

IMMEDIATE RELEASE



August 17, 2007

Connecticut Book Award Finalists and Lifetime Achievement Recipient Named

September Awards Ceremony at Hartford Public Library

The Connecticut Center for the Book is pleased to announce the presentation of the 2007 Lifetime Achievement Award to Morton Schindel, the founder and president of the ground-breaking Weston Woods Studios and Weston Woods Institute, an organization that supports innovation in education. The award will be presented during the Connecticut Book Awards ceremony, held at Hartford Public Library at 2 p.m. on September 23, 2007.

Morton Schindel came to Connecticut in 1953, when he bought 22 acres in Weston (in the woods, of course) and set about building a film studio that would produce more than 300 films based on picture books by the likes of Maurice Sendak, Robert McCloskey, Gail Hailey, Pat Hutchings, Kevin Henkes, Ezra Jack Keats, Margaret Wise Brown, and many more. Esteemed by teachers, librarians, and parents for using pictures and sound (through films, filmstrips, recordings, and now, DVDs) to encourage children to fall in love with books, Weston Woods thrives on reaching a broad, diverse audience, entrancing everyone through the universal lure of a good story.

Schindel, who first set out to make educational films for use in schools, was inspired by the need for quality children's programming in the early days of television. He asked himself, where do you go for good stories? Today, his answer is the same as it was then: "The best stories for children are still being written for books."

In the fifties, he recalls, four million children a day watched *Captain Kangaroo*, while a decent-sized printing of a picture book totaled about 20,000 -- mainly hardcovers that

would be bought by libraries. Weston Woods films became a way to increase the audience for a book, and gave rise to the printing of paperback editions of picture books for children to own. Weston Woods was embraced by schools, too, because a film allowed a classroom full of kids to experience a book together. Initial films such as *Andy and the Lion* and *Make Way for Ducklings* made use of iconography, a term coined by Schindel to describe his process of moving the camera over the illustration to evoke the energy built into the picture. Today, Weston Woods films make use of live action and animation as well, as in *Doctor DeSoto*, Julius Lester's *American Tall Tales*, and *Knuffle Bunny*.

“The thing that I’m proudest of is that nothing we did here had been done before. Today the word *innovation* is a buzz word. We never thought of ourselves as innovators at Weston Woods. We did what needed to be done to bring children’s books to the screen with fidelity.” He adds, with a grin, “It’s an obsession. We don’t just use the words in the text. We want to convey the concept and emotion the writer and illustrator tried to use. To do good storytelling, you must know the story so well, love it so much, make it your own, and *then* give it back.”

Possessing the innate generosity and invention of the storyteller, Schindel has endeavored to involve a succession of luminaries from the worlds of film and children’s literature. The studio’s unique method of marketing has arisen organically from the response to its films. Schindel outfitted Children’s Caravans, bookmobile-like vehicles housing mini-cinemas, to take Weston Woods films to children from beaches to city neighborhoods to the mountains. But the mountain came to him as well, as he welcomed tour groups of visitors (including children and a host of librarians and teachers) to the Weston property, where they peeked into the studio to see authors and illustrators collaborating with his production team, eavesdropped on internationally-known storytellers as they recorded their performances, and enjoyed a bite to eat -- and even a night’s stay -- in the Schindel family home.

A subsidiary of Scholastic, Inc., since 1996, Weston Woods studios and business offices are now located in Norwalk, leaving the gorgeous woodland property -- with its rustic

wood frame buildings, duck pond, and tall trees -- to new ventures as a museum for sound and film equipment, including 19th century magic lanterns, Eastman's first film camera, and a polyphone, a sort of giant music box. Schindel's path -- ninety years long now -- has crossed that of geniuses including Albert Einstein, Robert Oppenheimer, Meryl Streep, and Maurice Sendak.

Never finished, Schindel continues to look forward, seeking new ways to inspire children through stories. "I think that today there is a great deal more latitude for invention because of the internet. The whole activity of teaching through electronic media is very much in its infancy. It is an endless wide-open field, with enormous potential for improving children's ability to communicate."

The Connecticut Book Awards recognize and honor those authors, illustrators, and designers who represent the best books in or about our state. The list of 2007 finalists for Biography/Memoir, Children's Author, Children's Illustrator, Design, Fiction, and Nonfiction is posted at <http://ww2.hplct.org/cfb/new03/CBA.htm>. Winners will be announced during the Awards ceremony, which will be free and open to the public. Call 860-695-6320 for information about purchasing tickets for the reception and book signings to follow the program; tickets cost \$40.per person. If you require special accommodations to participate in this program, please contact Access Assistance at 860-695-6372 or TTY 860-722-6890, two weeks prior to the program.

The Connecticut Book Awards are made possible in part with support from the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism. The mission of the Connecticut Center for the Book at Hartford Public Library is to celebrate books, writers, and readers who engender and sustain the life of the imagination and to highlight authors, illustrators, printers, and the literary heritage of the state of Connecticut. The Connecticut Center for the Book is an affiliate of the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress.

Hartford Public Library provides strategic programs that respond to citizens' real needs and interests. The library offers programs for parenting, literacy and language development; programs for technical literacy and competency; and programs for entrepreneurs and small business owners. Hartford Public Library also provides a cultural

and artistic form that reflects the city's diverse and vibrant community. For a full listing of events and programs at Hartford Public Library, call 860-695-6295 or visit online at www.hplct.org.