



Press Release

For Immediate Release
12:00 p.m. EST, May 16, 2017

**The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts
Will Present
The 20th Annual Mark Twain Prize for American Humor
to
DAVID LETTERMAN**

**Prize Will Be Awarded at the Kennedy Center
At a Gala Performance on October 22, 2017**

**Program to Be Broadcast Nationally as
Center Celebrates 20th Anniversary of Mark Twain Prize Award**

(WASHINGTON)—The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts will present the 20th annual Mark Twain Prize for American Humor to David Letterman on Sunday, October 22, 2017 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. This year's ceremony marks the 20th consecutive year that the Kennedy Center's marquee comedy award will be presented and broadcast nationally. On-sale and ticketing information for this event will be available at a later date. Sponsorship packages for the Mark Twain Prize Gala Performance will go on sale Wednesday, May 17.

Capital One® is the Presenting Sponsor of this year's Kennedy Center Mark Twain Prize for American Humor as part of the bank's five-year, \$5 million gift to fund Comedy at the Kennedy Center, a signature program at the Center focused on elevating comedy as an art form and uniting the community through laughter.

The Mark Twain Prize for American Humor recognizes individuals 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.”

“For decades, David Letterman delivered comedy to America that was smart, authentic, and frankly, what many of us came to rely upon to elevate our spirits after a long day,” said Kennedy Center President Deborah F. Rutter. “Raise your hand if, like me, you shifted your bedtime because you didn’t want to miss a moment of Dave on television lest you not be part of the conversation with friends and co-workers the next day. His 30-year late-night presence—filled with pranks, antics, and his quintessential deadpan humor—remains a fixture of the American experience. I’m probably not the first to say that Dave is ‘comedy royalty’ and we are thrilled to present the Mark Twain Prize in this special anniversary year to such a deserving individual.”

“This is an exciting honor,” said Letterman upon learning he is to receive the nation’s top prize for comedy and humor. “For 33 years, there was no better guest, no greater friend of the show, than Mark Twain. The guy could really tell a story.”

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. Input is sought from prior recipients, distinguished members of the comedy community, and letters from the general public.

As recipient of the Mark Twain Prize for American Humor, David Letterman 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), Carol Burnett (2013), Jay Leno (2014), Eddie Murphy (2015), and Bill Murray (2016). The event has been broadcast nationally every year since the Kennedy Center established the Prize in 1998. The event was 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 46th 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.

ABOUT DAVID LETTERMAN

Over 33 years on late-night television, David Letterman hosted 6,028 episodes of *Late Night* (NBC) and *The Late Show* (CBS), and was the longest-running late-night broadcaster in American history. As a writer, performer, and producer, Letterman is one of the most-nominated individuals in Emmy Award® history, with 52 nominations, resulting in 10 wins. Letterman is also a two-time Peabody-Award winner and a Kennedy Center Honoree.

Born and raised in Indianapolis, Letterman's first network break came as a writer in 1978 on the CBS variety series *Mary*, starring Mary Tyler Moore. In November of that year, he made the first of his 22 appearances on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*, which he also guest-hosted numerous times. In 1980, Letterman began hosting a morning comedy-variety program, *The David Letterman Show*, which ran for three months on NBC. His groundbreaking show *Late Night with David Letterman* premiered in February 1982. Throughout its 11 years, *Late Night* earned five Emmys® and 35 Emmy® nominations. It was recently named as one of the top 20 greatest TV shows of all time by *Rolling Stone*.

On August 30, 1993, the *Late Show with David Letterman* made its debut on CBS, establishing itself as the first successful comedy/variety show in late night, outside of NBC. In its 22 years at CBS, *Late Show* launched the careers of countless comedians and musical acts. From his roots in comedy, Letterman also distinguished himself as an interviewer, sharing the stage with the U.S. Presidents, Cabinet officials, Medal of Honor recipients, and virtually every Presidential candidate for more than 20 years. Through his guest interviews, Letterman also brought to light important global issues such as world hunger and climate change.

Letterman announced his departure from *Late Show* in 2014, and aired his final episode on May 20th, 2015, to an audience of 13.76 million people.

David Letterman is 70, and resides in New York with his wife Regina and son Harry.

Capital One® is the Presenting Sponsor of the
20th annual Kennedy Center *Mark Twain Prize for American Humor*.

Major support is also provided by American Airlines.

For more information, please visit the [Mark Twain Prize website](#).

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