Romneys receive arts tribute at awards ceremony

Lenore and the late George Romney had always embraced the arts. The arts embraced them in a special way last week at the 11th annual Governors' Arts Awards ceremony.

In a warm tribute that dispelled the cold temperatures outside, the Romneys of Bloomfield Hills were lauded for their efforts on behalf of the arts in Michigan. The ceremony took place Thursday night at the Detroit Institute of Arts.

"Everything that is beautiful and wonderful has a spiritual base," Lenore Romney said.

"The arts are the most marvelous things."

Before George Romney's death this year, the Romneys had accepted an invitation from the planning committee to be recognized at the event. As governor in 1966, George Romney signed the legislation creating the Michigan Council for the Arts. He had urged the state Legislature to draft the law earlier that year. Lenore Romney actively participated in the council as its liaison to the governor.

PERSPECTIVES

MARY KLEMIC

"George insisted that Lenore's name precede his (at the tribute) because of her role as liasion," said Concerned Citizens for the Arts in Michigan chairman Frank Stella, who introduced Lenore as "a great lady."

"I am so grateful to all of you," she said.

"It's been a wonderful life."

Mrs. Romney told about a time during the Romney administration when seniors sang and danced with retarded children ("It was wonderful what music could do for them," she said of the youngsters). She drew applause when she said we are lucky to have the DIA.

She was presented with a reproduction of a painting by artist George Romney. Governor Romney liked to tell friends he was named after the artist.

Present and former Michigan governors praised the Romneys and the arts at the ceremony.

"The vitality of the arts in Michigan is in no small measure due to the foundation laid by George and Lenore Romney," Gov. John Engler said.

The Engler triplets, soon to be 1 year old, were already budding artists, he said.

"The problem is their palette is the dinner table and their canvas is the white carpet," he joked.

"I'm sure George Romney is with us tonight in spirit," said former governor James Blanchard, now U.S. ambassador to Canada.

In 11 years the awards have featured about 11,000 years of talent and commitment, Blanchard said. He listed some of the former honorees, who include singer Aretha Franklin, sculptor Marshall Fredericks and photojournalist Tony Spina. Eleven years ago, the ceremony drew 160 guests and raised $50,000; this year's ceremony drew 650 guests and raised $130,000, he said.

"John Kennedy said, 'I look forward (to when) we reward achievement in the arts as we reward achievement in business and statecraft.'"

Other honorees this year were the Barn Theatre, Copper Country Community Arts Council and Midland Center for the Arts, Arts Organization Awards; the Second National Bank of Saginaw, Business Honor Roll Award; Theodore "Teddy" Harris Jr., Michigan Artist Award; the Arts Council of Greater Grand Rapids, Arts in Education Award; Josephine Love, Civic Leader Award; Nkenge Zola, Media Honor Roll Award; Lloyd Richards, International Achievement Award; and Frederik and Lena Meijer, Special Recognition Award. Governor and Michelle Engler, and Ambassador and Janet Blanchard, were presenters.

"The arts are alive and well and thriving in Michigan," said host Carmen Harlan of WDIV-TV.

The ceremony will be broadcast throughout the state 7 p.m. Friday, Dec. 1 (contact your local cable operator for the channel) and throughout the country 10 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. both Wednesday and Friday, Dec. 6 and 8, on the Bravo cable channel.

Art support

Earlier Thursday, at a luncheon of the Bloomfield Republican Women's Club at the Forest Lake Country Club, arts representatives discussed funding for the arts.

"Don't believe 90 percent of the charges being made at the national level about the National Endowment for the Arts and National Endowment for the Humanities," said Joseph Blanco Jr., executive vice president of the DIA Founders Society.

Of the more than 100,000 grants distributed by the NEA and NEH since 1962, only 20 or 30 been controversial, he said. Using an analogy given by NEA chair Jane Alexander at the Detroit Economic Club three days earlier, eliminating the groups because of the controversial grants would be like closing down the Navy because of Tailhook, Bianco said.

The DIA's collections are ranked among the top five in the country, he said.

"The collections are sought out by people around the world."

Bianco had just returned from Japan, where 81 works from the DIA's permanent collection went to Toyota City in celebration of the opening of the Toyota City Municipal Museum of Art. The pieces are in the museum's debut exhibit, "Masterpieces of Modern Art from the Detroit Institute of Arts," continuing through Jan. 7.

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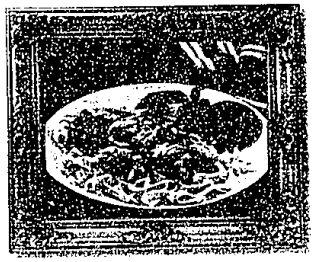

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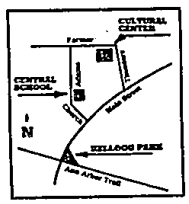

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