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**MORGAN FREEMAN & CHARLES PORTIS TO ACCEPT AWARDS AT  
*THE OXFORD AMERICAN'S* FIRST-EVER BEST OF THE SOUTH GALA**

**Kris Allen, Mary Steenburgen, Ray McKinnon,  
Lisa Blount, Joey Lauren Adams and others to participate**

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — Academy Award-winning actor Morgan Freeman and legendary writer Charles Portis will accept awards at *The Oxford American's* first-ever Best of the South Awards Gala in Little Rock on Saturday, April 3, 2010. Freeman will receive the magazine's inaugural award for Outstanding Contributions to Southern Culture and Portis will receive *The Oxford American's* award for Lifetime Achievement in Southern Literature.

Academy Award-winning actress Mary Steenburgen will host the awards ceremony. The current reigning American Idol, Kris Allen, is scheduled to give a special performance, while Academy Award winners Ray McKinnon and Lisa Blount and Joey Lauren Adams are scheduled to participate in the festivities. The awards ceremony will also include a film tribute to Morgan Freeman produced by award-winning Hollywood filmmaker (and Arkansas native) Harry Thomason.

"We are very pleased that Morgan Freeman will be the first recipient of the Outstanding Contributions to Southern Culture award, which we hope will create a long-standing pantheon of great Southern cultural figures," said Warwick Sabin, the publisher of *The Oxford American*. "He was our first choice for this recognition, not only because of his remarkable career and accomplishments, but because he has remained involved with his community in Mississippi and has done so much to improve it."

The Lifetime Achievement in Southern Literature recognition includes a cash prize that has increased to \$10,000. The first award was bestowed in 2006 to the novelist Donald Harington, who recently passed away.

"Mr. Portis should be the most popular writer in America," said Marc Smirnoff, the founder and editor of *The Oxford American*. "His novels are profoundly funny, profoundly well written, and full of heart and truth. You can't swing a cat in a room full of writers without knocking down a few aficionados. We hope this award helps extend the cat's reach."

Portis is best known for his novel *True Grit*, which was adapted for a feature film in 1969. It was a box-office hit, and it starred John Wayne, who won the Academy Award and the Golden Globe Award for Best Actor for his portrayal of Rooster Cogburn. The Coen Brothers are currently producing another film version of *True Grit*, with Academy Award-winning actor Jeff Bridges as Rooster Cogburn.

The entire Capital Hotel -- including all of the public and private rooms -- are reserved for this special event. Only a limited number of tickets will be available for the evening, which will include a pre-event VIP reception, a cocktail reception, a four-course dinner, and a special awards program featuring celebrity entertainment. The food will be curated by John T. Edge (the James Beard award-winning expert on Southern cuisine), and prepared by Lee Richardson, the Capital Hotel's executive chef.

"We envision a lively and fun event that reflects the character and personality of *The Oxford American*, highlighting music, literature, food, art, and other creative expressions of Southern culture," Sabin said. "It will be a sophisticated and entertaining affair anchored by celebrity presenters."

Cindy and Chip Murphy are chairing the awards gala, which will raise money to support the operations of the magazine, which is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. The Gala Sponsors are Arkansas Baptist College, Chenal Heights Assisted Living, Cindy & Chip Murphy, Cranford Johnson Robinson Woods, G. Dennis & Riley Lipschitz, Hendrix College and 2B Partners. Table Sponsors are Bank of the Ozarks, Coulson Foundation, Electric Cooperatives of Arkansas, McLarty Companies, Murphy Oil, Southern Bancorp, St. Vincent Health System, Winthrop Rockefeller Institute and Wright, Lindsey & Jennings. The Bar Sponsor is Glazer's Distributors of Arkansas and the Printing Sponsor is Twin City Printing. The event is sold out.

More details about the event available at <http://gala.oxfordamerican.org>.

## **ABOUT THE OXFORD AMERICAN**

*The Oxford American* is a national magazine based in Arkansas that is dedicated to featuring the very best in Southern writing while documenting the complexity and vitality of the American South. Billed as "The Southern Magazine of Good Writing," it has won two National Magazine Awards and other high honors since it began publication in 1992. The magazine has featured the original work of such literary powerhouses as Charles Portis, Roy Blount, Jr., ZZ Packer, Donald Harington, Donna Tartt, Ernest J. Gaines, and many other distinguished authors, while also discovering and launching the most promising writers in the region. The magazine has also published previously unseen work by such Southern masters as William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Walker Percy, James Agee, Zora Neale Hurston, James Dickey, Carson McCullers, to name just a handful. The New York Times recently stated that *The Oxford American* "may be the liveliest literary magazine in America."

More information at <http://www.oxfordamerican.org>.

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