USC Establishes Norman Lear Chair in Entertainment, Media and Society

Martin Kaplan to hold Endowed Chair at USC Annenberg School

LOS ANGELES, February 21, 2007 – Norman Lear, the pioneering television and film producer, political and social activist and philanthropist is being honored by the University of Southern California with the establishment of the Norman Lear Chair in Entertainment, Media and Society, Geoffrey Cowan, dean of the USC Annenberg School for Communication announced today.

The inaugural holder of the Norman Lear Chair is Martin Kaplan, founding director of the Norman Lear Center at the USC Annenberg School. Kaplan, an Annenberg Research Professor, has been associate dean of the School since 1997.

“I view few things as more important to the health of our culture as Martin Kaplan’s work leading the Center that exists in my name at the USC Annenberg School,” said Lear. “I could not be more honored that Mr. Kaplan has additionally agreed to occupy a Chair in my name – so honored, that I would be happy to surround his Chair with a roomful of furniture, piano included, were the Annenberg School to allow.”

“USC’s decision to create and name this chair is a wonderful tribute to Norman’s commitment to USC Annenberg and the work of the Lear Center,” said Cowan, who noted that, other than the Annenberg family, Lear is the largest donor to the USC Annenberg School.

In addition to $11 million from Mr. Lear—which includes a new $6 million pledge—the Lear Center has garnered more than $9 million in gifts and research grants from foundation, government and other sources.

“The research Marty has supervised has made enormous contributions to our understanding of a wide variety of topics, from how television covers campaigns, to the ways entertainment media can improve public health around the world,” Cowan added. “I join my colleagues at USC and beyond in congratulating him on his appointment to this chair.”

The Norman Lear Center, www.learcenter.org, which studies the impact of entertainment on society, was launched in 2000. Its research, publications, events and advocacy extend to areas as diverse as the public interest obligations of broadcasters; the impact of technology and intellectual property law on creativity in music, film and fashion; the globalization of entertainment, and its discontents; and the use of entertainment to promote civic engagement by young people.

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“Every domain of society, from journalism and politics to education and religion, is affected – for better and for worse – by the imperative to entertain, to market, to grab and hold attention,” said Kaplan. “Norman’s generosity, and the additional support it’s enabling us to secure, is helping us examine one of the most powerful untold stories of our time. I am honored to hold the chair in his name.”

Kaplan graduated summa cum laude from Harvard, where he was president of The Harvard Lampoon. A Marshall Scholar to Cambridge University, where he won a First in English, he received a Ph.D. in Modern Thought and Literature from Stanford University. He was Vice President Walter F. Mondale’s chief speechwriter, and also deputy campaign manager in Mondale’s 1984 presidential bid. He worked at the Walt Disney Studios for twelve years, where he was both a vice president of motion picture production, and also a screenwriter and producer. His credits include writing and executive producing The Distinguished Gentleman, starring Eddie Murphy, and adapting Michael Frayn’s stage play Noises Off for the screen, for director Peter Bogdanovich. Kaplan is a regular guest on television and radio, and his views frequently appear in op-ed columns, news stories and blogs.

Norman Lear teamed with director Bud Yorkin to form Tandem Productions in 1958. In 1970, CBS signed with Tandem to produce All in the Family, which ran for nine seasons. It earned four Emmys for Best Comedy series as well as the Peabody Award in 1977. All in the Family was followed by a succession of other television hit shows, including Maude, Sanford and Son, The Jeffersons, One Day at a Time, Good Times, and Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman. In 1980, Mr. Lear founded People For the American Way, a non-profit organization designed to speak out for Bill of Rights guarantees and to monitor violations of constitutional freedoms. Mr. Lear also founded the Business Enterprise Trust (1989-2000) to spotlight exemplary social innovations in American business. With his wife, Lyn, and Alan and Cindy Horn, in 1989 he co-founded the Environmental Media Association to mobilize the entertainment industry to become more environmentally responsible. In 1999, President Clinton bestowed the prestigious National Medal of Arts on Mr. Lear, noting that “Norman Lear has held up a mirror to American society and changed the way we look at it.” Mr. Lear and his wife also created the Declaration of Independence Road Trip, an educational initiative and national multimedia tour of one of the surviving original copies of the Declaration, which they own. As part of the project, Mr. Lear launched Declare Yourself, a nonpartisan voter initiative that registered 1 million new young voters in the 2004 and 2006 elections. Today, Mr. Lear is chairman of Act III Communications, a multimedia holding company with interests in the recording, motion picture, broadcasting, publishing, and licensing industries, including Concord Music Group and Village Roadshow Pictures Group.

Located in Los Angeles at the University of Southern California, the USC Annenberg School for Communication is among the nation's leading institutions devoted to the study of journalism and communication, and their impact on politics, culture and society. With an enrollment of more than 1,900 graduate and undergraduate students, USC Annenberg offers degree programs in journalism, communication, public diplomacy and public relations. For more information, visit www.annenberg.usc.edu.

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