A Host and a Legend

BOB BARKER HAS MADE A HUGE IMPACT ON TELEVISION, AND ON ANIMAL RIGHTS, TOO

BY PATT MORRISON

f there were a Mt. Rushmore for television game show hosts, there's no doubt about it: Bob Barker would be up there.

Even without being made of granite, his face has endured, filling Americans' eyeballs and television screens for a remarkable half-century. He helped to define the game-show genre, as a pioneer in myriad ways, right down to taking the radical step of letting his hair go naturally white for TV. He has nearly 20 Emmys to his credit.

Now, he is the recipient of the Legend Award from the Los Angeles Press Club, presented at the 2015 National Arts & Entertainment Awards.

Barker's broadcast career began after World War II, where he served as a Navy fighter pilot. He started in radio, as when he came to Los Angeles in 1950 hoping for a break, television was still a fledgling medium. It was a time when shows were sponsored by

cigarette makers and game show creators were willing to try almost anything new and different.

Bob Barker was brand-new to television when, on New Year's Eve 1956, Ralph Edwards, the creator and veteran host of the popular game show "Truth or Consequences," introduced his replacement.

Edwards had called Barker after hearing him on his car radio. It was Dec. 21 at 12:05 p.m., a day the two men celebrated every year thereafter. Less than 10 days later, Barker was on national TV.

Edwards couldn't have known how prescient he was when he said: "The man we selected we think has one of the brightest futures in television... Remember this name; you're going to hear a lot about him."

Barker, for his part, said modestly that, "I feel like I'm hitting after Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig."

Barker went on to become a one-man Murderers' Row of game show hosts, making a long-lasting mark on "Truth or Consequences" and hosting a number of others that came and went.

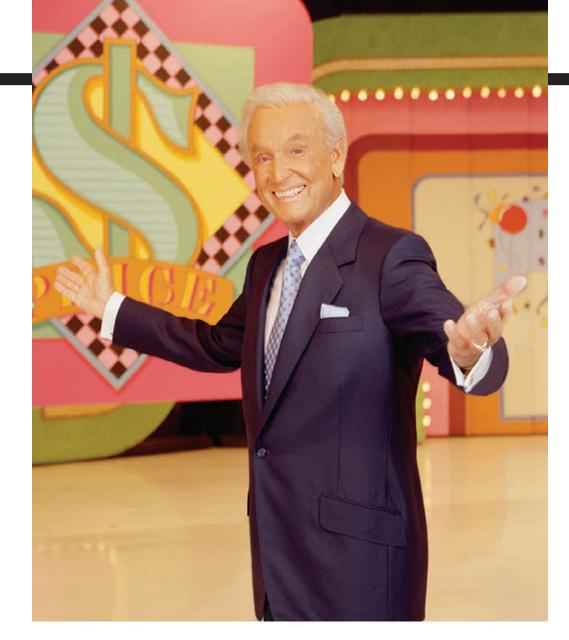
But when he landed as host on "The Price is Right" in 1972, he found his television home, the place where he broke Johnny Carson's 29-year record as longestserving host of a TV show.

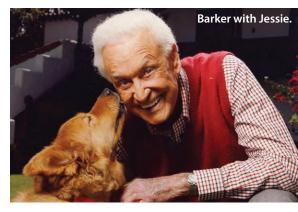
It's easy to rattle off numbers—for example, the first car he gave away on the show was a Chevy Vega, worth \$2,746. Then there's the fact that Barker hosted that show for 35 years, but how long is that, really? Here's how long: When Barker went on the air in 1972, Barack Obama had just turned 11. When Barker hosted his last show in 2007, Barack Obama was running for

president of the United States.

Barker brought to the job a genuineness and an easygoing manner that couldn't be rattled by any of the unexpected moments that come with live television, from equipment mishaps and wardrobe malfunctions to contestants who wanted a smooch. He was always ready with an adroit quip. When a contestant identified himself as a sheriff, Barker grinned and asked smoothly, "You here on business?"

He insisted on contestants who weren't just the young, good-looking people one usually saw on game shows. Barker encouraged bookers to bring on people in their 70s, even 80s. One





was a woman her daughter called an overweight Italian lady with a second-grade education, a woman who watched Bob Barker every day for decades, before her turn to "Come on down!" finally arrived, and she won. When she died in 1992, a framed eight-by-ten glossy of Bob Barker stood on an immaculate doily, next to a picture of her sons.

Barker hosted a national scrapbook of TV specials, from the Tournament of Roses parade to the Pillsbury Bake-Off and Miss USA and Miss Universe beauty

For that has been the true passion of Barker's life. While giving away millions of dollars' worth of sponsors' prizes, Barker has been giving away his own money and time to animals and animal rights issues and the organizations fighting for them. His late wife, Dorothy Jo, was a vegetarian long before her husband was, but once Barker became

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pageants-more on those later. He had a cameo in the 1996 film Happy Gilmore, handing Adam Sandler an epic thrashing. He reprised the slugfest almost 20 years later in a CBS soap opera, settling the score with a younger man who had insulted animal lovers.

an animal advocate, the four-legged world probably had no better friend. The genial game-show host was unrelenting in defense of animals.

He led demonstrators down Fifth Avenue to demand an end to fur sales. Fur farms, he said, are "animal concentration camps." He quit as host of the Miss USA and Miss Universe beauty pageants when he found out the contestants would be taking the stage in swimsuits and fur coats.

At the end of every episode of "The Price is Right," he urged viewers to spay and neuter their pets-

2015 LEGEND AWARD

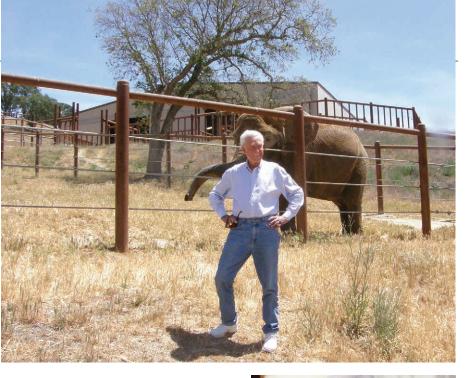
something his successor, Drew Carey, has kept up.

His millions to the Sea Shepherd Society funded an anti-whaling vessel that bears his name, and a helicopter that escorts the fleet across the world's oceans. He donated millions more to renovate PETA's Los Angeles headquarters. He has battled at every level of government to pass spay and neuter laws. His \$300,000 helped to liberate Ruby, a Los Angeles Zoo African elephant, to live out her days as a free pachyderm at a sanctuary in Stockton.

By way of thanks, PETA put Barker on one of its own postage stamps, alongside other renowned vegetarians like Mohandas K. Gandhi and Leo Tolstoy.

Barker has also endowed animal rights law studies programs at eight major law schools, including Harvard and Columbia.

His own critters have inspired him. Take Federico. Barker stopped his car one day when he saw someone had struck and killed a little dog, and the dog's canine friend was sitting by the body, growling at anyone who approached. Barker realized the only way he could save



Federico was to carry his friend's body to the car—so he did. Federico got in the car, and went home with Barker.

What he told Federico could have served as a mantra for the animal rescuers Barker supports: "Little man, with that much love and devotion in you, you deserve a break."

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Top: Visiting Maggie, the African elephant flown from Alaska Zoo to live with other elephants at PAWS, the Performing Animal Welfare Society sanctuary for abused, abandoned and retired captive wildlife.

Above, right: Barker with his dog, Federico.

Right: Visiting the bears and cofounders of PAWS, Ed Stewart and Pat Derby with fellow animal activist, Nancy Burnet (middle).



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