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Slow Down. Be Kind.

DUQUESNE EVENT
CELEBRATES THE LIFE AND
WORK OF FRED ROGERS

By Alison D'Addieco

Nov. 7, 2018, was seasonably cool in Pittsburgh. But in Duquesne's Charles J. Dougherty Ballroom, the warmth was palpable.

A crowd of more than 200 gathered to celebrate the life of Fred Rogers, the 50th anniversary of the beloved children's television program *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* and the publication of *The Good Neighbor: The Life and Work of Fred Rogers* by author Maxwell King.

Rogers' gentleness with words and incomparable way of relating to children were on the minds of those in the audience. Among those who spoke was Angela Stabryla, A'09, a data-quality analyst with the Veterans Leadership Program of Western Pennsylvania.

“As a child, his words brought me comfort. As an adult, I understand the wisdom behind them

and the full impact they can have in my life,” said Stabryla, who incorporates episodes of *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* as she works to help veterans heal. “Some of our most comforting things are talking about his quotes. ‘Anything that is human is mentionable and manageable.’ That sentence has gotten us through so much.”

The first full-length biography of Rogers, King’s *New York Times*-bestselling book is a richly detailed portrait, incorporating original interviews, oral histories and archival documents to trace Rogers’ rise from a child growing up in Latrobe, Pa., to an American icon.

Duquesne University President Ken Gormley moderated a discussion with King, founding director of the Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children’s Media at Saint Vincent College and current president and CEO of The Pittsburgh Foundation; Joanne Rogers, Rogers’ wife of 51 years; and two actors from *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*, David Newell, who played “Mr. McFeely,” and Joe Negri, who portrayed “Handyman Negri” and is an adjunct professor of jazz guitar at Duquesne. The panel reflected on Rogers’ works and the message of kindness and compassion he consistently conveyed.

Rogers’ enduring message resonated strongly with attendees that day, as the event occurred less than two weeks after the tragic shooting at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh’s Squirrel Hill neighborhood—the same neighborhood where Fred and Joanne Rogers raised their children and blocks away from the studio where Rogers filmed *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*.

King is not surprised that individuals continue to turn to Rogers for comfort.

Duquesne University will confer **two honorary degrees** at its May 10, 2019, commencement ceremony. **Joanne Rogers**, wife of beloved children’s television personality Fred Rogers, and **Maxwell King**, president and CEO of The Pittsburgh Foundation and author of the acclaimed biography *The Good Neighbor: The Life and Work of Fred Rogers*, will receive the Doctor of Humane Letters. King also will deliver the commencement address, and Rogers also will share remarks.

“This is a man who woke up every morning at 5 a.m. and prayed that with each person he saw that day, he’d be as good a person as he could. Now that may sound a little hokey or trite...but could that be more important today in a world that’s so fast-paced, intense, sometimes harsh?” asked King.

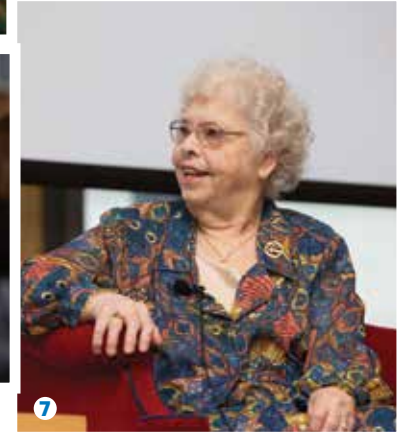
For decades, Rogers led the way for educational television, emphasizing the critical importance of the social and emotional development of children.

On May 1, 1969, a year after *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* first aired, Rogers testified before the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Communications to defend \$20 million in federal funding proposed for the newly formed nonprofit Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Rogers’ quiet, powerful testimony won the support of then-subcommittee chairperson Sen. John Pastore and broke new ground for the future of public television.

“I give an expression of care every day to each child, to help him realize that he is unique...I feel that if we in public television can only make it clear that feelings are mentionable and manageable,



David Newell, Joe Negri, President Ken Gormley and Joanne Rogers reminisced with *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood* memorabilia.



we will have done a great service for mental health," Rogers testified.

Rogers' values align with Duquesne's historic mission, noted King.

"The Spiritan tradition at Duquesne is such a strong tradition of the same kind of wonderful human and Christian values that Fred Rogers exemplified," he said.

As the afternoon unfolded, panel members shared personal reflections, interspersed with video clips from the program. The event concluded with Negri playing familiar tunes from *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, such as "It's You I Like." The audience joined him for "It's Such a Good Feeling," the closing song from the show.

King reflected on the feeling in the room that afternoon.

"This is a time when people need kindness," he said. "A lot of young people today get advice that they have to run really fast and be really tough. That's not Fred's advice. Fred would have told them to slow down. And to be kind."◆

1. President Ken Gormley served as moderator for the heartwarming discussion.
2. With his guitar nearby, Joe Negri fondly recalled his years as "Handyman Negri."
3. David Newell autographed memorabilia for a guest.
4. Joe Negri performed songs from *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* as the audience sang along.
5. Max King discussed the process of writing *The Good Neighbor: The Life and Work of Fred Rogers*.
6. Audience members were happy and nostalgic as they viewed video clips.
7. Joanne Rogers listened proudly as panelists recounted their favorite memories of Fred Rogers.