

2026 Will Rogers Medallion Awards honor John Kennedy, Kevin Costner & top Western authors and filmmakers

2026 Will Rogers Medallion Awards Honor John Kennedy, Kevin Costner, Doris Kearns Goodwin, and Leading Voices in Western Literature and Film

GRASS VALLEY, CA, UNITED STATES, June 3, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A United States senator, an Academy Award honoree, a Pulitzer Prize recipient, and multiple New York Times bestselling authors are among the recipients of the 2026 Will Rogers Medallion Awards.

The 2026 honorees include Louisiana Sen. John Kennedy, Oscar winner Kevin Costner, Pulitzer Prize recipient Doris Kearns Goodwin, and bestselling authors Anne Hillerman, Craig Johnson, and Chris Enss. Named for American humorist and performer Will Rogers (1879–1935), the WRMA gold, silver, and bronze medallions will be presented Oct. 31 at the River Spirit Casino Resort in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

The annual awards honor creative works across 30 categories focused on the American West, its cultural heritage, and storytelling traditions. The awards recognize artistic achievement as well as the preservation and reinterpretation of Western identity in contemporary culture.

The 2026 honorees, listed by category, include:

Western Humor: *How to Test Negative for Stupid: And Why Washington Never Will* by Sen. John Kennedy (HarperCollins); "Directions" by Reavis Z. Wortham; and *The More the Merrier* by Jerry Zezima.

Western Biographies/Memoirs: *The Reel Thrilling Events of Bank Robber Henry Starr* by Mark Archuleta; *The Sharpshooter and the Showman* by Chris Enss; and *The Life and Times of Jim Bridger* by Bill Markley.

Western Nonfiction: *The Undiscovered Country* by Paul Andrew Hutton; *In the Days of Billy the Kid* by James B. Mills; and *Colorado Outlaws and Lawmen* by Nancy K. Williams.

Western Short Nonfiction: "Dr. Sofie Herzog: The Gunfighter's Physician" by Chris Enss; "A Man of Two Worlds" by Michael Norman; and "In Search of the Night Herder" by W.K. Stratton.





The American West remains a living narrative that continues to inspire writers, filmmakers, poets, and musicians. This year's honorees reflect its depth, diversity, and enduring appeal."

*Chris Enss, Executive Director
Will Rogers Medallion Award*

Western Traditional Fiction: The Reckoning of Men by Chris Mullen; Cold Powder Vengeance by D.N. Sample; and Dismal Trail by Ron Schwab.

Western Modern Fiction: The Blessing by John Bradshaw; The Buffalo Hunter Hunter by Stephen Graham Jones; and Narrow Is the Road by James Wade.

Western Mystery: The Blue Horse by Bruce Borgos; Shadow of the Solstice by Anne Hillerman; Return to Sender by Craig Johnson; and Darkness Rising by Chris Mullen.

Western Historical Fiction: Tough Luck by Sandra Dallas; The Apache Kid by W. Michael Farmer; and Too Much the Lion by Preston Lewis.

Western Romance: Iron Horse Claim by C.K. Van Dam; Love's Healing Path by Lacy Williams; and To Love a Beast by Karen Witemeyer.

Western Inspirational: On a Midnight Clear by Misty M. Beller, Tracie Peterson, and Karen Witemeyer; A Secret Heart by Wendy Klopfenstein; and Crossing Paths by Andrew Roth.

Western Fiction Short Stories: "Shadows in the Firelight" by Michelle Ferrer; "Banner" by Sharon Frame Gay; "Sailor's Wisdom" by Rik Goodell; and "Come Necessary" by Michael Knost.

Western Maverick Book: Common Horse Sense from Will Rogers by Jennifer Rogers and Randall Reeder.

Western Photographic Essays: 100 Years of Dude Ranching by Lynn Downey; Edward S. Curtis: Unpublished Southwest by Edward S. Curtis, John Graybill, and Coleen Graybill; and At the Edge of Out There by Caroline Joy Hadley and Cindy Monroe.

Western Cookbooks: I'll Have the Chicken Fried Steak by Mike Cox; The Route 66 Cookbook by Linda Ly; and Culinary Treasures by Sherry Monahan.

Western Young Reader/Illustrated: Winston's First Rodeo by Linda Apple; Rosie's Ranch Rescue by Paige Murray; and A Home for Steamboat by Casey Rislov.

Western Young Adult Fiction: Never Curse the Rain by S.J. Dahlstrom; When the Sky Turned to Dust by Catherine Matthias; and Destined to Ride Alone by R.G. Yoho.

Western Poetry: The Solace of Wild Places by Kathryn Jones; Santa Fe Trail by karla k. morton and Alan Birkelbach; and At the Ranch by John D. Nesbitt.

Cowboy Poetry: Ponderin's by Rik Goodell; Pensive and Playful by Mark Munzert; and Authentic, or Something Like That by Kye Rieff.

Cowboy Songwriting: "My Good Horse" by The Arizona Wildflowers; "As Cowboy as They Come" by Aspen Black; and "5 A.M." by Joel White and Randy Palmer.

Western Film—Drama Feature: Broke; Wild Faith Christmas; and Where the Wild Wind Blows.

Western Film—Documentary Long Form: The Moccasin Speaks; Little House Homecoming; and Kevin Costner's The West: Oregon Trails.

Western Film—Documentary Short Form: Today's Wild West, Episode 704; Nita: Hotbed in Deadwood; and Clayton Moore is My Father, the Lone Ranger!

Maverick—Western Film: The Seamstress.

Chris Enss

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+1 916-216-0995

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