



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

June 18, 2014

**The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts
Will Present**

**The 17th Annual Mark Twain Prize for American Humor
to
JAY LENO**

**Prize Will Be Awarded at the Kennedy Center
At a Gala Performance on October 19, 2014**

Program to be broadcast nationally on PBS November 23, 2014

(WASHINGTON, D.C.)—The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts will present the 17th annual Mark Twain Prize for American Humor to Jay Leno on October 19, 2014 in the Kennedy Center Concert Hall. The Prize, which is named to honor one of the world's greatest humorists, will be given at a gala performance featuring some of the biggest names in comedy, and will be taped by WETA for broadcast nationwide on PBS November 23, 2014 (check local listings). Capital One® is the presenting sponsor of the Kennedy Center 17th annual Mark Twain Prize for American Humor.

The Mark Twain Prize for American Humor recognizes people who have had an impact on American society in ways similar to the distinguished 19th century novelist and essayist Samuel Clemens, best known as Mark Twain. As a social commentator, satirist, and creator of characters, Clemens was a fearless observer of society, who startled many while delighting and informing many more with his uncompromising perspective on social injustice and personal folly. He revealed the great truth of humor when he said “against the assault of laughter nothing can stand.”

“Like Mark Twain, Jay Leno has offered us a lifetime’s worth of humorous commentary on American daily life,” stated Kennedy Center Chairman David M. Rubenstein. “For both men, no one was too high or too low to escape their wit, and we are all the better for it.”

Upon learning he will receive the Mark Twain Prize, Jay Leno remarked, “What an honor! I’m a big fan of Mark Twain’s. In fact, *A Tale of Two Cities* is one of my favorite books!”

Each year the producers of the Mark Twain Prize for American Humor cast a wide net for the next recipient. The Prize recognizes people who have had an impact on American society in ways similar to Mark Twain and input is sought from prior recipients, distinguished members of the comedic community, and letters from the general public. A short list is compiled by the Executive Producers and presented to a group comprised of representatives from the Kennedy Center board of trustees, as well as Kennedy Center senior management and programming staff.

As recipient of the Mark Twain Prize for American Humor, Jay Leno will receive a copy of an 1884 bronze portrait bust of Mark Twain sculpted by Karl Gerhardt (1853–1940). Previous recipients of the Kennedy Center Mark Twain Prize are Richard Pryor (1998), Jonathan Winters (1999), Carl Reiner (2000), Whoopi Goldberg (2001), Bob Newhart (2002), Lily Tomlin (2003), Lorne Michaels (2004), Steve Martin (2005), Neil Simon (2006), Billy Crystal (2007), George Carlin (2008), Bill Cosby (2009), Tina Fey (2010), Will Ferrell (2011), Ellen DeGeneres (2012), and Carol Burnett (2013). The event has been broadcast nationally every year since the Kennedy Center established the Prize in 1998. The event is created by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and executive producers Bob Kaminsky, Peter Kaminsky, Mark Krantz, and Cappy McGarr.

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts is America's living memorial to President Kennedy. It is the nation's busiest performing arts facility and annually hosts more than 2,000 performances for audiences totaling nearly 2 million; Center-related touring productions, television, and radio broadcasts welcome 40 million more. Now in its 43rd season, the Center presents performances of music, dance, and theater; supports artists in the creation of new work; and serves the nation as a leader in arts education.

Deborah F. Rutter, who becomes Kennedy Center president on September 1, stated, "The Mark Twain Prize has become one of the foremost awards for achievement in comedy, thanks to a large cadre of friends and supporters who have supported it over the years. I want to thank our partners at WETA, PBS, and Capital One who help us bring attention to this important art form."

Tickets will go on sale to the public August 6, 2014.

ABOUT JAY LENO:

It was in May of 1992 when Leno followed in the footsteps of legendary NBC late-night hosts Steve Allen, Jack Paar and Johnny Carson as *Tonight Show* host. Prior to becoming host, Leno had been the exclusive guest host on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson* since September 1987. He first appeared as a guest on the show March 2, 1977, and he made numerous additional appearances on the show, as well as NBC's former program *Late Night with David Letterman*. An indefatigable performer, Leno loves to test his humor live on audiences across the nation, performing over 100 live appearances in nightclubs, theaters and stadiums each year, including during *Tonight Show* hosting.

Leno has also gained an international following on the internet with his new creation, Jaylenosgarage.com, winning an Emmy Award and two additional nominations for Outstanding Special Class–Short-Format Nonfiction Programs. Leno, himself, is the recipient of the People’s Choice Award and other honors, including the Harris Poll selection as most popular star on television. Other personal highlights include the Hasty Pudding Award at Harvard University and an honorary doctorate from his alma mater, Emerson College. Like Mr. Carson, Groucho Marx, and an elite group of entertainment figures, he has been invited to have his papers installed in the Library of Congress.

Leno’s children’s book *If Roast Beef Could Fly* (from Simon & Schuster) was published in April 2004 and immediately became a *New York Times* Bestseller. His follow-up kids book *How to be the Funniest Kid in Your Class* was similarly successful. He has also published the book *Leading with My Chin* (from HarperCollins), as well as four versions of *Headlines*, the compilation of books and desk calendars featuring his favorite funny newspaper headlines, and *Police Blotter*, a book with more humorous newspaper clips involving police stories. When he is not performing, writing, doing charitable work, Leno keeps busy doing voice-over work in such movies as *Cars* and *Igor* and the hit-TV show *The Fairly Oddparents* (Nickelodeon), where the character *The Crimson Chin* – a superhero with a chin with superpowers – was inspired by Leno’s own noted jawline. He is also a monthly columnist in *Popular Mechanics* and in his spare time, he enjoys working on his collection of classic cars and motorcycles, building a number of cars, including an eco-car in his eco-friendly garage. Leno was born in New Rochelle, New York, and raised in Andover, Massachusetts. He and his wife, Mavis, live in Los Angeles.

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