

The Newport Daily News

75 cents
NewportDailyNews.com

NEWPORT ♦ MIDDLETOWN ♦ PORTSMOUTH ♦ JAMESTOWN ♦ TIVERTON

Friday
July 30, 2010



David Hansen ♦ Daily News staff photos

Actress and comedian Whoopi Goldberg is presented with an American Civilization Award by Laurence S. Cutler and his wife, Judy Goffman Cutler, on Thursday during the National Museum of American Illustration's gala. In addition to Goldberg, American Civilization Awards also went to author Tom Wolfe, below, and the National Arts Club.

ILLUSTRATION CELEBRATION

National Museum of American Illustration turns 10 with a star-studded birthday party

By Sean Flynn
Daily News staff

NEWPORT — Author Tom Wolfe, entertainer Whoopi Goldberg and lawyer F. Lee Bailey were among the 350 guests at a gala held in Vernon Court on Thursday night to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the National Museum of American Illustration.

Laurence S. Cutler and Judy Goffman Cutler opened the museum on Bellevue Avenue in Newport after a zoning battle with neighbors and the Bellevue Avenue Ochre Point Neighborhood Association

that ended up in court, a dispute that was referred to several times by Laurence Cutler and others during the speeches.

"I couldn't understand why people did not want a gallery here," Goldberg said. "I could understand it if they were selling hot tubs or hot dogs."

At the time, she said she volunteered to come and talk to the neighbors. "Judy and Laurence thought it would not be a good idea," she said to laughter from the crowd. "This is my first trip to Newport."

"Whoopi's advice to us was, 'Don't settle,'" Laurence Cutler said. "That really says everything about her."



Goldberg, Wolfe and the National Arts Club, founded in 1898 in New York City to promote public interest in the arts, received American Civilization Awards from the museum for their contributions to the arts and American popular culture.

The awards were made as guests enjoyed a multi-course dinner featuring Veal Paillard, emerald basis whipped potatoes, salads and elaborate desserts under a large tent set up on the museum grounds, with music provided by the Soul Sound Revue. There was dancing until midnight.

Illustration

Continued from A1

"You guys are great," Goldberg said, turning to the band.

This was a well-heeled crowd, with individual ticket prices at \$350. Premier sponsor tables were available for \$15,000, VIP sponsor tables for \$10,000 and supporter tables for \$5,000. All proceeds went to the American Civilization Foundation, the nonprofit organization established by the Cutlers to operate the museum.

Some guests, including Goldberg and British entrepreneur Peter de Savary, have worked with the Cutlers to establish their own collections of works by American illustrators. De Savary said he has 42 works from his collection on display at his Vanderbilt Hotel on Mary Street. The Cutlers own and operate a commercial gallery, the American Illustrators Gallery in New York City, where the purchases are made. The museum here exhibits art that is not for sale.

During the evening, de Savary auctioned off a series of artworks, including a Howard Chandler Christy painting from 1904 for \$18,000 and a J.C. Leyendecker illustration from 1950 for \$9,000. A man accompanying Campbell Soup heiress Dorrance "Dodo" Hamilton successfully bid on two framed Playboy cartoons by Claude Smith from 1964 and 1968 for a total of \$5,500. All proceeds from these items and others sold during the "petite auction" went toward the museum's endowment fund.

Bailey said he was at the gala because he is a close friend of Laurence Cutler's younger brother. He said he does not collect American illustration art like some of the other guests. "I come and look at what I can't afford," he told a reporter. "We have that in common."

The attire was "festive cocktail," with the women in brightly colored dresses. Most of the men wore blazers of solid whites, tans or traditional blue. De Savary, however, wore a bright orange blazer, and another man was dressed in a multi-colored blazer in pastel shades.

"This is the event of the season," said Robert Power of Newport, who serves on the museum's New England Council. "This knocks the socks off everything else."

The featured speaker of the evening, Wolfe, was dressed as always in his iconic white suit. As a pioneer of the "New Journalism," he used fiction techniques for nonfiction reporting, such as his description of the lifestyle and antics of Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters in "The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test," a defining book of the 1960s. He also wrote a biting account of a party given by Leonard Bernstein to raise money for the Black Panthers called "Radical Chic," a phrase that entered the English lexicon.

Among his 16 books are best-sellers such as "The Right Stuff," a portrayal of the American space program, and "Bonfire of the Vanities," a novel about the 1980s that he called the "Me Decade" — another term that stuck.

Wolfe said the Cutlers were ahead of their time in recognizing early that American illustrators were great artists and that their works should be collected, preserved and exhibited.

"You are part of the freight train of history," he told them.

In past decades, many considered Norman Rockwell a mere commercial illustrator, Wolfe said. "At one point, he was considered loathsome by the art world because he was sentimental," he said.

That whole perception of Rockwell has changed to a recognition that he was a serious artist, "thanks in no small part to Judy and Lau-



David Hansen ♦ Daily News staff

Whoopi Goldberg laughs Thursday during the National Museum of American Illustration's 10th anniversary gala at Vernon Court in Newport.

rence," Wolfe said.

He pointed out that Rockwell's "Breaking Home Ties" sold for \$15.4 million in 2006 and one of his paintings done for a Saturday Evening Post cover recently sold for \$9.6 million.

By 2020, American illustrators will be fully recognized for the talents they had, Wolfe predicted.

"Norman Rockwell is the Picasso of the 21st century," he said.

Wolfe gave an overview of art trends in the 20th century, from modern art through pop art to minimalist art and what he called "no-hands art" and "tenure art." He condemned the "rusting walls" of Richard Serra and the sexually explicit sculptures of Jeff Koons. "Tenure art" he defined as short-term trendy art that gets the artist appointed to the faculty of a university and remains popular just long enough to win tenure for the artist.

"I think it's reached the end of the line," Wolfe said. "The illustrators are becoming the icons of American art."

Besides his work as author, Wolfe also has done illustrations. During a two-year peri-

od, he created illustrations monthly for Harper's Magazine. These pen-and-ink, conte crayon and pencil illustrations were compiled in Wolfe's book, "In Our Time." Wolfe's illustrations are a new exhibit in one of the rooms of the National Museum of American Illustration that guests were able to preview Thursday night.

It also was opening night for the museum's new main exhibit that features the works of Rockwell, who completed 321 covers for the Saturday Evening Post, and the works of his mentor, J.C. Leyendecker, who completed 322 covers for the same magazine.

Along the walls of the museum, a work of Rockwell's is paired with a work of Leyendecker, each with a similar theme. For example, Leyendecker's "Christmas Carolers" from 1907 is next to Rockwell's "Christmas Sing Merrily" from 1923. During their long productive careers, the artists took up many similar themes and the parallels in their works are striking.

Send reporter Sean Flynn e-mail at Flynn@NewportRI.com.