
News From: **The Helen Hayes Awards**

For Immediate Release

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May 23, 2007

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THE HELEN HAYES AWARDS RECEIVES \$2.85 MILLION DOLLAR ENDOWMENT GIFT FROM THE ROBERT M. FISHER MEMORIAL FOUNDATION

Washington, DC – The Helen Hayes Awards announced today that the Robert M. Fisher Memorial Foundation has made a \$2.85 million gift in memory of Washington philanthropists Jess Fisher, his wife, Mildred, and daughter, Cecilia “Cookie” Fisher Rudman, long-time supporters of The Helen Hayes Awards and patrons of Washington theatre. This generous gift – the largest in The Helen Hayes Awards’ 23-year history – makes possible the creation of The Helen Hayes Awards Endowment.

The Helen Hayes Awards is the area’s chief force for building and maintaining audiences for Washington professional theatre, which in turn strengthens the region’s economy and our community as a whole.

The gift includes both a \$2 million outright grant and an \$850,000 challenge grant which, when matched, will generate initially a \$3.7 million endowment to support the organization’s education and community service programs. In addition to the endowment gift, the Fisher Foundation also provided a \$150,000 grant to help build organizational infrastructure and to establish the new “Fisher Angels Program,” an initiative to ensure that a ticket to the annual Helen Hayes Awards will always remain affordable to every theatre artist, technician, administrator, and company member – the very people who make our theatre community what it is. The “Fisher Angels Program” was announced to a cheering audience at this year’s Helen Hayes Awards on April 16.

John Schofield, a trustee of the Robert M. Fisher Memorial Foundation said, “Jess, Mildred and Cookie cared deeply about The Helen Hayes Awards and the education and service programs they offer to young students and to the entire Washington community. The Foundation is thrilled to support this organization whose efforts make our community a better place to live.”

The Fisher Foundation’s endowment gift will not only fund the “Fisher Angels Program” in perpetuity, but also support “Cookie’s Classes,” established in 2002 in honor of Cookie Rudman as part of The Helen Hayes Awards Theatre Legacy Project, a landmark program that introduces D.C. public school students to both the magic and practical applications of live theatre.

In announcing the gift, Linda Levy Grossman, Executive Director of The Helen Hayes Awards said, “We are enormously honored to be a part of the Fisher Family’s legacy. The new Helen Hayes Awards Endowment, made possible by their generous gift, will allow us to continue to build audiences, educate young people in our community, and recognize the talent and dedication of everyone working in Washington professional theatre. We are so grateful for the Foundation’s vote of confidence in our work.”

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Victor Shargai, Chairman of the Helen Hayes Awards Board of Directors, added, “This is an extraordinary gift from an extraordinary family. Jess, Mildred and Cookie were devoted theatre-goers and wonderful friends of The Helen Hayes Awards. The Endowment will be a lasting memorial to the spirit of a family dedicated to improving the quality of life for others.”

The Robert M. Fisher Memorial Foundation was established by real estate developer Jess Fisher to honor his son and Cookie’s twin, Robert, who died in 1969. Throughout his life, Fisher was active in local and national real estate organizations, and he served for many years on the Board of Advisors of the National Bank of Washington. Involved in many Jewish charities, he served as international treasurer of the B’nai B’rith Youth Commission and as international chairman of the B’nai B’rith Israel Commission. Fisher was also involved in the Israel Institute of Technology’s Technion. He served on its national and international boards and, in 1991, was honored with Technion’s *Albert Einstein Award*.

Jess Fisher passed away in June 2003 at the age of 89, three days after his wife Mildred died of a heart attack. Cookie Rudman preceded her parents in death less than a year earlier at age 58.

The Helen Hayes Awards

Founded in 1983, the Helen Hayes Awards commemorates Washington native and “First Lady of the American Theatre,” Helen Hayes, whose legendary work ethic and standards of excellence continue to inspire Washington artists. The annual awards celebrate and showcase Washington’s artistic theatre community, and have boosted the city’s reputation as a cultural capital.

The Helen Hayes Awards - The Curtain Never Comes Down

While the Helen Hayes Awards steps into the spotlight one night a year, the organization’s work behind the scenes continues year-round. With a commitment to building audiences and educating youth, the organization introduces thousands of children to live theatre annually and conducts marketing campaigns that promote Washington theatre throughout and beyond the region. Through these service programs, The Helen Hayes Awards builds bridges and connects theatres with audiences, funders, and the media. These programs include:

- [The Theatre Legacy Project](#), a unique program that introduces D.C. public school students to the magic and practical applications of live theatre – free-of-charge. More than 30,000 children have participated in the program since 1994.
- [Curtain UP](#), a quarterly guide to what’s playing in Washington theatres, reaching an audience of 400,000 annually
- [The Washington Audience Development Initiative](#), which builds and broadens Washington theatre audiences through integrated marketing and public awareness initiatives
- www.helenhayes.org, a comprehensive online resource used by more than two million people annually, with information, links, calendar listings, a database of Awards recipients and so much more
- [Washington Theatre TixCertificates](#), flexible \$20 gift certificates redeemable at more than 40 participating theatres
- [The Washington Theatre Guide](#), the most comprehensive resource of its kind with information about all Washington theatres as well as nearby restaurants, parking and public transportation

For more information about Helen Hayes Awards programs and services, visit www.helenhayes.org, email info@helenhayes.org or call 202-337-4572.