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## Muppet Stamps take Henson back to roots

LELAND, MS - The story is told that Jim Henson, looking for a unique name, coined the term “Muppets” by combining the words “marionette” and “puppets.” But who’s to say that like their creator (whose childhood buddy just happened to be named Kermit Scott), the wacky and lovable characters didn’t also draw their beginning from “Muh-ississippi” instead?

One thing is for certain--the man who brought Kermit the Frog and Miss Piggy into the world will be honored Oct. 18, not far from the Greenville hospital where he was brought into the world, as the U. S. Postal Service and the Birthplace of the Frog Exhibit host a special stamp and postmark ceremony.

The event begins at 10 a.m. at the Capps Entrepreneurial Center in Stoneville, site of the USDA research facility that employed Henson’s father in the 1930s and 40s, and mere yards from the grounds where his childhood home stood.

Henson and his beloved Muppets have already been immortalized on United States postage stamps that are now on sale at Post Offices nationwide following their release Sept. 28 in Los Angeles. While that high profile event reflected the icon status enjoyed by Emmy® winner and Television Academy Hall of Fame inductee Henson, this Mississippi Delta gathering spotlights Leland, the small town that hosted and influenced so much of his first twelve years.

“It’s often said that a person’s imagination is influenced by their early years,” says Marketing Manager Hazel Sanford of the USPS Mississippi District Office. “We proudly claim Jim Henson as another in a long line of great artists who trace their roots back to our state.”

Following the morning’s events in Stoneville, Cheryl Henson, second born daughter of Henson, will be signing copies of the new book, “It’s Not Easy Being Green: And Other Things to Consider,” at the Birthplace of the Frog Exhibit in Leland. In addition to the book signing, Henson will join officials and guests in celebrating the installation of a new display at the Birthplace of the Frog Exhibit. The new exhibit on loan from The Jim Henson Legacy depicts a segment from the Jim Henson Hour, “The Song of the Cloud Forest.”

The public is invited to attend the events at the Capps Entrepreneurial Center and the Birthplace of the Frog Exhibit. School groups are requested to contact the exhibit in advance regarding participation in the day’s events. For more information on the Muppets Commemorative Stamp Ceremony, the book signing or to reserve copies, please call 662-686-7383 or email [thefrog@tecinfo.com](mailto:thefrog@tecinfo.com).

The 11-stamp commemorative stamp sheet, officially tagged “Jim Henson: The Man Behind the Muppets,” coincides with the 50th anniversary of Henson’s most famous Muppet, Kermit the Frog, who emceed the LA ceremony.



Lisa Henson characterized the stamps as fitting her father's sense of humor. "We are honored that the U.S. Postal Service chose to recognize our father's legacy with this fun and irreverent stamp collection - a perfect reflection of his inspired silliness and creativity."

Her brother Brian welcomed the stamps as an homage to his father's work. "Our father created wonderful characters that continue to be loved around the world. These stamps are also a tribute to his millions of fans who continue to support his work and believe in his vision," added Brian Henson.

Kermit the Frog viewed the stamps from the Muppets' perspective. "On behalf of the Muppets, it is a great honor to be featured on our own set of stamps," said Kermit the Frog. "These commemorative stamps couldn't have come at a better time - to celebrate my 50th Anniversary, I'm hitting the road (October 14 in Kermit, TX) on a 50-stop World Tour. I'll need to send a lot of letters home to Miss Piggy if I want to stay in her good graces!"

The Television Academy's Dick Askin testified to Henson's legacy. "Jim Henson was a master storyteller and technical innovator who created unforgettable characters and entertainment," commented Askin. "He left us far too soon, but it's a testament to his unique talents that we still are captivated by his whimsical creations."

The pane includes a 1986 Norman Seeff photograph of Henson accompanied by his visionary quote: "When I was young, my ambition was to be one of the people who made a difference in this world. My hope is to leave the world a little bit better for my having been here."

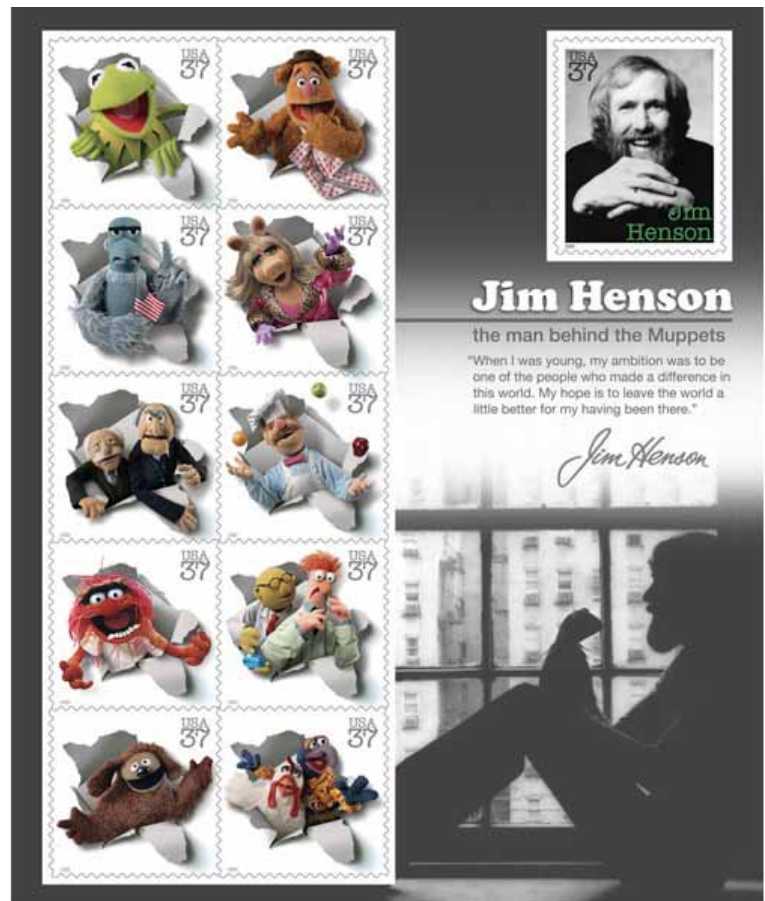
Ten additional stamps depict 13 famous Muppet characters: Kermit the Frog; Sam the Eagle; Statler and Waldorf; Animal; Rowlf the Dog; Fozzie Bear; Miss Piggy; Swedish Chef; Dr. Bunsen Honeydew and his assistant, Beaker; and the Great Gonzo and Camilla the Chicken.

When applied to a white envelope, each of the individually photographed Muppet stamps appear to burst through. This effect was created by photographing the characters and torn white paper separately to enhance highlights and shadows. The two images were merged and digitally enhanced to produce a fun and lighthearted stamp sheet.

The back of each stamp sheet features humorous autographed notes from each of the Muppet characters. The reverse of Miss Piggy's stamp reads, "Moi is thrilled...for all those lucky people who will get your letter with Moi's gorgeous face on the envelope. Don't even think of canceling moi, sweetie! Kissy, Kissy (signed Miss Piggy)."

Henson was born Sept. 24, 1936, and continued to spend time in Mississippi even after the family moved to Maryland when he was five. In 1955, as a student at the University of Maryland, his own five-minute show, "Sam and Friends," made its debut on WRC-TV, an NBC affiliate in Washington, DC. The show featured a large cast of characters Henson dubbed "Muppets," including a green puppet named Kermit who would later become the world-famous Kermit the Frog (see attached Henson bio).

His creations continue to delight children and adults alike. And his legacy continues through The Jim Henson Company which continues to entertain audiences worldwide through creative excellence, technological achievements and inspired silliness with a wide range of television and film projects.



# Jim Henson Biography

Jim Henson, an extraordinary artist and visionary, invented unique worlds and characters that remain just as vivid, original and fresh today as when they were created. A television pioneer, an innovator in puppetry, technology and visual arts, and a performer who literally brought to life some of the most memorable characters ever-including the world's most famous frog, Kermit™, Jim Henson's impact on entertainment, education and culture continues to this day.

Born September 24, 1936 in Greenville, MS, Jim was the second son of Paul and Betty Henson. Jim spent his early years in Leland, MS, where his father worked with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Throughout his youth, Jim had an interest in art and, later, television. He was particularly close to his maternal grandmother, an avid painter, quilter, and needleworker, and he visited her often. She was supportive of Jim's artistic efforts and encouraged him to use his imagination and to take delight in the world around him.

When Jim was in the fifth grade, the Henson family moved to Maryland. There Jim, often with his older brother Paul, experimented with a variety of artistic techniques- experiments which eventually led Jim to the very latest visual medium, television. In 1954, while still in high school, Jim began his television career with performing puppets on a local Washington, DC Saturday morning program on WTOP-TV. The following year, as a freshman at the University of Maryland, he was given his own twice-daily, five-minute show, Sam and Friends, on the local NBC affiliate, WRC-TV. Jim along with his assistant, fellow University of Maryland student and future wife, Jane Nebel, introduced many Muppet mainstays-music, snarky humor and innovative technical tricks (such as eliminating the puppet stage and using the television itself as the proscenium). Perhaps most memorably, the show featured an early version of Kermit the Frog.

The success of Sam and Friends led to guest appearances on such national network programs as The Steve Allen Show, The Jack Paar Show, and Today. Jim also began making hundreds of humorous commercials for sponsors throughout the country. In 1961, as Muppets, Inc. grew, Jim and Jane brought on puppeteer and writer Jerry Juhl, who would become one of Jim's major collaborators. The demands of national television appearances brought Jim and his family to New York in 1963. With weekly appearances on Today and an ever-growing list of commercial clients, Jim sought out the talents of master puppet builder, Don Sahlin and young puppeteer, Frank Oz. Together, they helped develop the Muppets' first nationally known character, Rowlf the Dog, who appeared regularly on The Jimmy Dean Show from 1963 to 1966. Having established a group of talented collaborators, including producer David Lazer, Jim continued to pursue his career in puppetry and filmmaking. Between 1964 and 1969, Jim produced several experimental films including the award-winning Time Piece, Youth '68, and The Cube. These projects expanded Jim's knowledge of film techniques, leading to greater innovations with the Muppets.

In 1966, a public television producer named Joan Ganz Cooney, began work on a ground-breaking educational children's television show called Sesame Street that would premiere in 1969. Based on Jim's creative reputation, Cooney asked him to create a family of characters to populate Sesame Street. These characters-Ernie and Bert, Oscar the Grouch, Grover, Cookie Monster, and of course the 8-foot-2 Big Bird-continue to entertain and educate today, more than 35 years later. Working with Children's Television Workshop (later renamed Sesame Workshop) on Sesame Street, Jim also had the opportunity to continue experimenting with film techniques. Together with his talented team, Jim produced more than two dozen live action and animated shorts that are still teaching children how to count, learn the alphabet and master other educational concepts.

Sesame Street demonstrated the Muppets' undeniable appeal to children, but Jim strongly believed these characters could entertain a much wider family audience. After years of trying to sell the idea for The Muppet Show in the U.S., Jim finally received backing from a London-based television producer, Lord Lew Grade. In 1975 production began at Grade's ATV Studios, and soon the world was introduced to a new family of unforgettable characters, such as Miss Piggy, Fozzie Bear and Animal

(performed by Frank Oz); The Great Gonzo (performed by Dave Goelz); Scooter (performed by Richard Hunt); Lew Zealand (performed by Jerry Nelson); and Rizzo the Rat (performed by Steve Whitmire). Hosted by Kermit the Frog, accompanied by the musical meanderings of Doctor Teeth and the Electric Mayhem Band, the Muppets were joined each week by an international pantheon of guest stars, from Gene Kelly and Rudolph Nureyev to Steve Martin and John Cleese. The success of The Muppet Show naturally led to Hollywood, where the Muppets starred in six feature films: The Muppet Movie, The Great Muppet Caper, The Muppets Take Manhattan, The Muppet Christmas Carol, Muppet Treasure Island and most recently Muppets From Space.

During the 1980s, in addition to making Muppet movies, Jim brought two remarkably original fantasy films to the big screen, The Dark Crystal and Labyrinth. Inspired by the exquisite and intricate artwork of British illustrator Brian Froud, these films challenged Jim to create new kinds of three-dimensional characters with advanced movement abilities. In development for five years, The Dark Crystal utilized the talents of scores of designers, builders, technicians, and performers from across the globe. The result: a phenomenal showcase of puppetry and animatronics. Jim and Brian Froud collaborated again on the feature film, Labyrinth, which was produced by George Lucas, and starred David Bowie and future Oscar®-winner Jennifer Connelly. Like The Dark Crystal before it, Labyrinth gave Jim a unique opportunity to take animatronics and performance to a new level. The multi-talented staff that helped create these two films formed the basis for what is now known as Jim Henson's Creature Shop. Founded in 1979, with offices in London and Los Angeles, Jim Henson's Creature Shop continues to set industry standards in animatronics, performance and performance technology.

Throughout the 1980's, Jim also created memorable television series and specials, including Fraggle Rock, Muppet Babies, Jim Henson's The Storyteller, and Jim Henson's Greek Myths.

Fraggle Rock was one of the world's first international television co-productions. The show continues to have a devoted fan following around the world. Muppet Babies was awarded four consecutive Emmys® for "Outstanding Animated Program."

Jim Henson's The Storyteller and Jim Henson's Greek Myths were two original series conceived by Jim to convey the metaphoric richness of ancient stories. With magical visual effects and animatronics by Jim Henson's Creature Shop, the shows are a rare combination of ancient tradition and modern technological artistry.

Jim's last project was MuppetVision 3\*D, a short multi-media film and interactive attraction, which he directed and which currently runs at custom-made theaters at Disney/MGM Studios theme park at the Walt Disney World Resort in Florida, and at Disney's California Adventure in Anaheim, California.

On May 16, 1990, after a brief illness, Henson died in New York City. With his keen ability for drawing together a strong team of performers, artists, and collaborators who shared his vision and creativity, Jim ensured that his work and unique creative vision would continue. Through The Jim Henson Company, his work continues to captivate and entertain a global audience.

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