The 15th Anniversary of the National Museum of American Illustration

by Lita Solis-Cohen

Judy Goffman Cutler and Laurence Cutler's National Museum of American Illustration (NMAI) celebrated its 15th anniversary on Thursday, July 30, at a gala in the garden of the museum at Vernon Court on Belleview Avenue in Newport, Rhode Island. The fund-raising dinner, dance, and benefit auction was attended by 330. After dinner, American Civilization Awards were presented to NBC Today Show host Matt Lauer, to actress and children's book author Evangeline Lilly, and to Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist Paul Szep.

"The Today Show is the twenty-first-century equivalent of the Saturday Evening Post," said Judy Goffman Cutler. "Evangeline Lilly told me her day job is acting, so she can write children's books and work with illustrators. Paul Szep is one of a dying breed of political cartoonists whose work can be found only in online publications."

An auction, live and silent, followed the presentations and raised $1.5 million for NMAI's endowment fund. Norman Rockwell's 1963 portrait of John F. Kennedy, a study for the April 6, 1963, Saturday Evening Post cover, sold for $25,000 in the post-sale auction between two bidders who missed the party. Other illustrations and vacations were sold in the silent auction. Among them was a painting of The Falters in the Maine Surf, a 1948 gouache on paper, 18" x 26", which Falter had done for himself and later used for an August 1948 Post cover; it sold for $25,000. A study by Ludwig Bemelmans for a Madeline book sold for $5000. All were donated by collectors to fund an endowment for the future of the museum.

Collectors, art dealers, and auctioneers from as far away as Shanghai and Prague joined locals to celebrate the museum's anniversary. "I am grateful for the evening's success," said Judy Goffman Cutler. "We want the collection to remain at Vernon Court for future generations to enjoy."