



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SECOND FAYETTE COUNTY HOMETOWN LEGENDS DESIGNATION FOCUSES ON LOCAL FILM PIONEER

Uniontown, PA – Fayette County boasts dozens of famous names, including standout Connellsville athletes John Woodruff and Johnny Lujack. Another Connellsville native, Edwin S. Porter, is a bit less well-known despite the important contributions he made to the film industry.

Now, Porter’s name recognition is getting a boost from some well-deserved accolades, as well as the inaugural silent film festival being held in his honor at the Connellsville Community Center, 201 E. Fairview Ave., Connellsville.

On Friday, Porter was recognized as the second honoree of the Fayette County Hometown Legends program, a project spearheaded by the Fayette County Commissioners in partnership with the Fayette Chamber of Commerce. The honor will be followed up with the first Edwin S. Porter Silent Film Festival on Saturday evening in the theater bearing the film pioneer’s name.

“The Hometown Legends program was created as a way to honor and recognize so many incredible people who were born in Fayette County, or came to live in Fayette County, and did remarkable things with their lives,” Fayette Chamber Executive Director Muriel Nuttall said in bestowing the designation.

Nuttall said that in spite of the “bad rap” Fayette sometimes gets, “this is an amazing, amazing county.” She said it is important to instill in our children a sense of pride in where they live, and programs such as Hometown Legends help do just that.

Porter was born in Connellsville in 1870 and grew up in the city, but his contributions would be much more far-reaching. At the age of 21, he was one of two people to obtain a patent for an electric regulator for lamps. He served as a telegraph operator and machinist in the U.S. Navy and went on to use that knowledge to build movie projectors and become a projectionist.

From there, Porter began to produce films. His career took off when he caught the attention of Thomas Edison, who hired him to work for the Edison Company, one of the major producers of moving pictures in the U.S. at that time. Porter obtained several movie industry patents and became Edison’s main film director, a job that allowed him to experiment with different ideas and film techniques, including dramatic editing and cross cutting.

Porter’s innovations are on display in his most well-known silent film, “The Great Train Robbery”. The film is known as the first “blockbuster” movie and even influenced famed director Martin Scorsese, who duplicated the iconic final shot in his movie Goodfellas.

Porter died in 1941.

Dr. Frank Jacobyansky first learned about Porter when he moved to Fayette County 40 years ago, and the classic movie buff said he had several conversations with late local journalist Joe Abramowitz about bringing something to the Porter Theatre.

“I really like watching movies, especially old movies,” Jacobyansky said. “We kicked (ideas) around and said we should do something at the Porter Theatre.”

Then, last year, Jacobyansky and his sons attended the first Pittsburgh Silent Film Festival and spoke with the organizers, who were familiar with Porter. The festival organizers visited the theatre and offered ideas for a film festival in Connellsville. Jacobyansky took the idea to Connellsville Area Community Ministries President Barry Craig and Secretary-Treasurer Kevin Ghost.

“The city actually gave us a 10-year lease on this building to maintain and run it. That was about five years ago,” Craig said, explaining that the organization has made a number of improvements and strives to bring community-oriented activities to the space.

As someone who has a passion for the arts, Craig said, the film festival had his solid support. “Kevin and I, our whole goal is to get more people through this building,” he said. “It’s for the community.”

Ghost agreed he and Craig were enthusiastic about the idea. “I don’t think Barry or I knew very much about silent films, but we knew that Edwin S. Porter was from Connellsville, and we thought it was a great opportunity to showcase this community and to celebrate Connellsville history,” he said.

Ghost called the Hometown Legends designation “fantastic” and said it, along with the city’s proclamation of Sept. 6 as Edwin S. Porter Day, has “really re-sparked this interest in him.

In addition, Sen. Pat Stefano and representatives for Rep. Ryan Warner presented citations from the Pennsylvania Senate and House of Representatives, respectively.

Fayette County Commissioner Dave Lohr, a Connellsville native, said he attended school in the community center before the current high school was built. “It’s pretty cool to be in here and see what you’ve done with this beautiful, beautiful theater,” he said, highlighting the effect Porter has had on Connellsville and on the world.

“In southwestern Pennsylvania and in Connellsville, there are so many people who have changed the world,” Lohr said, through their work ethics, morals and “stance on life in general.”

Commissioner Chair Scott Dunn said it is crucial to remember those who forged paths before us. “It’s always really important to celebrate our history, celebrate our past, even as we look toward our future.”

Dunn said there are a great many people who have made an impact on the history of the U.S., including Edwin S. Porter. “Who knows where the film industry goes without Edwin S. Porter?”

“This is a fitting honor for a Connellsville native who did so much for the film industry. He was a pioneer of film editing and went on to not only edit, but direct the industry’s first major box office success, “The

Great Train Robbery,” added Commissioner Vince Vicites. “Porter’s trailblazing work was one of great importance to the film industry. He deserves this recognition.”

The Porter Film Fest will be held from 6-9 p.m., and will feature three of Porter’s short silent films, as well as a feature-length film called The Freshman, directed by Harold Lloyd. Music will be provided by the Peacherine Ragtime Society Orchestra. Hors d’oeuvres by Sparks Catering and cocktails will be served at 6 p.m.

Tickets are still available at <https://porter.ludus.com/index.php>.

For video coverage of the Edwin S. Porter Hometown Legends dedication, visit the Fayette County TV YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/@fayettecountytv .

To learn more about the Fayette County Hometown Legends project, visit their Facebook page at www.facebook.com/FayetteLegends. To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.fayettecountypa.org.

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