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N E W S R E L E A S E

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Chautauqua audiences to grill “FDR” about current woes

Nebraskans will have the opportunity to ask Franklin Delano Roosevelt what President Obama should do to revitalize the American economy when Chautauqua comes to Broken Bow and Plattsmouth in June. The “Bright Dreams, Hard Times: America in the Thirties” Chautauqua offers first-person presentations of five important historical characters from the Thirties and daily workshops for adults and youth.

In comparing the Great Depression with today’s sharp economic downturn, Patrick McGinnis, the historian who portrays Roosevelt on the 2009 Chautauqua circuit, said, “Even a cursory examination reveals both similarities and differences. Rising unemployment defines both eras. So do mounting bank failures, home foreclosures, business and personal bankruptcies, a sharp decline in foreign trade and increasing signs of political instability.”

However, McGinnis went on to note that the current recession hardly comes close to the severity of the Great Depression.

“This spring, unemployment figures approached 8.5 percent. In 1933, the figure was nearly 33 percent. Proportionately, home foreclosures and bankruptcies are not reaching the elevated levels that marked the economic collapse of the period from 1929 to 1933.”

McGinnis, author of a book about Depression-era radicals in Oklahoma, whose research includes United States political history and the history of the American West, observed that two questions dominate public and private discussion when focusing on any economic crisis.

“When will it end? And what should be done about it? Those questions provoked an intense debate that began with the Depression itself and has continued ever since, both among scholars and in the media. The current crisis has sharply intensified this debate.”

McGinnis’s Roosevelt will be joined by scholars portraying humorist Will Rogers, radio evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson, WPA folklorist Zora Neale Hurston, and Louisiana senator Huey Long for five days of history and entertainment in Broken Bow from June 17-21 and in Plattsmouth from June 24-28.

For more information about “Bright Dreams, Hard Times” Chautauqua events for 2009, visit www.knchautauqua.org for community schedules or contact Beth at the Nebraska Humanities Council at (402) 474-2131 or beth@nebraskahumanities.org.

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