

coverstory

BY JAY BOBBIN



In helping to bring “NCIS: New Orleans” to a close, CCH Pounder is leaving it with Pride.

That’s as in Dwayne Pride, the Scott Bakula-portrayed team leader who Pounder’s coroner character Loretta Wade has worked with closely on the CBS drama, which wraps up its seven-season run Sunday, May 23. In the series finale, Pride is preparing to marry his security-official girlfriend Rita (played by Bakula’s real-life wife Chelsea Field) when he’s distracted by an ongoing case.

As the sun sets on one “NCIS” spinoff, another is on the horizon – using one of its favorite action-show locations, CBS has ordered “NCIS: Hawaii” for next season – but Pounder says she’s satisfied with the ending given her “New Orleans” alter ego.

“There’s always a catchphrase like, ‘She’s the moral center’ or ‘She’s the best friend or the great adviser,’” the pleasant Pounder muses, “and that usually means, ‘Uh-oh. There’s not going to be much for her to do.’ But (the show’s producers and writers) were really very attentive to someone interested in building a character who was something other than a fabulous workhorse.”

Though “NCIS” already had yielded a successful offshoot in “NCIS: Los Angeles,” Pounder maintains she never saw “NCIS: New Orleans” as a sure bet to be ordered when she became involved.

“Oh, good grief, no!,” she says emphatically. “I was one of those who was like, ‘There’s two of them already. What could a third one possibly be?’ I was not expecting anything, but once I discovered that New Orleans itself was going to be a huge character in the show, I would see such unexpected things in the background ... trains, bridges, all these natural things. I always thought that was a wonderful sort of paint brush to use in showing what the city would be like.”

In fact, Pounder enjoyed it enough to become a full-time resident there: She and her late husband gave up their house in California and moved to one in the Big Easy; where she plans to remain based, at least for the time being. She had worked earlier with “NCIS: New Orleans” star Bakula on his series “Quantum Leap,” but after much other television work ranging from “The X-Files” to “The West Wing,” she reasons, “I think I can operate from pretty much anywhere these days, provided that the health and travel restrictions are cool.”

As she says goodbye to “NCIS: New Orleans,” then, Pounder is glad she’s not also having to do the same to the actual New Orleans. “The people are exceedingly friendly,” she enthuses, “and I really have appreciated their appreciation of our being here. They still get excited about seeing film crews, and that’s really nice.”

‘NCIS’ bids New Orleans farewell as CBS spinoff signs off

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