

The envelope, please

For 75 years, PwC balloting leaders have kept the biggest secrets in Hollywood.

Let's face it: Accounting may not be the most glamorous line of work. It requires precision and discretion, and it's usually a behind-the-scenes gig. But once a year, for two members from PwC's Los Angeles office, the job also requires formalwear, a walk down the red carpet, some celebrity mingling and a briefcase packed with the most sought-after secrets in Hollywood.

As the official ballot tabulators for the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences annual awards—also known as the Oscars®—PwC members collect handwritten ballots, lead a team in hand-tallying the results, and then hand-deliver sealed envelopes bearing the names of the winners on Oscar night. It's an intentionally low-tech process designed to maintain the utmost secrecy, and it's been at the heart of PwC's relationship with the Academy for 75 years.

PwC handles the ballot tabulation for both the Academy Awards® nomination process and the selection of the winners. Each year, in an undisclosed location, two balloting leaders assemble a crack team of accountants to count the ballots and tally the results for each of the 24 major Oscar categories (not including scientific, technical or special achievement awards). No scanning machines. No computers. And for all 75 years PwC has been involved, no security breaches.

"We kept the door locked and wouldn't let anyone in," says Bill Miller, balloting leader from 1954 to 1969. "All the results were locked in the vault. We even burned the scratch paper."

Over the years, this painstaking process has remained much the same for each of the 12 people who have

led the balloting and represented PwC at the annual Academy Awards show. "The balloting leaders are sort of like a fraternity," says Frank Johnson, who oversaw balloting from 1977 to 1997. "We share that experience."

Members of that select group say the experience is a highlight of their time with PwC—a defining moment in their careers. It gives them the opportunity to meet celebrities, enjoy a few minutes of fame, and be part of one of PwC's most high-profile and long-standing client relationships.

"It's a terrific role to have, not just the event, but 365 days a year," says Brad Oltmanns, a balloting leader since 2004, who says he watches all the nominated films each year. "The people at the Academy are among the finest I've worked with."

Before being tapped for the Academy Awards position, Dan Lyle, balloting leader from 1986 to 1996, worked with several large entertainment clients, but he says this role was unique. "It was one of the most exciting jobs PwC had to offer," he says. "There's a huge sense of responsibility that goes along with the job. You're involved with something that helped make PwC a household name."

Along with giving the firm worldwide visibility, balloting leaders play a crucial role in making the most glamorous night in Hollywood a success. And they always come away with stories to tell.

What's in the briefcase?

On Oscar night, off-duty police officers (dressed in tuxes, naturally, yet fully armed) accompany each of the two balloting leaders. They take separate cars and separate routes to the show, and each balloting

leader carries a briefcase with a complete set of winning envelopes.

Balloting leaders enter the Academy Awards show on the same red carpet as Hollywood's A-list, amid the glare of the paparazzi's flashbulbs and a mob of international reporters clamoring for interviews. And, they dress the part: tuxedos for the men, and for Lisa Pierozzi, balloting leader from 1998 to 2001, a formal designer gown. But it's not what they're wearing that makes them stand out; it's that telltale accessory: the briefcase.

"You're quite aware you are in a surreal setting," says Rick Rosas, who has led the balloting since 2002. "You are one of two people who have the results, and you're surrounded by people you know about, who you've seen in the movies."

And from the red carpet all the way up to the final moments backstage, everyone is dying to know what's in the bag. In 2001, when Pierozzi handed Julia Roberts the envelope for the category Roberts would be presenting, the actress eyed Pierozzi's briefcase and said, "Don't you have another one in there I'd be more interested in?" Roberts was not just a presenter that night, but also a Best Actress nominee for her role in *Erin Brockovich* (she won).

Roberts tried again the next year with Greg Garrison, who led the balloting from 1996 to 2005. This time, she wanted to know if her friend Denzel Washington had won Best Actor for *Training Day*. "I said, 'I'd love to tell you, but I can't because if I do, you won't be surprised, and you shouldn't have to act on a Sunday.' She said, 'OK, then I've just got to lean on you.'"

Not everyone gives in so easily. Robin Williams seems to take particular pleasure in making PwC accountants sweat—just ask Johnson, Oltmanns, Lyle, Rosas or Garrison, who all endured some good-natured ribbing from the frenetic comedian. One year, Williams recognized Garrison backstage and said, "Oh, it's the guys from Pricewaterhouse." Then he lunged at Garrison's briefcase, saying, "Let's just open this up right now."

"The bodyguards jumped up, and Williams said, 'Just kidding, just kidding!'" Garrison recalls.

Whether it's from celebrities, family members or reporters, every balloting leader has been prodded to reveal the winners—Robert Ford, balloting leader from 1970 to 1976, remembers being bribed with chocolate cakes and offers of fine Scotch. But, they say it's always in good fun.

"I found it to be the easiest secret in the world to keep," says Pierozzi. "There's a mystique around it that people want to maintain."

Brushes with fame

Standing backstage on Oscar night gives PwC balloting leaders a unique view of the awards show and sets the scene for one-of-a-kind celebrity encounters.

Lyle found himself on a first-name basis with Chevy Chase and Gene Hackman, who introduced Lyle to his wife, saying "This is Dan Lyle, and he's the reason I didn't win."

Garrison once kept Susan Sarandon from stepping out onto the stage because he was standing on her dress. He also held Ben Affleck's car keys while the then little-known actor presented an award in 1998. Later that night, Affleck won the award for Best Original Screenplay along with Matt Damon for their breakout hit *Good Will Hunting*.

In 2007, before the Best Director award announcement, Rosas lived a film buff's dream, standing backstage with legendary directors Steven Spielberg, George Lucas and Francis Ford Coppola as they speculated about whether their friend Martin Scorsese would win his first Oscar (he did, for *The Departed*). Rosas was also backstage in 2003 when Best Actor winner Adrien Brody planted a kiss on presenter Halle Berry. "Meryl Streep was standing next to me, and she died laughing," he says. From their backstage vantage point, PwC partners also get a chance to see the unscripted, memorable moments that make the Oscar history reels.

In 1969, Bill Miller's balloting team discovered a tie for Best Actress between Barbara Streisand for Funny Girl and Katharine Hepburn for The Lion in Winter, the only exact tie in a major acting category in Academy history.

"We counted the ballots several times to make certain it was a tie," Miller recalls. "I was concerned that if I just wrote the names on the card, the presenter would read the first name and the other name would be forgotten."

So, Miller wrote "It's a tie" in bold letters at the top of the card, which came as a shock to presenter Ingrid Bergman. "After the presentation, she said, 'I saw that and almost had a heart attack!'"

Occasionally, PwC partners find themselves at the center of the action during the live broadcast. At the 1996 awards show, Sharon Stone and Quincy Jones were presenting back-to-back awards, and Stone accidentally handed both envelopes to the first winner. She and Jones went on to read the nominees for Best Original Dramatic Score, only to discover they had no envelope revealing the winner. While Stone stalled, Jones stepped offstage for some assistance from Johnson, who had, of course, memorized all the winners.

"Sharon said, 'Let me have a psychic moment,' while I told Quincy it was the score for *Il Postino*," Johnson says.

The show goes on

One year, after the last envelope was opened, Jane Fonda put her arm around Lyle and said, "That wasn't so bad!" At that moment, after all the awards have been announced, PwC balloting leaders get a chance to exhale.

Riding a wave of relief, they head to the legendary Oscar after-party, the Governors Ball, where the celebrity encounters keep coming. Johnson shook John Wayne's hand at the ball, and Frank Sinatra once greeted Miller with a "Hi Bill!"

"That struck me that he called me by name," Miller says. "He only knew me from the rehearsal."

Balloting leaders describe the party as the best part of the evening, when they don't have to keep any secrets, don't have to maintain a poker face, and can toast the evening's winners and nominees along with everyone else.

"The event is fantastic," Oltmanns says. "You see celebrities walking around and hanging out with their friends. It's fun to see people who have just been recognized in this way."

Pierozzi says a few years ago, surviving balloting leaders gathered for a photo, and afterward, they had lunch together and told stories from their years of working with the Academy. "We're very proud of the work we've done, and we've all got interesting experiences to share," she says.

And, because of the secrecy surrounding PwC's work, many of those experiences can only be shared with this select group of people who have tallied the winners, carried the all-important briefcases and successfully protected the best-kept secrets in Hollywood.

"There are a lot of stories you just can't tell anyone else," Pierozzi says. "There's a reason the firm is still doing this after 75 years."