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Area events planned to mark 50th anniversary of 'Mockingbird'

By Teri Greene • terigreene@gannett.com • May 16, 2010

Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird," which turns 50 this year, was a milestone work of literature that opened eyes around the world to racial inequalities and their severe consequences -- on individuals, families, communities, states, the nation.

Today's My Life section is dedicated to all things "Mockingbird," with local people sharing the impact the book's message has had on them, a travel story on Monroeville, a feature about that city's annual staging of a production (in and around the courthouse) dramatizing the book and prominent Alabama lawyers talking about the impact the novel and Atticus Finch in particular, have had on their work.

The Alabama Humanities Foundation is not letting this Pulitzer Prize-winning book's shining moment go unnoticed either. For its first statewide fundraiser, the organization has spotlighted Lee's beloved novel with "TKAM 2010: 'To Kill a Mockingbird'-- Awakening America's Conscience," a series of statewide celebratory events to honor the book's lasting significance on the state, country and the world. This week, the celebration lands in Montgomery.

Set in the fictional town of Maycomb, Ala., most likely based on Lee's hometown of Monroeville, the book tells the story of lawyer Atticus Finch's struggle to defend an innocent black man in a time of rampant racism in the Deep South through the eyes of his young daughter, Scout. And though its backdrop may be humble, the book's impact has, in the past half century, resonated with readers from all walks of life, from all over the world.

Stacy Henry of Montgomery said Lee's "simple" story is the most profound book she has ever read.

"Atticus Finch and company inspire me to become a better person and to rear my children as independent thinkers," she said.

Following a string of commemorations in

Birmingham last month, the celebration this week moves to Montgomery with an exhibit of works inspired by "To Kill a Mockingbird" by more than 30 Alabama artists, as well as a screening of the Oscar-winning film based on the book.

The tribute culminates with a gala featuring panel discussions about the book by prominent writers, including Rick Bragg, auctions of "Mockingbird"-inspired art by Alabama artists, signed copies of the book, recently autographed by "Miss Lee" just for this occasion, and more.

Funds from the event will go right back into sharing the arts and humanities in Alabama through the efforts of the Alabama Humanities Foundation, said Reggie Hamner, one of the lead organizers of the event. (To learn more about the organization, go to www.ahf.net.)

"'To Kill a Mockingbird' is an icon in world literature," Hamner said. "We decided that celebrating the anniversary of a work written by an Alabamian, and set in Alabama, was an appropriate way for the Alabama Humanities Foundation to spotlight the work we do to bring the humanities to the highways and byways of Alabama."

Here's a rundown of events:

- Tuesday-Friday: Visitors can preview the exhibit of a group of works of art inspired by "To Kill a Mockingbird" at Stonehenge Gallery, 1041 East Fairview Ave. in Montgomery. These works of art will be auctioned during

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Saturday's festivities. Stonghenge Gallery hours are 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday and 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Friday. The exhibit is free. For more information, call the gallery at 262-8256.

- Thursday: At 7:30 p.m., the Capri Theatre will present a screening of the 1962 film version of "To Kill A Mockingbird" starring Gregory Peck. The film was nominated for eight Academy Awards and won three (Gregory Peck for Best Actor, as well as Best Art Direction/Black-and-White and Best Writing of an adapted screenplay for Horton Foote). The Capri is at 1045 East Fairview Ave. Call 262-4858.
- Saturday: A celebration of the Pulitzer Prize-winning book, including an art event and auction, will be from 6 to 9 p.m. at Wynfield Estates, the home of the late Winton Blount. A major highlight will be an auction of three signed copies of "To Kill A Mockingbird," which Lee recently autographed specifically for this event.

Also on display and up for auction will be the work of 37 Alabama artists who created their own visual perspectives of the novel. While most of the art will be included in a silent auction, there will be a live auction during the event, Hamner said.

Guests will see a preview of Sandra Jaffe's upcoming documentary "Our Mockingbird" and also hear an original song by musician Karren Pell, with lyrics inspired by the book.

In addition, Nicolosi, the "pop artist to the stars," will travel from his studio in Chicago to unveil his portrait of the stars of the film -- Gregory Peck as Atticus, Brock Peters as the accused Tom Robinson, and Mary Badham as Scout. Badham, who hails from Birmingham, is expected to attend the event, Hamner said.

Tickets are \$50 and are available at www.ahf.net. Wynfield is located at 5801 Vaughn Road (adjacent to Blount Cultural Park).

The commemoration is well deserved, organizers say. At least until the next half-century mark -- when the book may still be making an impact, turning minds around.



The film version of "To Kill a Mockingbird" features Gergory Peck, left, in his Oscar-winning role as Atticus Finch, and Brock Peters, right, as Tom Robinson. Montgomery's Capri Theatre will have a special screening of the film at 7:30 p.m Thursday, one of several local events commemorating the 50th anniversary of the novel's publication. (Contributed)

WANT TO GO?

What: "TKAM 2010," a 50th-anniversary celebration of Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird," with an art auction, signed book auction, live music and preview of "Our Mockingbird," an AHF grant-funded documentary film

When: 6-9 p.m. Friday

Where: Wynfield Estates, 5801 Vaughn Road (adjacent

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to Blount Cultural Park)

Ticket info: Tickets are \$50 and are available at www.ahf.net

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