

Forged in Arkansas



The **Oxford American** will host its first-ever Best of the South Gala tomorrow night. Awards will be presented to **Morgan Freeman**, for Outstanding Contributions to Southern Culture, and to author **Charles Portis**, for Lifetime Achievement in Southern Literature. The award (pictured above) was designed by Little Rock artist Kevin Kresse and forged in bronze by the Light and Time Design Studio in Royal, Arkansas. More info on the jump.

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. — The Oxford American today released photos of the awards it will present to Charles Portis and Morgan Freeman at its first-ever Best of the South Gala this Saturday, April 3.

"We wanted to create an award that The Oxford American could use to recognize the best of Southern culture for years to come," said Warwick Sabin, the publisher of The Oxford American. "Hopefully it will eventually become an iconic symbol of intellectual and creative achievement."

The inspiration for the design is the rooster that appears as a colophon at the end of every article in The Oxford American magazine. It was conceived and sculpted by Kevin Kresse, an artist based in Little Rock, and it was forged in bronze by the Light and Time Design Studio in Royal, Arkansas.

Kresse is a painter and sculptor based in Little Rock. He has exhibited his work in New York, Washington, Memphis, Atlanta, and around Arkansas. Kresse has been awarded painting fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts – Mid-America Arts Alliance and the Arkansas Arts Council. He has also won several awards in the Arkansas Arts Center's annual Delta competition, and he has been featured in numerous newspaper, magazine, and television pieces, as well as a film short by Garret Lakin. More information is available at <<http://www.kevinkresse.com>>.

ABOUT THE BEST OF THE SOUTH GALA

Academy Award-winning actor Morgan Freeman and legendary writer Charles Portis will accept the awards at The Oxford American's first-ever Best of the South Awards Gala in Little Rock this Saturday, April 3. 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.

The entire Capital Hotel -- including all of the public and private rooms -- is reserved for this special event. Only a limited number of tickets were 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> .