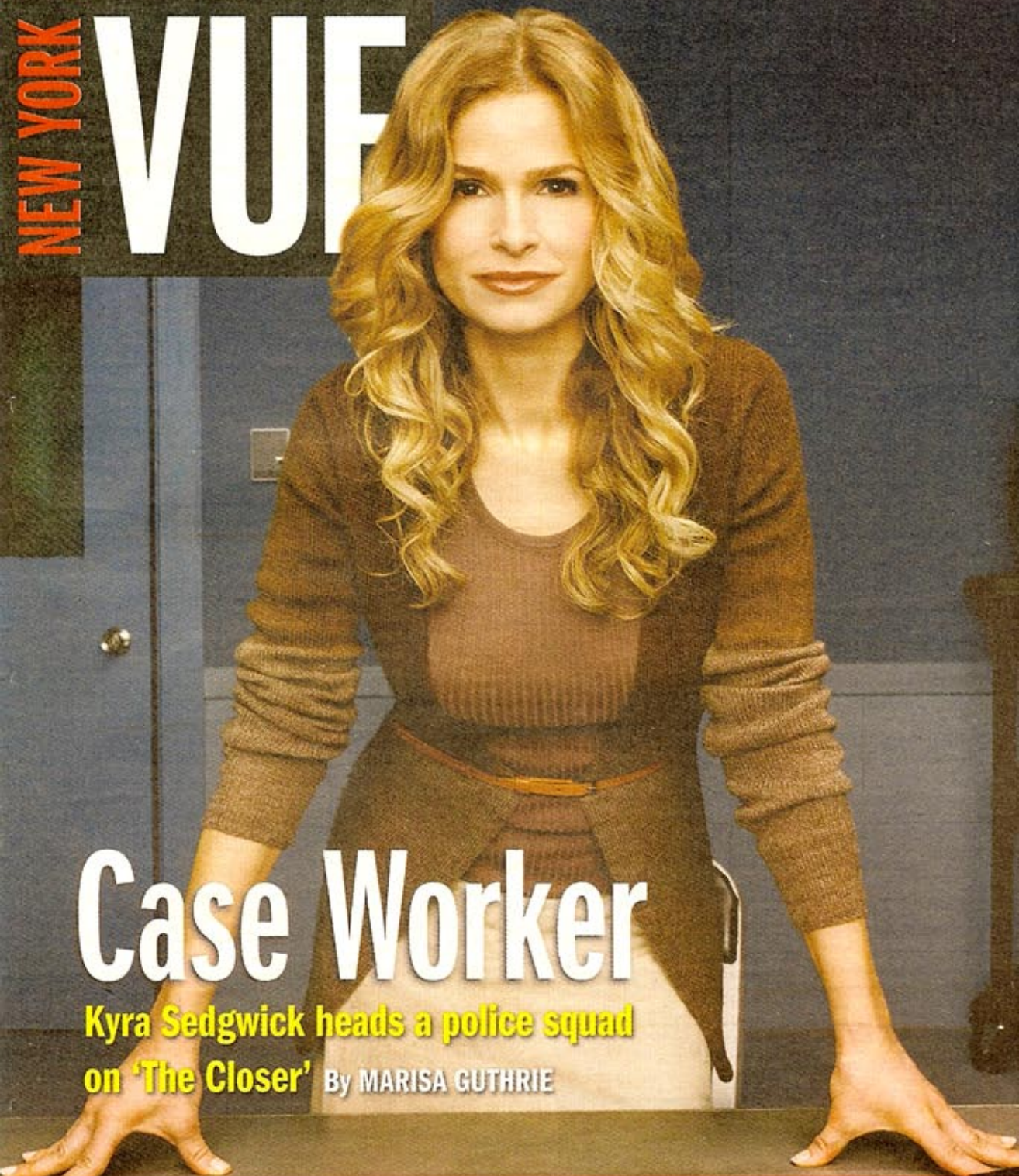


NEW YORK

VUE



Case Worker

Kyra Sedgwick heads a police squad on 'The Closer' By MARISA GUTHRIE

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She arrests cop bias

By **MARISA GUTHRIE**

For her first television series, actress Kyra Sedgwick jumps right into a snake pit.

As CIA-trained detective Brenda Johnson in "The Closer," she is brought in to lead the LAPD's Priority Murder Squad, much to the chagrin of the old boys who have been toiling in this Byzantine deathhouse.

The part, says Sedgwick, "speaks to what it's like for women in the workplace, because it really is a man's world."

The series, which premieres tomorrow at 9 p.m. on TNT, is from Greer Shephard and Michael M. Robinson, the creative team behind FX's "Nip/Tuck." Former Los Angeles District Attorney Gil Garcetti, who served during the O.J. Simpson trial, is a consultant for the show.

Sedgwick's Johnson, who hails from Atlanta, is blonde, perky and possesses heaps of that signature Southern honey. The men at the squad — including Assistant Police Chief Will Pope (J.K. Simmons), Captain Taylor (Robert Gossett) and Detectives Flynn and Sanchez (Tony Denison and Raymond Cruz) — have it in for Johnson from the word go.

The lone woman on the squad, Det. Irene Daniels (Gina Rivera), is no help. And Johnson's right-hand man, Sgt. David Gabriel (Corey Reynolds), takes his time warming up to her. The only ally she seems to have is an old friend from her past, FBI Agent Fritz Howard (Jon Tenney).

But Johnson isn't ruffled by the hostility — so strong that, in the series premiere, every member of her squad puts in for a transfer.

"It's wonderful to be in a high-up position when people don't want you to be [there]," says Sedgwick. "I find it interesting to see her maneuver and navigate



ODD WOMAN OUT (l.-r.): Corey Reynolds, G.W. Bailey, Kyra Sedgwick, Tony Denison, Robert Gossett and J.K. Simmons.

with no allies."

Johnson is a Southern belle with a steely side. She's brilliant at extracting confessions from suspects in the witness box, but never forgets her manners.

"She still says, 'Please' and 'Thank you,'" says Sedgwick.

And the Southern twang, which can so often come off as an affectation, is just another asset in Johnson's bulg-

ing bag of tricks.

"I humanize her," says Sedgwick. "People hear a Southern accent and they think redneck or stupid or they think she's going to be a pushover. And she's none of those things."

"She has that Southern hospitality that I think people find very disarming. I like that about her."

She also has her share of quirks, the most visible of which is an addiction to sweets. In the first episode, she gazes with the longing of a lover at a glazed doughnut. And when she finally finds the

courage to pluck the confection from the box, she hides in her office to eat it.

"I think she's going to stay very true to her oddball-ness," says Sedgwick.

So how does a quirky female police chief handle a squad full of surly men?

You definitely don't become one of the guys.

"She's still very much a woman," says Sedgwick. "She still wears skirts. She doesn't hide her sexuality. She's a woman who is strong but who can also be very vulnerable."

"I really feel like I want to use this opportunity to show women to themselves," she continues. "A lot of the women I see on TV, I don't recognize them."

"We're supposed to look a certain way, dress a certain way. We're supposed to be very successful but not too successful. We're supposed to be vulnerable but not let our feelings show. It's very complicated."

"The Closer" airs tomorrow at 9 p.m. on TNT.

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On the cover: Kyra Sedgwick