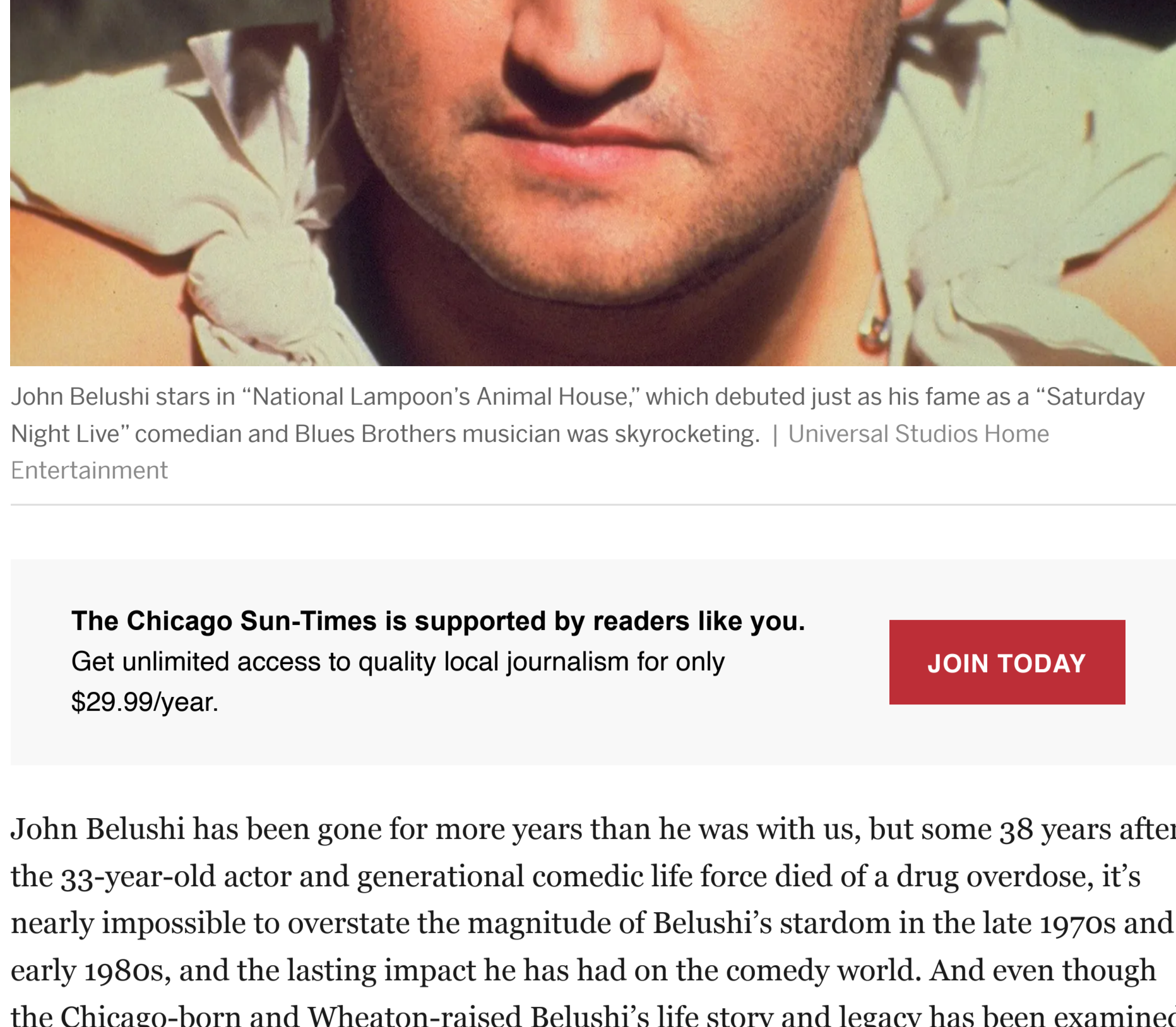

[MOVIES AND TV](#) • [ENTERTAINMENT AND CULTURE](#) • [COLUMNISTS](#)

## 'Belushi' documentary gets to the soul of the man

The movie, which opens the Chicago International Film Festival, profiles the great Chicago-born actor and singer with the help of animation, tapes of vintage interviews and even his personal letters to his wife.

By Richard Roeper | Oct 14, 2020, 5:30am CDT

[f](#) [Twitter](#) [SHARE](#)


John Belushi stars in "National Lampoon's Animal House," which debuted just as his fame as a "Saturday Night Live" comedian and Blues Brothers musician was skyrocketing. | Universal Studios Home Entertainment

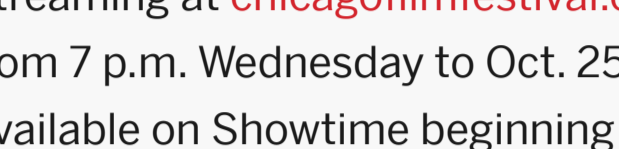
**The Chicago Sun-Times is supported by readers like you.**  
Get unlimited access to quality local journalism for only \$29.99/year.

[JOIN TODAY](#)

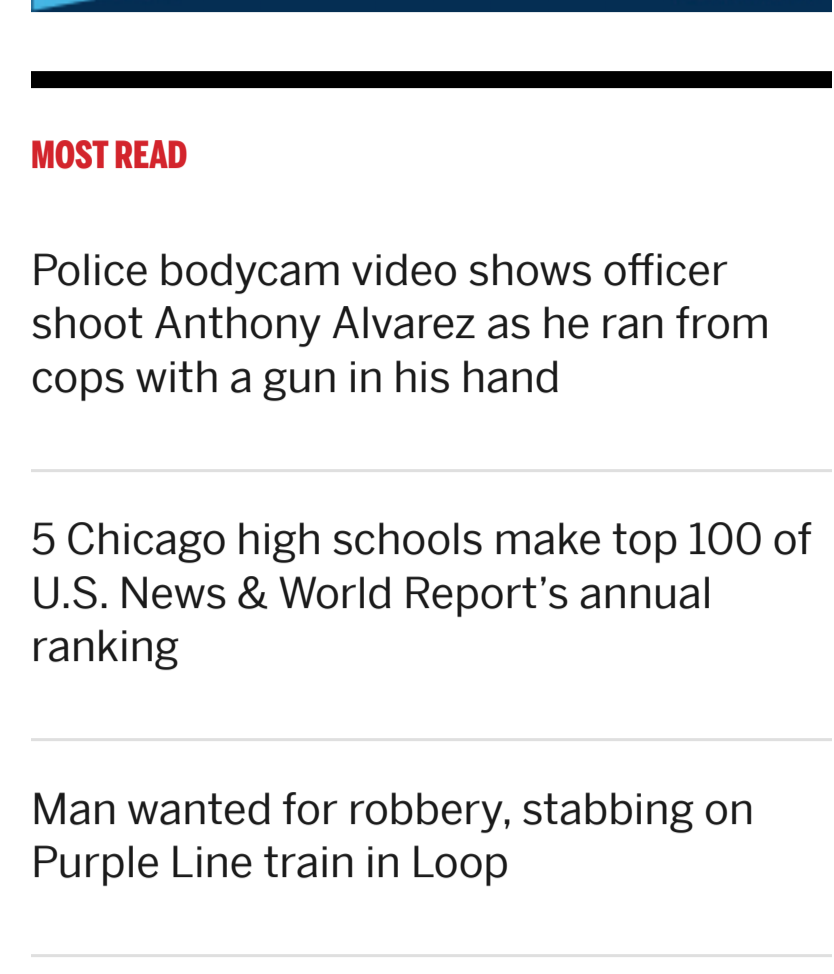
John Belushi has been gone for more years than he was with us, but some 38 years after the 33-year-old actor and generational comedic life force died of a drug overdose, it's nearly impossible to overstate the magnitude of Belushi's stardom in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and the lasting impact he has had on the comedy world. And even though the Chicago-born and Wheaton-raised Belushi's life story and legacy has been examined time and again, the documentary simply titled "Belushi" is a work of great value.

With this film, which opens the Chicago International Film Festival on Wednesday, director R.J. Cutler has fashioned arguably the definitive biography of Belushi, featuring a greatest hits collection of Belushi's most memorable work; graphic novel-style animation of key moments from John's childhood through his early stardom through the dark times, and a treasure trove of audio tapes from Judy Belushi's collection, which had been sitting in the basement of her house on Martha's Vineyard for years. We even get a glimpse of Belushi's most personal moments, via handwritten letters he sent to Judy, who had been with him ever since they were sweethearts at Wheaton Community High School in the mid-1960s. Bill Hader as does a brilliant job of voicing the letters; it's not quite an imitation, but it really feels as if we're hearing Belushi in his own words, whether he was sharing his hopes and dreams with Judy, compiling a list of things he needed to do in order to become a better man or, near the end, confessing, "I'm afraid I'm too far gone."

'Belushi'



Showtime presents a documentary directed by R.J. Cutler. No MPAA rating. Running time: 108 minutes. Streaming at [chicagofilmfestival.com](#) from 7 p.m. Wednesday to Oct. 25. Available on Showtime beginning Nov. 22.



**MOST READ**

Police bodycam video shows officer shoot Anthony Alvarez as he ran from cops with a gun in his hand

5 Chicago high schools make top 100 of U.S. News & World Report's annual ranking

Man wanted for robbery, stabbing on Purple Line train in Loop

Horoscope for Wednesday, April 28, 2021

Man fatally shot while driving in Ashburn

**CS\*T**

### Breaking News

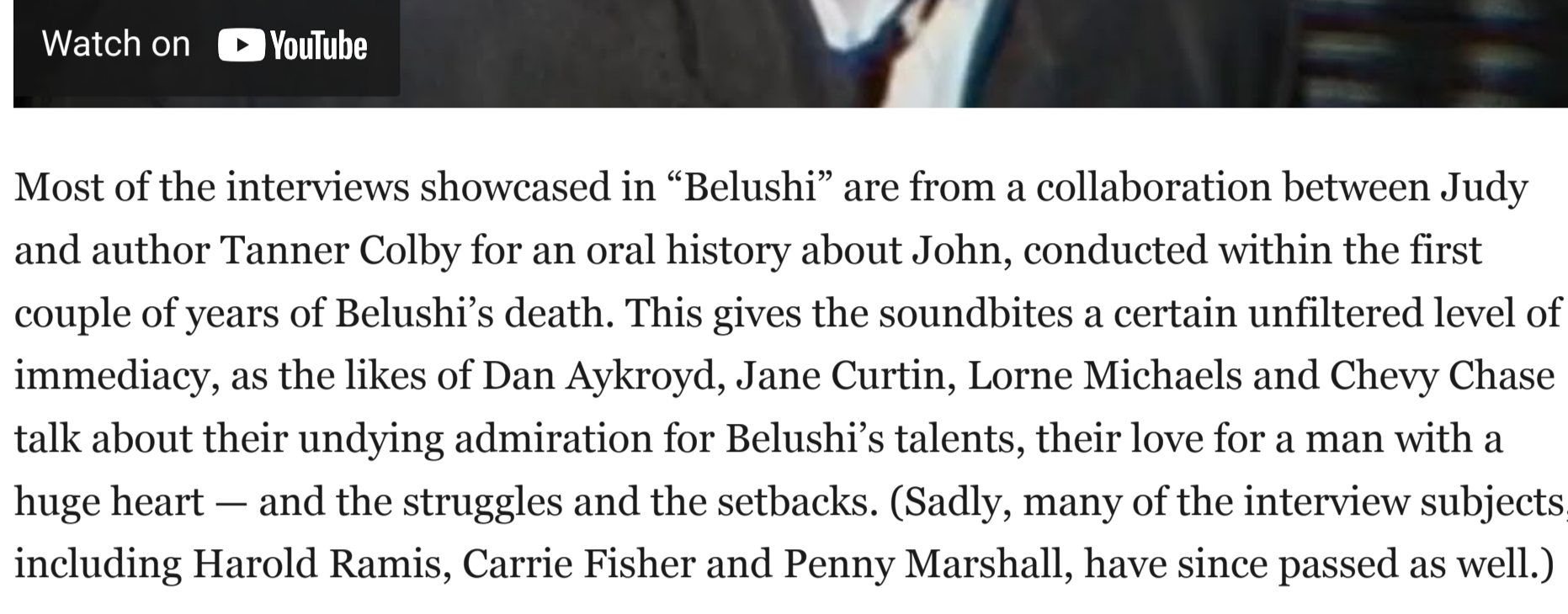
Know about breaking news as it happens. We follow the stories and update you as they develop.

Email (required)

By signing up, you agree to our [Privacy Notice](#) and European users agree to the [data transfer policy](#).

[SUBSCRIBE](#)

AD



Most of the interviews showcased in "Belushi" are from a collaboration between Judy and author Tanner Colby for an oral history about John, conducted within the first couple of years of Belushi's death. This gives the soundbites a certain unfiltered level of immediacy, as the likes of Dan Aykroyd, Jane Curtin, Lorne Michaels and Chevy Chase talk about their undying admiration for Belushi's talents, their love for a man with a huge heart — and the struggles and the setbacks. (Sadly, many of the interview subjects, including Harold Ramis, Carrie Fisher and Penny Marshall, have since passed as well.)

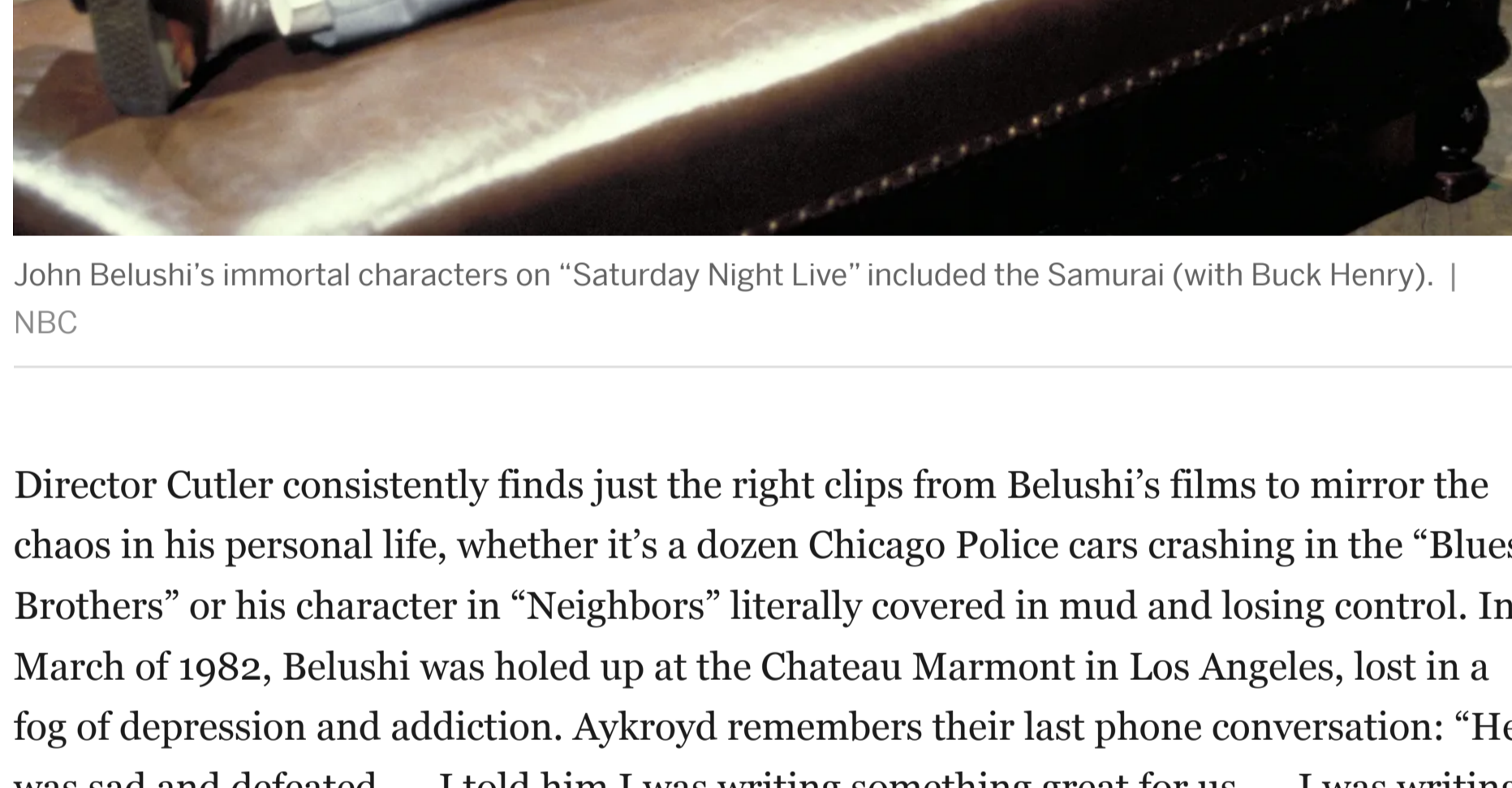
"Belushi" kicks off with footage of Belushi's screen test for "Saturday Night Live." Just a few years later, the Blues Brothers were performing before an adoring throng in Los Angeles in 1978. The recording of that performance would become the No. 1 album in the country, in the same year Belushi was starring on the white-hot "Saturday Night Live" and had stolen every scene in the mega-hit film "National Lampoon's Animal House." He was a triple-threat superstar who had conquered the showbiz world — and he was spiraling into a drug-fueled free fall.



John Belushi (left) and Dan Aykroyd work in Chicago on "The Blues Brothers," the movie drawn from their popular musical duo. | Universal Studios

"John always had appetites that were completely out of control, for everything," says Harold Ramis, once his Second City castmate. "But I didn't start to worry about him until he was at the Universal Amphitheatre, playing for 7,000 people. I looked at John on the stage and I thought, 'He's on the most popular comedy show of our generation, he was in the most successful comedy film ever, and now he's onstage fronting an amazing band.' My first thought was, 'How great for him.' My second thought was, 'Knowing his appetites, I don't think he'll survive this.'"

We flash back to John's childhood and high school years, illustrated in stunning fashion by animator Robert Valley. "Belushi" chronicles the moment when John took Judy to see a Second City show and told her afterward, "This is what I want to do." In rapid fashion, John went from performing with his improv group, called The West Compass Players, to joining Second City to becoming a star with the National Lampoon's Woodstock-parody stage show "Lemmings" and the National Lampoon Radio Hour — which led to "SNL." Along with he would bond with Dan Aykroyd (who recalls, "We fell in love the moment we met ... we saw the worth in each other right away for a great and enduring friendship"), establish a host of memorable characters on "Saturday Night Live" including Jake Blues, the Samurai and Pete Dionasopoulos of the Olympia Café, and enter into a dark embrace with booze, pot, cocaine and heroin. On and off camera, "John was just this big event," says Carrie Fisher.

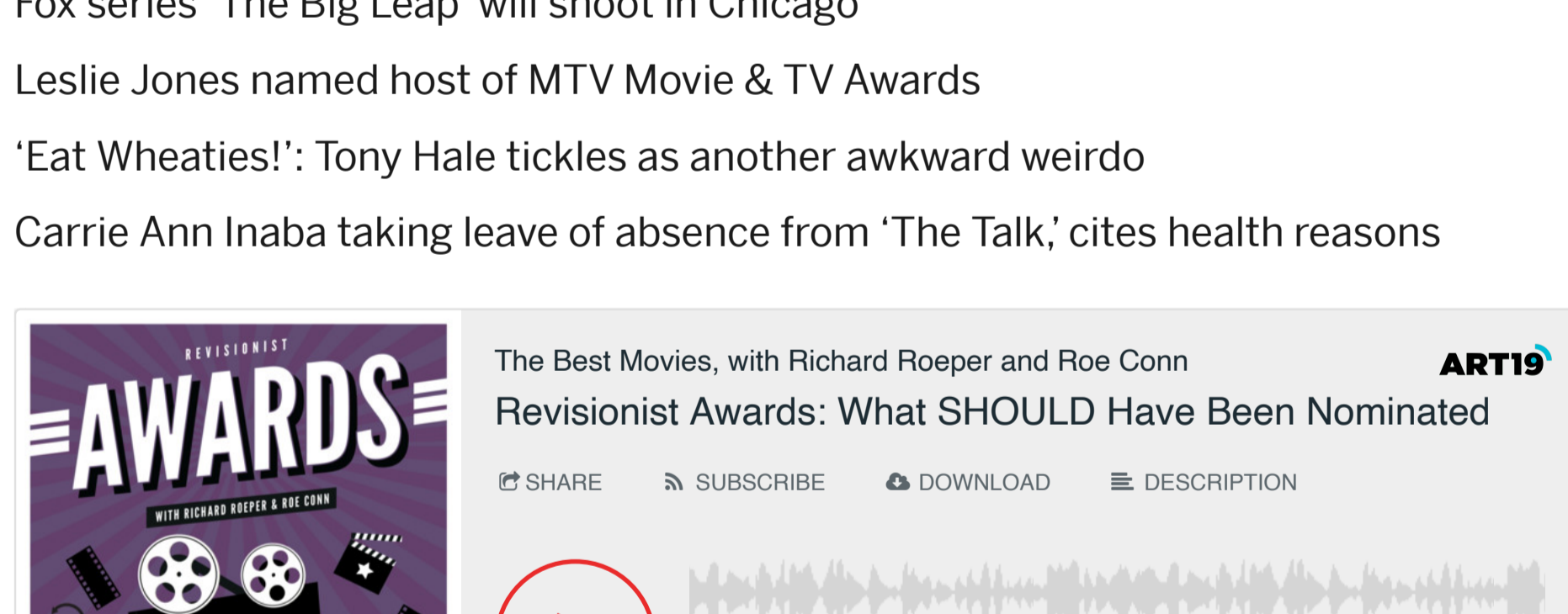


John Belushi's immortal characters on "Saturday Night Live" included the Samurai (with Buck Henry). | NBC

Director Cutler consistently finds just the right clips from Belushi's films to mirror the chaos in his personal life, whether it's a dozen Chicago Police cars crashing in the "Blues Brothers" or his character in "Neighbors" literally covered in mud and losing control. In March of 1982, Belushi was hospitalized at the Chateau Marmont in Los Angeles, lost in a fog of depression and addiction. Aykroyd remembers their last phone conversation: "He was sad and defeated. ... I told him I was writing something great for us. ... I was writing 'Ghostbusters.' ... I thought I'll finish this page, this paragraph and get out there ... but I didn't get there in time and I carry that with me forever."

A short while later, Belushi was gone. In the span of less than a decade, he left a lifetime's worth of memorable work — but just think of what he could have delivered in the years and decades to come.

*The world premiere of "Belushi," presented by the Chicago International Film Festival, begins at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday at the ChiTown Movies drive-in, 2343 S. Throop St. Tickets: [chicagofilmfestival.com](#)*



**NEXT UP IN MOVIES AND TV**

The Mix: Lyric's Rising Stars, drive-in horror and more cool things to do in Chicago April 29-May 5

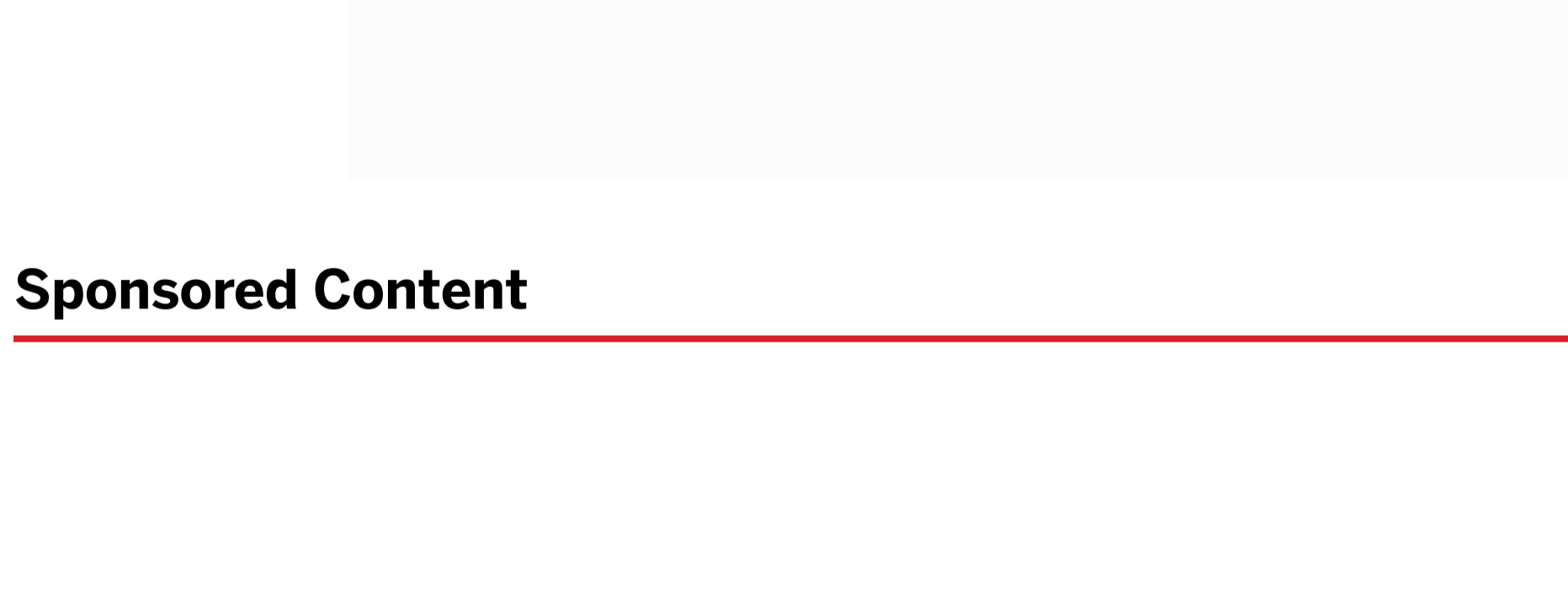
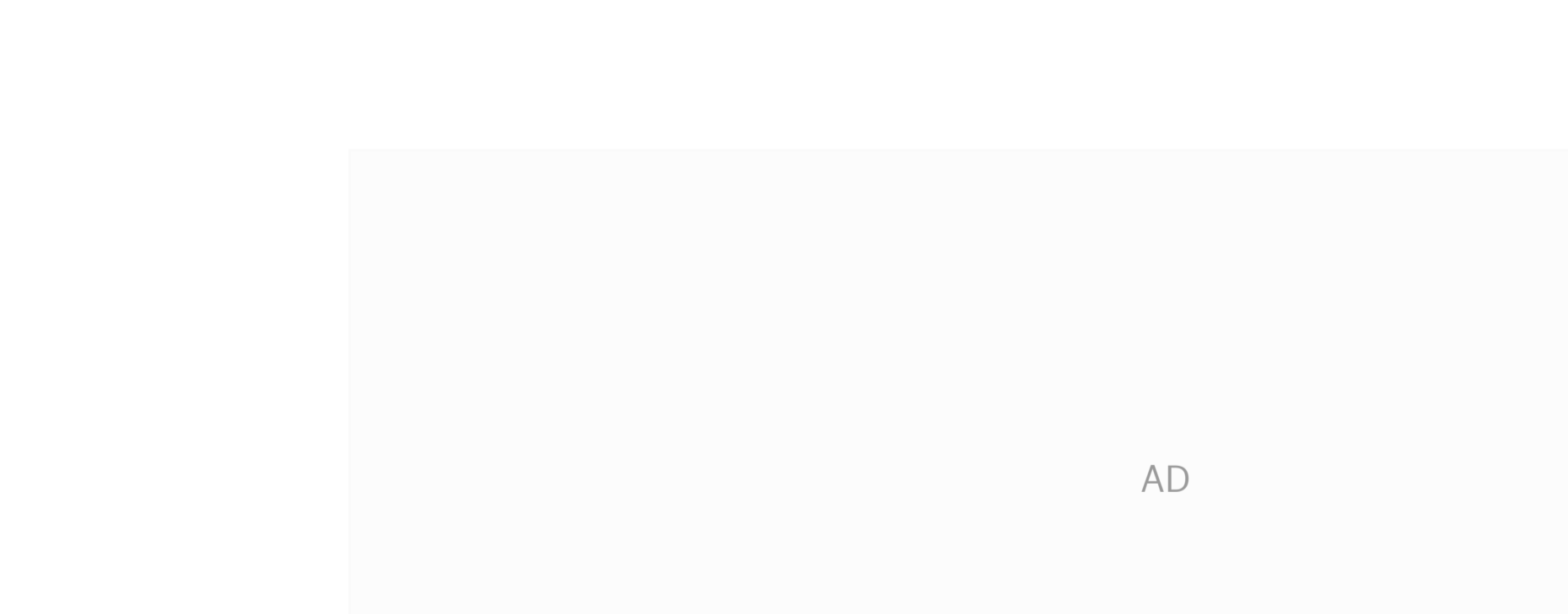
'Things Heard & Seen': Overwrought horror starring an overqualified cast

Fox series 'The Big Leap' will shoot in Chicago

Leslie Jones named host of MTV Movie & TV Awards

'Eat Wheaties!': Tony Hale tickles as another awkward weirdo

Carrie Ann Inaba taking leave of absence from 'The Talk,' cites health reasons



AD

### Sponsored Content

Recommended by [Outbrain](#)

**People in Los Angeles are Loving Martha Stewart's Meal Kit.**  
Martha Stewart & Marley Spoon

**Here are the Cost Differences Between Cremation and a Burial**  
Cremations | Search Ads

**1 In 2 Mac Users Are Unaware Of This Mac Trick**  
MacKeeper

**Brain Scan Uncovers Real Cause of Tinnitus (It's Genius)**  
world-of-health-wellness.com

**19 Accurate War Movies Veterans Love**  
Ranker

**[Pics] 69 Year Old Elvira Is Not Ashamed Of Her Age Or Her Net Worth**  
<http://urbanautnity.com/>

### THE LATEST

**Villa Park man charged with carjacking Amazon delivery driver**  
The Amazon driver parked his vehicle while he made deliveries in a neighborhood near Villa Park and when he returned a man in dark-colored clothes pushed him to the ground and stole his 2006 Toyota Scion  
By Sun-Times Wire

**Speech text, Biden's first address to Congress: 'America is on the move again'**  
Said Biden, "Life can knock us down. But in America, we never stay down. In America, we always get up."  
By Contributor

**City deploys trucks to protect retail corridors following video release of police shooting Anthony Alvarez**  
Video officials confirmed Wednesday that vehicles including snow plows and garbage trucks would be deployed in a preemptive effort to discourage looting after video of the fatal police shooting was released Wednesday.  
By Sam Kelly

**Latest loss, decisions keep Tony La Russa watchdogs on alert**  
There is no getting around it, and it comes with the territory, Hall of Fame ring on his finger or not, White Sox manager Tony La Russa's decisions will be scrutinized.  
By Daryl Van Schouwen

**Jackson-Akiwumi would be rare judge who was a public defender highlighted at her Senate confirmation hearing**  
That the Chicago-based federal appeals court is all-white was spotlighted at Jackson-Akiwumi's Senate Judiciary Committee confirmation hearing.  
By Lynn Sweet

**Pritzker's energy bill seeks to spark clean energy of the future and escape dirty politics of the past**  
The Consumers and Climate First Act addresses ethics and consumer protections as well as renewable energy and clean power. It also seeks to address how the state plans to help those who lose their jobs as Illinois shifts away from non-renewable energy sources.  
By Rachel Hinton

AD

