

Spot News

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Columnist Sam Venable 25th Anniversary Front Page Follies Honoree

On June 14, be prepared to laugh the evening away.

The East Tennessee Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists (ETSPJ) will honor News Sentinel humor columnist Sam Venable at the 25th Annual Front Page Follies on June 14, 2003, in the Knoxville Marriott.

Venable, a Knoxville native and University of Tennessee journalism graduate, has been the News Sentinel humor columnist since 1985. For 15 years before that, Venable was the newspaper's outdoor writer.

Scholarships

The Follies show and auction raise money for journalism scholarships at the University of Tennessee and Pellissippi State Technical Community College. The 2003 scholarships will be named after Venable.

"This may be one of the years when the quality of the humor displayed by the honoree is better than that of the show," said Larry Aldridge, ETSPJ president and editor of the Maryville Daily Times.

"That is not to say that newsmakers during the past year haven't given us plenty to work with in our roasts. They have. So this should be a fun-filled evening."

As honored as I am, I'm also worried," said Venable. "These things usually are awarded to fossilized old goats near the end of their careers—not young, hip, cutting-edge Baby Boomers like me. I would expound further but it's

time for my afternoon Metamucil. Whoo-hoo! I'm so gosh-dang giddy, I may treat myself to a double."



Sam Venable

Letter to Bush

In his column, Venable has written an open letter to George Bush advising him on fishing and quail hunting. He's sponsored a search for the worst vacation photos and the most tacky vacation souvenirs.

Venable has emceed a symphony concert dressed in a tuxedo coat and Hawaiian shorts. He has hung around to interview the last-place finisher in a 10-kilometer race.

More recently, he has praised a common household item even more essential in the home than duct tape in event of a terrorist attack, bathroom tissue.

Winner of more than two dozen writing awards, Venable is the author of nine books, contributing author to two more, and has written more than 150 magazine articles.

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Scientific American Editor to deliver this year's Hill Lecture at UT

John Rennie, Editor in Chief of *Scientific American*, will give this year's Alfred and Julia Hill Lecture on Science, Society, and the Mass Media at the University of Tennessee. In his eight years at the helm of *Scientific American*, Rennie has modernized and reinvigorated that 157-year-old popular science journal, the oldest continuously published magazine in the United States.

His Hill Lecture will be on Tuesday, March 4, at 8 p.m. in the University Center Shiloh Room.

Rennie has named his Hill Lecture "Naysaying the Nincompoops: On Being a Maven in a Misinformed Era." He explains: "My intention is to talk about the necessity and challenge for science journalists and scientists to try to counter the prevalent misinformation about matters relating to science, whether they be utter nonsense (like TV psychics) or pseudoscience (like intelligent design creationism) or carefully packaged misrepresentations of real science (like global warming skepticism)." He will also assess the claim of the Raellian cult that they have cloned a human being.

Professional comedian

There is no charge to attend the John Rennie's Hill Lecture. Following his talk, there will be a question period. At the conclusion of the program, refreshments will be served.

John Noble Wilford, Science Correspondent for *The New York Times* (and UT alumnus), says that Rennie is one of the most exciting speakers he has seen. Some of Rennie's speaking skills developed as he performed for eight years as a professional comedian in Boston and New York.

Rennie was born in 1959 in a Boston suburb. He received his B.S. in biology from Yale University in 1981, then worked for several years in a Harvard Medical School laboratory. In 1984 he set out to fulfill a lifelong dream—inspired by the works of Isaac Asimov—of a career in science writing. He covered biology, technology, and medicine for *The Economist* and a variety of other magazines and newsletters.

He joined the staff of *Scientific American* in 1989 as a member of the Board of Editors. He helped plan and edit several of *Scientific American's* single-topic issues, including

"Mind and Brain" (September 1992), which became *Scientific American's* best-selling issue, and "Life, Death and the Immune System" (September 1993), which was subsequently republished as a book. Rennie was named editor in chief of *Scientific American* in 1994.

Family science magazine

Since Rennie became editor in chief, *Scientific American* has twice been nominated for National Magazine Awards. "What You Need to Know About Cancer" (September 1996) won the National Magazine Award for editorial excellence in the Single-Topic Issue category.

In addition to his leadership of the monthly magazine, Rennie helped to launch *Scientific American's* Web site www.SciAM.com and *Scientific American Explorations*, the family science magazine. From 1998 to 2000, he also served as editor in chief of the quarterly magazine *Scientific American Presents*.

Follies Honoree

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He is very popular on the speaking circuit, covering a wide variety of topics from how to speak "hillbillyeze" to good-natured jabs at politicians, TV preachers, doctors, government bureaucrats, and, yes, even journalists.

Lauver tribute

On June 14, the Follies will also present a special tribute to chief scriptwriter David Lauver, who helped found the Follies 25 years ago and who has written hilarious scripts each year since the beginning.

Local TV anchors and meteorologists will join the cast of amateur singers, dancers and actors for the show. Bear Stephenson is the official Follies auctioneer. Guests include public officials, broadcast and print reporters, university officials, and business leaders.

Tickets are \$60 each and \$600 for a table of ten. Table purchases are given seating priority. For tickets, please call Sally Guthrie at 584-1474.

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Aunt Ethel was 'about liberation'

By Brett Edgerton, UT junior in journalism

After the U.S. Postal Service honored Ethel L. Payne with a stamp last September, it was possible for the face of the late pioneering journalist to be seen all over America.

According to her niece Sylvia Peters, who spoke to an audience from the East Tennessee chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists Feb. 17 at the University Center, a stamp might not have been entirely necessary.

Payne's face, after all — along with her mind, her hands and her courage — has already been felt around America for decades.

For 27 years at the crusading *Chicago Defender* newspaper, starting toward the beginning stages of the Civil Rights movement in the mid-1950s, Payne was the undeniable "First Lady of the Black Press."

She provided a voice for the oppressed — a voice for those who didn't have a typewriter and a printing press to help them stand up for themselves.

Peters said Payne "always had a deep connection for the people who were displaced by poverty and by bigotry."

Perhaps she felt a connection because Payne herself had to fight discrimination. Denied admission to the University of Chicago law school, Payne later decided she could best pursue her passion for advocacy issues through her writing.

Stationed in Japan in the late 1940s with the Army Special Services Club, Payne sent letters back home raising questions about some sensitive racial issues, chief among them the military's true commitment to desegregating its forces.

"My aunt was one of the first to raise these questions," Peters said.



Sylvia Peters greets a student after the ETSPJ meeting on the UT campus.



Sylvia Peters opens the parasol her Aunt Ethel sent from Japan.

The *Defender* took notice and published some of Payne's letters. For the next three decades — a time spent covering seven U.S. presidents at the paper's D.C. bureau — Payne would continue to ask the tough questions.

"She would take on anybody," Peters said. "You didn't mess with her."

Even as she was ignored as part of the White House press corps — President Eisenhower, annoyed by Payne's tough questions about race, very rarely even acknowledged her — she still took her position as one of the few minority voices in the nation's capital seriously.

"She used her influence as a journalist to accurately tell about our African-American cause," Peters said. "She was one of true shapers of African-American politics and culture."

From Eisenhower to George H.W. Bush, she raised the issues that no one wanted to talk about. From being taken to the University of Alabama in the trunk of a car to covering black troops in Vietnam, Payne "was willing to risk it all without a thought to her safety," according to Peters.

"She lived a just life — she was about liberation," Peters said of her aunt.

Twelve years after she passed away at the age of 80, Payne is still fondly remembered by her niece, who is now the project director for the Atlanta Community Learning Collaborative.

"I can't tell you how much I miss her," Peters said. "I, for one, miss her voice, her courage, and her wisdom in these perilous times."

Run, Michele, Run

Board member Michele Silva is training to run a 26.2-mile marathon in June to benefit the American Stroke Association.

Michele writes, "No, I haven't lost my mind! By joining the American Stroke Association's Train To End Stroke program, I have a coach, a team to run with, training schedules and clinic and a reason that makes this more than a personal goal. I am helping to raise funds for stroke research, education and advocacy programs."

She is hoping to raise more than \$5,500 before April 1. If you would like to help Michele reach her goal, contact her at msilva@wbir.gannet.com for information.

ATTENTION! TIME IS RUNNING OUT!

Golden Press Card Awards entries must be turned no later than Friday, 5 p.m., March 7...so time is running out! All entry rules, forms and deadlines are posted on our ETSPJ Web site (<http://www.korrnet.org/etspj/GPC2003.htm>)

NOTE: MARCH 7, 2003, IS THE DEADLINE FOR RECEIPT, NOT POSTMARK. Mail or deliver entries to: Golden Press Card Entries; Ms. Janine Jennings; College of Communications; 302 Communications Building; University of Tennessee; Knoxville, TN 37996-0332. Please pay by check. Jennings cannot accept cash. For more information or directions, call Jennings at (865) 974-3031, or e-mail janine-jennings@utk.edu.

Mark Your Calendar

March 4, 8 p.m. Alfred and Julia Hill Lecture, University Center Shiloh Room

March 7, 5 p.m., Golden Press Card Entry Deadline

March 17, ETSPJ FOI Meeting -- details to follow

April 4-5, Region 3 Conference/IRE Better Watchdog Workshop, Atlanta

May 16, Golden Press Card Award Program with Court-TV's Fred Graham

May 16-17, Nashville, Freedom and Fear. . . at War/Access Under Attack

June 14, Front Page Follies