

Social Snaps: Newport museum honors Lauer, Lilly, Szep, raises \$1.5 million

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Matt Lauer of the “Today” show, a winner of an American Civilization Award, enjoys the proceedings July 30 at the National Museum of American Illustration’s 15th-anniversary gala. Photo: National Museum of American Illustration / Marianne Lee

NEWPORT, R.I. -- Some 330 guests -- including “Today” show host Matt Lauer, “Ant-Man” actress Evangeline Lilly, and Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist Paul Szep, all of them honorees -- were on hand July 30 when the National Museum of American Illustration celebrated its 15th anniversary.

The trio won American Civilization Awards for their contributions to popular American culture. “The careers of all three laureates parallel those of the Golden Age illustrators highlighted in the [museum]’s American Imagist Collection,” organizers said in a news release, “linking the Gilded Age to the 21st Century.”

The museum is a nonprofit organization devoted exclusively to illustration art -- works created to be reproduced in books, magazines, posters and the like. It’s located at the Vernon Court mansion on Bellevue Avenue, where the gala was held.

The event raised \$1.5 million through ticket sales and auctions. The fundraising highlight was the sale of a Norman Rockwell portrait of President John F. Kennedy, donated to the auction by a private collector, which went for \$900,000 at a live auction. Other sales of donated artworks included John Falter’s “Game Not Called on Account of Darkness,” a baseball image, for \$55,000, and a Ludwig Bemelmans study for his “Madeline” series, which sold for \$5,000 during a silent auction.