

= The Bubble ( Parks and Recreation ) =

" The Bubble " is the fifteenth episode of the third season of the American comedy television series Parks and Recreation , and the 45th overall episode of the series . It originally aired on NBC in the United States on May 19 , 2011 . In the episode , Leslie becomes nervous when her new boyfriend Ben has a business meeting with her tough mother , Marlene . Meanwhile , Chris tries to make some changes in the parks department , much to the chagrin of the staff .

Written by Greg Levine and Brian Rowe and directed by Matt Sohn , " The Bubble " originally aired back @-@ to @-@ back along with " Lil ' Sebastian " . The two are stand @-@ alone episodes not originally meant to run together , but because the third season premiered late , they had to be shown together so the series ' season would conclude by the end of the television season . The episode featured a guest appearance by Pamela Reed as Leslie 's mother Marlene , her first appearance since the second season episode " Galentine 's Day " .

" The Bubble " marked a major progression for the character Tom Haverford , who starts considering if he should leave his city hall position , which sets the stage for him to leave the position in " Li 'l Sebastian " . " The Bubble " received generally positive reviews and , according to Nielsen Media Research , was seen by an estimated 4 @.@ 27 million household viewers . Combined with an estimated 3 @.@ 72 million household viewers with " Li 'l Sebastian " , the two episodes ' ratings were about even with the previous week 's episodes , " The Fight " and " Road Trip " .

= = Plot = =

In a cold open scene , the parks department welcomes Ann ( Rashida Jones ) to her new office in city hall and fill it with balloons , much to the chagrin of her cranky officemate Stuart ( Jim Jansen ) . Leslie ( Amy Poehler ) and Ben ( Adam Scott ) are dating , but they are keeping their relationship a secret due to a no @-@ dating policy at work . They are enjoying what Leslie calls " the bubble " , or the beginning of a relationship when everything is simple and fun . It is suddenly threatened , however , when Ben has a meeting with Leslie 's mother Marlene ( Pamela Reed ) , a notoriously tough politician in the Pawnee school system , who wants Ben to approve the purchase of four new school buses despite a difficult budget season . Afraid of ruining the bubble , Leslie initially tells Ben she is not related to Marlene . Right before Ben 's meeting , however , Leslie admits Marlene is her mother , making him nervous and causing him to capitulate to all of her demands during the meeting . Marlene considers Ben weak , so Leslie becomes determined to prove that he is a tough boss to impress Marlene .

Meanwhile , Chris ( Rob Lowe ) has enacted numerous changes to the parks department ; he promotes Jerry ( Jim O 'Heir ) to public relations director , appoints April ( Aubrey Plaza ) as everyone 's assistant , places Tom ( Aziz Ansari ) on the nightmarish fourth floor with Andy ( Chris Pratt ) as his temporary assistant , and makes Ron ( Nick Offerman ) sit in the middle of a circular desk after the removal of his office , to force him to interact with people . Ron believes everything will eventually go back to normal as it has with past city managers that implemented drastic changes . However , Donna ( Retta ) is concerned the overly @-@ determined Chris will not do so and demands that Ron talk to him . On the fourth floor , Tom 's attempts to charm some of the elderly women into doing his work fails miserably , as they ignore him and all adore Andy .

Leslie trains Ben for his next meeting with her mother . He impresses Marlene so much with his tough negotiation skills that she becomes flirtatious with him . An uncomfortable Ben tells Leslie they should tell her about their relationship , but Leslie does not want to lose the bubble . Fed up , Ben storms into Marlene 's office and tells her that he is dating her daughter and asks her to keep it secret . Marlene laughs off the situation and tells Leslie that she approves of Ben . Meanwhile , Ron tells Chris the changes do not play to his staff 's strengths because Jerry only does well in the background , Tom only does well if people are all aware of his activities , and April only does well if people leave her the hell alone . Chris takes in Ron 's well @-@ reasoned arguments and they cut a deal where Chris will return everything to the way it was after Ron does one more week of

interacting with the public . Nevertheless , Tom is frustrated with the experience and begins to contemplate leaving his city hall job to pursue his own entrepreneurial interests .

= = Production = =

" The Bubble " was directed by Matt Sohn and written by Brian Rowe and Greg Levine , the latter of whom regularly works as a writers assistant on the series . The episode was originally broadcast on May 19 , 2011 , and ran back @-@ to @-@ back with the Parks and Recreation episode " Li 'l Sebastian " , which aired immediately afterward . The two are stand @-@ alone episodes that were not originally designed to be shown together . However , because the show premiered late as a mid @-@ season replacement in January , the two episodes aired together so the third season could conclude at the end of the television season . The concept of the fourth floor of Pawnee 's town hall as a dark and horrifying place was introduced in the second season episode " Tom 's Divorce " , and has been a running joke with the show ever since .

" The Bubble " featured a guest appearance by Pamela Reed as Leslie 's mother Marlene Griggs @-@ Knope , her first appearance on the show since the second season " Galentine 's Day " . Comedian Dana Gould , who previously worked as a producer on Parks and Recreation , made an uncredited cameo appearance as a man on the fourth floor who enters Tom 's fourth floor office looking for a man named Mort , then smashes a coffee pot and says , " Tell Mort I said , ' Your move . ' " " The Bubble " marked a progression of the Tom Haverford that had been building throughout the third season , in which the character begins to consider leaving his city hall position to pursue his own business ambitions . That storyline is advanced in " The Bubble " through Tom 's frustration with his assignment by Chris , and culminates in the season finale " Li 'l Sebastian " , in which he ultimately quits the parks department .

= = Cultural references = =

Leslie refers to the cable television network History while she describes why she enjoys the early part of romantic relationships : " White wine , cuddling , and crazy amounts of History Channel documentaries . " In one scene , Leslie refers to a mixtape for Ben that included five straight songs by singer and songwriter Sarah McLachlan . Leslie prepares Ben for her meeting with Marlene by describing some of her favorite conversation topics , including industrialist Andrew Carnegie and Calvin and Hobbes cartoonist Bill Watterson . Leslie claims her mother loves actor Daniel Craig and Mark Sloan , a character from the medical drama series Grey 's Anatomy nicknamed " McSteamy " , and she makes a music box with a picture of the latter character in it for Ben to give her as a gift .

= = Reception = =

= = = Ratings = = =

Due to the 9 p.m. broadcast of " Search Committee " , the one @-@ hour seventh season finale of comedy series The Office , Parks and Recreation was not shown in its regular 9 : 30 p.m. broadcast on May 19 . " The Bubble " aired at 10 p.m. , while " Li 'l Sebastian " immediately followed it at 10 : 30 p.m. In its original American broadcast , " The Bubble " was seen by an estimated 4 @.@ 27 million household viewers , according to Nielsen Media Research , with a 2 @.@ 4 rating / 6 share among viewers between ages 18 and 49 . A rating point represents one percent of the total number of television sets in American households , and a share means the percentage of television sets in use tuned to the program . Viewership for Parks and Recreation progressively dropped for the night , as " Li 'l Sebastian " was seen by an estimated 3 @.@ 72 million households . Combined , the ratings were about even with the average ratings for the previous week , in which two Parks and Recreation episodes were also shown back @-@ to @-@ back , although from a 9 : 30 p.m. to 10 : 30 p.m. time block : " The Fight " had been seen by an estimated 4 @.@ 55 million household

viewers , while " Road Trip " was seen by 3 @.@ 54 million households . In its 10 p.m. timeslot , " The Bubble " was outperformed by the fourth season finale of the ABC medical drama series Private Practice , which was seen by 7 @.@ 45 million household viewers .

= = = Reviews = = =

" The Bubble " received generally positive reviews . The Atlantic writer Scott Meslow called the episode " a fine example of Parks and Recreation at its funniest " and along with " Li 'l Sebastian " served as an " ideal caper to a remarkably strong third season of the series " . Meslow added that Ron 's intervention on behalf of his co @-@ workers demonstrates he is a " much better manager than he lets on " . Henry Hanks of CNN called it a very funny episode and said scenes of Ron swiveling around his circular desk to avoid talking to members of the public were " masterfully executed " . Alan Sepinwall of HitFix said he enjoyed Marlene 's attempts to seduce Ben , and especially loved the subplot with Chris making changes to the parks department . He praised Nick Offerman 's " marvelously minimalist " performance , especially while trying to avoid people in his swivel desk . Matt Fowler of IGN said the episode was hilarious and demonstrated " how marvelously great this series is at creating a truly lovable ensemble " . He also praised the subplot with Pamela Reed and the " ridiculous filthiness " of the fourth floor .

Eric Sundermann of Hollywood.com called it a " great little episode " and strong setup for the season finale . Although Sundermann initially had reservations about Leslie and Ben getting together , he now said it felt real because Leslie was willing to risk a job she loved so much to be with him . Paste magazine writer Garrett Martin said although the idea of pairing two co @-@ workers felt like a conventional television move , he did not mind with Leslie and Ben because they are such a " charming and well @-@ matched pair " . Martin also said Pamela Reed " absolutely kills it " as Leslie 's mother . Rick Porter of Zap2it said Parks and Recreation was at the " top of its game " , and that " The Bubble " worked well paired along with the season finale " Li 'l Sebastian " . He praised the comedic and romantic chemistry between Amy Poehler and Adam Scott , and said the subplot with Chris imposing changes on the parks department was " great fun " .

Joel Keller of TV Squad said he enjoyed seeing Ron stand up for the parks department , which proved that despite his hatred of government , he knows his co @-@ workers well and is a good boss . Keller also praised Pamela Reed 's performance and said she works well with Amy Poehler . Nick McHatton of TV Fanatic said although he believed the no @-@ dating policy was little more than an unnecessary device meant to create friction between Leslie and Ben , he enjoyed the lengths with which they were going to keep their relationship secret . Steve Heisler of The A.V. Club called " The Bubble " an excellent episode that went a long way in fleshing out the Leslie and Ben romance , but primarily set the scene for the superior " Li 'l Sebastian " . Time magazine writer James Poniewozik said " The Bubble " was not as funny as some of the better third season episodes like " Harvest Festival " or " Andy and April 's Fancy Party " , but was nonetheless enjoyable and " perfectly funny " .