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TR Coming to Life at Cultural Heritage Center

PIERRE, S.D. – The Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre will host a “Press Conference with the President” at 7 p.m. CDT on Thursday, Oct. 17.

The president in question is Theodore Roosevelt, as portrayed by actor Arch Ellwein of Sidney, Mont.

“Arch has previously presented two programs sponsored by the South Dakota Historical Society Foundation in which he portrayed historic individuals. Both programs were popular with audiences,” said Foundation President Michael Lewis. “We’re pleased to have Arch back in Pierre to bring the nation’s 26th president to life.”

The event is part of the History and Heritage Book Club sponsored by the foundation, which is the nonprofit fundraising partner of the South Dakota State Historical Society. Everyone is welcome to attend the free program, which is made possible by the South Dakota Humanities Council, an affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Roosevelt became president in 1901 when President William McKinley was assassinated. In the eight years he served as president, Roosevelt became known as an environmentalist for setting aside nearly 200 million acres for national forests, reserves and wildlife refuges. He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1906 for negotiating a treaty that ended a war between Russia and Japan, making him the first American to receive a Nobel Prize.

Ellwein’s program is set in 1911, two years after Roosevelt left office. Questions will be provided to audience members who will act as the “press corps.” After a short address, former President Theodore Roosevelt will entertain questions.

“This format allows TR to cover a wide gamut of unrelated topics in a 40- to 45-minute program,” Ellwein said. “This is not a lecture. It is an event.”

He began developing the program after reading Roosevelt’s autobiography in preparation for playing Teddy Brewster in the play “Arsenic and Old Lace.” The character of Teddy Brewster believes he is Theodore Roosevelt.

“I have been performing as TR since 1996,” Ellwein said. “His energy and enthusiasm are infectious. In addition to being supremely confident, TR is incredibly sentimental. His irrepressible and mercurial personality is the hallmark of my performance. I want audiences to ‘feel’ Roosevelt so modern audiences can understand how he was such a captivating public figure.”

Selections for the History and Heritage Book Club are “Mornings on Horseback” by David McCullough and “Theodore Roosevelt in the Badlands” by Roger L. Di Silvestro. The books are available at the Heritage Stores at the Cultural Heritage Center and the Capitol. Book club members receive a 10 percent discount, and South Dakota State Historical Society member receive an additional 5 percent discount, when they purchase book club selections at either Heritage Store.

For more information about the Oct. 17 program, call (605) 773-6006.

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The South Dakota State Historical Society is a division of the Department of Tourism. The Department of Tourism is comprised of Tourism, the South Dakota Arts Council, and the State Historical Society. The Department is led by Secretary James D. Hagen. The State Historical Society, an Affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution, is headquartered at the South Dakota Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. The center houses the society's world-class museum, the archives, and the historic preservation, publishing and administrative/development offices. Call (605) 773-3458 or visit www.history.sd.gov for more information. The society also has an archaeology office in Rapid City; call (605) 394-1936 for more information.