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NATION'S LARGEST PUPPETRY CENTER TO OPEN JIM HENSON WING IN ATLANTA

Henson Family Proposes Gift to Center for Puppetry Arts

ATLANTA, July 25, 2007 – When the Center for Puppetry Arts opened its doors in 1978, Jim Henson and Kermit the Frog were there to cut the ceremonial ribbon. Twenty-nine years later the Henson family has chosen the Center, the largest non-profit organization in the United States specifically dedicated to the art form of puppetry, as the proposed destination for their definitive collection honoring Jim Henson's legacy.

This momentous gift of between 500 and 700 puppets, props, scenic elements, posters, sketches, drawings, films and videos, will be housed in a newly planned Jim Henson Wing, to be included in the Center's new museum space, tentatively scheduled to open in 2012.

Last year, the Center received a prestigious grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to fund the planning of their new museum. This new museum will house the most extensive collection of world puppetry in the nation. Soon after, the Henson Family approached the Center with a proposal to add a Jim Henson Wing to the project with the stipulation that the gift of the collection is contingent on the Center raising the money to build a wing to house and exhibit the collection.

"What the Henson family is offering us is an institution-changing gift," said Vince Anthony, Executive Director of the Center. "They have given us the opportunity to make the Center into an international destination. They have created a challenge for us, the Atlanta community, and others who wish to step forward and partner with us in making this dream a reality. This will allow us to embrace their monumental offer and in return present a new museum worthy of such a collection."

The Center is nearing completion of a comprehensive facility development planning process that will chart the size, scope and parameters of its future museum, theater, and education facility needs. The results of this process will lay the ground work for a major capital campaign to cover the costs of the design, construction, operation and endowment of the Center. The Jim Henson Wing is now an exciting part of these new plans.

However, Jim Henson fans won't have to wait five years to remember his remarkable contributions to puppetry. An historic Kermit the Frog puppet is already on display in the Center's atrium as the focal point of the current special exhibit: Jim Henson: A Man and his Frog.

Joining this Kermit puppet in September is a cast full of familiar faces. New puppets will be rotated in the Center's Special Exhibit Gallery over a period of time. Visitors can see historic puppets such as Rowlf, Swedish Chef and Dr. Teeth, who were all performed by Jim Henson, as well as Fraggles like Mokey and Red, and Jim Henson Fantasy Film puppets like Aughra from *Dark Crystal* and Didymus from *Labyrinth*.

In addition to these world renowned Jim Henson puppets, the rotating exhibits will include groundbreaking animatronic and character animation technology, product commercials that influenced the future of television commercials, experimental films such as The Academy Award nominated *Time Piece*, seldom seen screenings of Jim's use of animation superimposed over the television screen like *Visual Thinking*, the floating face called *Nobody* and *Ripples & Wheels* created for The New York World's Fair in 1964 and much more.

"We are thrilled to be able to present the full spectrum of the life and work of Jim Henson," Anthony said. "Many exhibits can only present a small portion of what Jim created and accomplished in his life time. What makes the Center unique is that we can become a living, breathing, evolving representation of Jim Henson's legacy."

Long-time patrons of the Center will remember Executive Director Vince Anthony's close relationship with the Henson family. In addition to being present for the Center's grand opening in 1978, Jim and Kermit returned in 1988 for the ten-year anniversary where they performed for the audience and even cut the cake! The Henson family has continued to participate and play an important role in the Center's activities.

"My father, Jim Henson, loved the art of puppetry," said Cheryl Henson, President of The Jim Henson Foundation. "He was constantly experimenting with new technologies and forms; there was nothing more exciting than creating something that had never been done before."

"We are delighted the Center for Puppetry Arts will make it possible for the public to see and experience the full breadth of this extraordinary work that reaches across generations and countries to touch everybody. My father was active in the International puppet community and supported innovative puppeteers through his foundation. There is no better place to celebrate my father's work than here at the premiere puppetry center in the United States."

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The Center for Puppetry Arts is a non-profit, 501(C3) organization and is supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts; the Georgia Council for the Arts, through appropriations from the Georgia General Assembly (GCA is a Partner Agency of the National Endowment for the Arts); and contributions from individuals, corporations and foundations. Major funding for the Center is provided by the Fulton County Board of Commissioners under the guidance of the Fulton County Arts Council. Major support is provided by the City of Atlanta Office of Cultural Affairs. The Center is a member of Theatre Communications Group and the Atlanta Coalition of Performing Arts. The Center also serves as headquarters of UNIMA-USA.