewers.

Plots can revolve around teen-age drug use ("Home Improvement") and drinking ("Boy Meets World" this Friday), around cancer ("Murphy Brown") and weight bias ("The Drew Carey Show") because they are the exception, not the rule.

The shows also know to follow the

trail blazed by such 1970s TV pioneers as Norman Lear with "All in the Family" and Larry Gelbart with "M-A-S-H"; even racism, death and war can be dressed up as sitcom fodder with humor as the sugar coating.

"My take has always been we can tackle any subject as long as we're not preachy, as long as we remember we're trying to entertain with it," says Bruce Helford, executive producer of "Drew Carey" and an alumnus of "Roseanne," which explored such issues as domestic abuse.

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**ctor makes best of
utterfly' stomach**

NEW YORK (AP) — Before show-up at co-star Jack Nicholson's house for his first rehearsal, Greg Kinnear was hungry but too nervous to know if he should eat or not.

"So I decided to wolf down a bowl of spaghetti," Kinnear says in the March issue of Entertainment magazine.

"It was that kind of nervous eating, I read through some scenes, and then Jack said, 'Would you like some spaghetti?' And I said, 'Absolutely! I'm starving!' It was uncomfortable eating the second time, but I dealt with it."

The ex-host of TV's Talk Soup recovered from the double dinner in the role of co-star as Nicholson's down-on-his-luck gay neighbor, a performance that won Kinnear a best-supporting actor nomination.

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