



CinemaCon: Industry Icon Tom Sherak Remembered And Honored At Emotional Pioneer Awards Dinner

By PETE HAMMOND Thursday March 27, 2014 @ 1:00am PDT



The 73rd [Pioneer Of The Year Dinner](#) in honor of the late [Tom Sherak](#) just may have been the most emotional and moving event the philanthropic organization has ever thrown, certainly of those I have attended in the four years they have been held during [CinemaCon](#). As 20th Century Fox President of Distribution and

President of the Will Rogers Motion Picture Pioneers Foundation Chris Aronson said, it was also “historic” as it represented the first time the Pioneer Of The Year award was presented posthumously. That was not the plan when they selected Sherak, who passed away in January, for the honor several months ago. The dinner raised over \$1M for the Pioneer Assistance Fund. Sherak’s widow Madeleine told me Wednesday evening that he was thrilled to be getting the award and was well aware of it before his passing. Still, she noted it was very bittersweet. “When Tom died he didn’t leave anyone in charge. There isn’t a vice-president of All Things Tom. But what he did leave was a piece of him in everyone he touched. He didn’t have a number two, he had a number *hundreds*. We all have watched him through the years, we were mentored by him, he taught us to ‘do’,” Aronson said in opening remarks.



A constant theme of the evening was in noting the selfless work Sherak did for everyone. In fact, as former Disney chair Dick Cook said in introducing his widow, when he visited Tom in December to tell him of the award, the first thing Sherak asked was if there was someone

else who might be more deserving. He always shunned honors for himself in favor of raising money in someone else's name, but Cook assured him he was the unanimous choice.



[Jeffrey Katzenberg](#), host for the evening, said “He was someone who didn't see the glass as half full. If it had a single drop of water in it, it was full to Tom. He was the only person I ever met who actually could pull the bad news out of a disastrous, possibly career-ending movie opening that had me smiling, if not laughing, at the end of the conversation. This is a guy who typically would wrap up a meeting by saying, ‘remember, make it fun.’” That's exactly the feeling this evening had as Sherak was so warmly remembered as one of a kind whose like will not be seen again in this industry. “Of all of us who are lucky enough to be working in this business, he believed he was the luckiest of all.”

The remembrance reel compiled for the evening and narrated by Dodgers announcer Vin Scully, was first-rate and different from the norm as it centered on four of his non-showbiz buddies growing up, and their own particular memories of Tom. It was funny, poignant, touching and *perfect*. Scully was an inspired choice since no one was a bigger Dodger fan than Sherak. Even at the last game I attended last season, where I scored box seats, there was Tom Sherak talking up the game with former Dodger manager Tommy Lasorda in the front row.

Katzenberg also told a hilarious story about Sherak's somewhat aggressive methods in raising money, particularly for his beloved MS Hope foundation (daughter Melissa has MS) where he has raised some \$40M and which now will be re-named the Tom Sherak MS Foundation. “I was often on the receiving end of Tom's great efforts. Tom would often call me not to just ask for money, but also to get me to conspire with him to raise even more money. He'd instruct me on what to bid for and exactly how much in a pre-meditated plan to



create a snowball effect forcing some poor bastard, actually a *rich* bastard to bid. Actually this was a brilliant strategy most of the time. I distinctly remember a couple of years ago he and I managed to sell Edgar Bronfman Jr. I think a Bic Pen for \$50,000. I do also remember a year when things went slightly astray and I ended up the winner for \$25,000 of a premium gold putter autographed by Jack Nicklaus. And for those who know me only a little bit, much less well know I get a lot of *use* out of that,” he joked.



An impressive turnout that included several studio heads, top studio executives and current Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences President Cheryl Boone Isaacs, representing the organization that Sherak headed for three years, heard a beautiful performance from the singing group The Tenors which the Sherak family requested. They received a standing ovation as did Madeleine Sherak when she took the stage to accept the award for her late husband. It was certainly a great love affair. Earlier in the day, Disney Chairman Alan Horn remembered Sherak during the Disney studio CinemaCon presentation. He recalled the Sheraks actually got remarried for the second time at his house, something they had done often. As for Madeleine, she was quite moving in her remarks. “Tommy and I shared more than 46 years of marriage and I know first-hand that except for the illness and death of loved ones, he treasured each day of life and each and every person who became a part of it. Over the past few weeks we have received thousands of cards and emails and texts from people all over the world expressing their condolences and sharing their sorrows and stories. The reach Tommy had to people everywhere overwhelms our family. We still ask ourselves how did he have enough hours in the day to connect with so many people and still have enough time for us?”



But that was Tom Sherak. He had time for everyone who needed it. And it was a packed room full of people Wednesday night in Las Vegas who came to honor and thank him for everything he did for the industry he loved.

COMMENTS

No comments yet.

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