

# Carol Burnett fan letter prompts call to local actress



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Performing Arts Columnist

Did you ever write a fan letter to a celebrity? Did the celebrity answer?

While writing this type of letter ordinarily might end the one-way contact, it was not so for Carolyn Wong, Stage Right actress, director, and producer. She wrote such a letter to Carol Burnett, and got a phone call from the celebrity.

"Stage Right is producing 'The Carol Burnett Show' at Conroe's Crichton Theatre in April," Carolyn said.

"When I learned that she actually will be in Texas the same weekend we open 'her' show, I thought why not invite her? So I did.

"I thought if I ever did hear from Carol Burnett at all, it would be her secretary or her agent's secretary," Carolyn said.

A few days later, an unexpected call came.

When the voice on the phone said, "This is Carol Burnett," Carolyn was so stunned that the star had to repeat herself.

In her letter, Carolyn told Burnett about the Crichton's history, how it once was intended for vaudeville, and was probably the same type of theatre that Burnett attended with

her grandmother, as a child.

Carolyn also explained how, as a shy kid growing up, Burnett had inspired her to get into acting, and that Burnett is a continuing inspiration until this day.

Although the comedienne will bring her "Laughter & Reflection; a Conversation with Carol Burnett" to Fort Worth April 19 and to Galveston's Grand Theatre April 21 and 22, she declined Carolyn's invitation to visit the Crichton to see "her" show, citing time constraints.

Carolyn explained that one reason for her letter was to determine what Burnett's favorite charity is.

Stage Right customarily highlights a need in the community then spotlights nonprofit organizations. In the past it's been the food

bank, animal shelter, items for troops overseas, women's shelter, and library books.

Burnett told Carolyn that The Teddy Bear Cancer Foundation is "very dear to her heart."

"Normally," Carolyn said, "our selected charity sets up a table in the Crichton lobby to collect donations and dispense information. This will be the first time Stage Right has contributed to a group outside our community.

"But we decided it's appropriate in this case."

The nonprofit Teddy Bear Cancer Foundation, based in Santa Barbara, Calif., gives financial and emotional support to families of children undergoing cancer treatment. Carolyn's own family endured this heartbreak years ago when her older brother, at age 13, was stricken with Hodgkin's Lymphoma.

Carolyn contacted the nonprofit which is "absolutely thrilled" that a theatre company in Texas is going to raise funds for it. Stage Right also has linked its web site, [www.stage-right.org](http://www.stage-right.org), to the California organization.

Stage Right decided to donate all its concession mon-

ey to the group during the run of its musical variety production "The Carol Burnett Show" April 20 through May 6.

"We felt that we also need to do something for those in our own community," Carolyn added. "So we are going to offer free admission to 'The Carol Burnett Show' for immediate family members of a person currently undergoing cancer treatment. All they have to do is call for reservations."

Stage Right hopes for an underwriter to help cover these show expenses for the April production.

Next up for Stage Right at downtown Conroe's Crichton Theatre is holiday classic "A Christmas Story," a family show set in 1938, and running weekends Dec. 2-18.

Here's additional information from attorney Larry Foerster about the Gentry Building and the Nov. 17 gala centennial in its honor.

The building at North Main and Simonton was completed in 1911, for Conroe businessman A. L. Koonce, about whom little is known today.

The owner whose name it now bears was Thomas Ear-

le Gentry, who operated a gentleman's apparel shop there until shortly before his death in 1987. It also is sometimes identified as the Koonce/Rosner/Gentry Building, honoring previous affiliates.

Attorney Foerster said that the late Thomas Earle Gentry was a friend of Lyndon Baines Johnson. Before becoming U. S. president, Johnson occasionally visited him at the shop. Mr. Gentry also was mayor, fire chief, and a continuous community leader during his lifetime.

Today, Anne Gentry Moore, wife of the late A. Lavoy Moore, is proprietor. With some artistic assistance from Moore daughters Susie Pokorski, Bonnie Hanley, and Nancy Mc Lemore, the edifice was restored to its original state. Now it houses the Montgomery County Performing Arts Society headquarters, along with a home decorating shop, and Jim Pokorski's office.

Sponsor Conroe Live! invites the public to the Nov. 17 celebration that begins at 5 p.m. and is without charge.

In addition to viewing re-

stored vintage autos, attendees may tour the Gentry and Madeley buildings; partake of complimentary birthday cake and more; listen to songs of the time from the Silver Statesmen Barber-shop Quartet, and the Noteables, women's singing assemblage; see old photos and a history video; listen to witnesses tell of Conroe history; plus much more.

Organizers hope that attendees choose to don clothing of the period for the merrymaking scheduled to end at 9 p.m.

The Corner Pub and Siegelman's Deli will be open for business.

One of the best parts will be the grand opening of the Conroe Art League gallery in the Madeley building, with art curator Craig Campobella, on Simonton Street, just a few steps away from Main. A plethora of prize winning art will be on view, all of it for sale.

This special event in Conroe will be remembered for decades, and you can be a part of it, all for free.

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