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**NATIONAL ABRAHAM LINCOLN 200th “BIRTHDAY CARD”
EXCEEDS ALL EXPECTATIONS**

A national “birthday card”, celebrating the bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln’s birth, will be displayed at the rededication of the Lincoln Memorial on May 30, 2009.

The “Happy Birthday President Lincoln, from the People” project was created by the artist Wendy Allen to bring Lincoln’s legacy to the people. “This was my way,” says Allen, “of giving the public a chance to participate in this historic celebration. Around the world, Lincoln still personifies hope and freedom. I wanted to provide a venue where people could stop to honor this great leader and consider his incomparable achievements.”

The project, which Allen calls “the people’s tribute,” was endorsed by the national Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission and will be displayed on the National Mall, courtesy of the National Park Service. It has proved an extraordinary success. Since February, Allen and her co-producer, Elaine Henderson, have gathered more than 15,000 signatures in nearly a dozen cities nationwide—Harrisburg and Gettysburg, PA.; Portland, OR; Stockbridge, MA; Warwick, R.I.; Danbury and Hartford, CT; Rochester, N.Y.; West Orange, N.J.; Pittsburgh, PA; and Columbus, OH. Visitors to the Mall on May 30 will also have a chance to sign.

“Originally,” Allen continues, “I imagined people would stop and sign just their names. I was afraid that some might write graffiti. But at every turn, we were astounded by the outpouring of thoughtful sentiment and genuine gratitude, not just for Lincoln but for the nation. Some examples: ‘You’re #16, but you’ll always be #1.’ ‘Happy Birthday, President Lincoln! God bless you & grant you peace eternally.’ ‘You made us strong.’ And remarkably, from a 9-year-old boy, ‘Thanks for sacrificing your life to free the slaves.’ Some embellished their birthday greetings with elaborate drawings of birthday cakes, balloons, and American flags—and even some of ‘Old Abe’ himself. One beautifully-rendered stovepipe hat was accompanied by the Whitman poem, ‘When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom’d.’ Many others recognized Lincoln’s enduring impact with the election of President Obama.”

“People of all nationalities have come—Chinese, Japanese, Czecks, Slovaks, Portuguese, Spaniards, French, Irish, British, Canadians, and Domincans. People from all walks of life. Veterans. People in wheelchairs. The young as well as the old. Children too young to sign their names traced their handprints, while proud parents filled in their names and ages. Teenaged boys shook our hands and actually said, ‘thank you.’”

At each venue, Allen painted a commemorative portrait of Lincoln, her signature subject for which she is recognized around the world. In the past 30 years, she has painted nearly 300 Lincoln portraits. Two are now on display in the Historical Society of Washington, D.C. as part of the exhibition, “Portraying Lincoln: Man of Many Faces.”

“It is my sincere hope,” Allen concludes, “that the birthday card panels will be archived for 100 years in a national institution so they can be exhibited during Lincoln’s 300th birthday celebration in 2109. I think it will be incredible for our great-grandchildren to see what we wrote about him. I wish someone had done the same for us 100 years ago. I want everyone who signed to be able to say, ‘I left my own mark on history.’”

Contacts:

Wendy Allen
Artist

60 Old Northville Rd.
New Milford, CT 06776
Phone: (203) 770-3421
wallen123@charter.net
www.happybirthdaylincoln.com

Jennifer L. Rosenfeld
Deputy Executive Director
Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission
101 Independence Ave., S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20540-4015
Phone: (202) 707-6998
Fax: (202) 707-6995
www.abrahamlincoln200.org