

LOCAL NEWS

## Exhibit at Elmhurst Art Museum featuring PBS Kids show Donkey Hodie runs through Aug. 12



Donkey Hodie, star of the PBS Kids show of the same name, lives in a windmill. (Courtesy of Fred Rogers Productions)



By **MYRNA PETLICKI**

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Fans of “Donkey Hodie,” and anyone interested in television or film, should enjoy looking behind the scenes of the popular PBS Kids show when they visit the Elmhurst Art Museum to view, “Designing Donkey Hodie: From Make Believe to Someplace Else.” The exhibition runs through Aug. 12.

You’ll learn that three puppeteers ride along on a cart below the camera’s view to propel the Potato Pirate Ship.

You’ll discover that the facial features, ears, arms, legs, and tails of the puppets are often removable so the designers can give the puppets different expressions.



Visitors to the exhibition “Designing Donkey Hodie” at the Elmhurst Art Museum will discover that several puppeteers work behind the scenes to make the PBS Kids program come alive. (Courtesy of Fred Rogers Productions)

The origin of Donkey Hodie, a character introduced on the TV show “Mister Rogers Neighborhood” in 1968, will be revealed.



The exhibit includes storyboards, drawings, models, puppets, set pieces, and props from the PBS Kids show.

“This exhibition is original to our museum,” said Executive Director John McKinnon. “We worked with Fred Rogers Productions and Spiffy Pictures. They put us together with Justin Vandenberg from the art department of Spiffy Pictures. He and his crew build all the sets and create all the props. He helped us understand how all the behind-the-scenes filming, production, and other things come to life because it is so handmade.”

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The show uses puppets, rather than relying on digital or artificial intelligence methods.

“This exhibition is much broader,” the Executive Director declared. “We hope that it pulls in people of all ages – anyone that remembers ‘Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood’ and may wonder what other stories have been told through that.”

McKinnon added that the exhibition should also appeal to people who are interested in film or television and might appreciate learning how shows like “Donkey Hodie” are crafted.

Of course, young people will enjoy seeing the puppets in person.

David Rudman and his brother Adam, who own Spiffy Pictures, created the PBS Kids show “Donkey Hodie” and serve as executive producers along with Ellen Doherty, chief creative officer of Fred Rogers Productions.

“At the beginning, Fred Rogers Productions reached out to us because they wanted to do a spinoff series with this character called Donkey Hodie that Fred Rogers created,” Rudman related. “Adam and I worked with Ellen Doherty at Fred Rogers Productions and we developed the show with them.”

Donkey Hodie hadn’t been a major character in “Mister Rogers Neighborhood” but the people at Fred Rogers Productions were attracted to the name. (Think Don Quixote!) They found several other secondary characters from the show to incorporate into the series.



Mister Rogers is pictured with the original Donkey Hodie puppet. (Courtesy of Fred Rogers Productions)

“We discovered that Fred Rogers created this place called Someplace Else,” Rudman said. “We decided the world of Donkey Hodie would take place in Someplace Else.”

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Because it's a puppet show, there are some limitations. "We figure out all the problems before we get into the studio," Rudman said.

It takes about two and one-half days to shoot each 11-minute episode of the show.

Rudman noted that he has a connection to the Elmhurst Art Museum because that was where he saw artist Dave Pryor's artwork in the gift shop and got Pryor's contact information. He later met with Pryor and chose him to design the "Donkey Hodie" characters, along with Rudman.

Rudman reported that it was Pryor's idea to have an exhibit at the Elmhurst Art Museum about designing the PBS Kids show.

Kristin DiQuollo of Fred Rogers Productions is the supervising producer of "Donkey Hodie." She noted that when Chief Creative Officer Ellen Doherty was looking for a character to build a series around and came across Donkey Hodie, the name made her laugh.

"Who better than a donkey, and a donkey named Donkey Hodie, to create a series about resilience and big dreams?," DiQuollo said.

They chose Spiffy Pictures to create that series because the company "has a long history in creating really delightful puppet series," DiQuollo explained.

Fred Rogers Productions decided to use puppets for "Donkey Hodie" because "puppets became a wonderful medium for being able to tell our stories in this quirky storybook world where all of these characters are rich with texture and personality," DiQuollo said.

At the same time as the exhibit about designing "Donkey Hodie" is up, the Museum will display an outdoor exhibit, "Monsters in Wilder Park: A Kid-Powered Art Show." That installation is by artist Dave Pryor, who designed the "Donkey Hodie" puppets with David Rudman.

Three programs are planned in conjunction with the exhibit that are included with museum admission.

"Family Day: Monster Creations with special guest Dave Pryor" is 1-4 p.m. June 15.

"Family Day: Donkey Hodie cast appearance with puppet demo and Family Day workshop" is 1-4 p.m. July 20.

"Family Day: Creative Storytelling" is 1-4 p.m. Aug. 3.

The Elmhurst Art Museum is at 150 S. Cottage Hill Avenue in Elmhurst. Admission is \$18 for ages 18 and older, \$15 for seniors, \$10 for students, and \$5 for children. For more information, call 630-834-0202 or visit [elmhurstartmuseum.org](http://elmhurstartmuseum.org).

*Myrna Petlicki is a freelance reporter for Pioneer Press.*

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