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National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum Announces 2026 Western Heritage Awards Winners for Creative Achievement

OKLAHOMA CITY, Thursday, Feb. 19, 2026 - The National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum announced the individuals who will be recognized for outstanding creative achievement from 2025 at the 65th Western Heritage Awards. Each year, the museum honors artists and storytellers whose exceptional work in film, television, literature and music advances and preserves Western heritage.

This year's recipients will be presented with a Wrangler Award at the Western Heritage Awards ceremony held at the museum in Oklahoma City on Saturday, April 11, 2026. The Wrangler is a bronze sculpture of a cowboy on horseback created by the late Oklahoma artist Harold T. Holden, a 2017 Hall of Great Westerners inductee.

The Western Heritage Awards also serve as the induction ceremony for the Museum's Hall of Great Western Performers and Hall of Great Westerners, as well as the presentation ceremony for special awards such as the Chester A. Reynolds Award (named after the Museum's founder), the Special Directors' Award and the Western Visionary Award.

As announced previously, acclaimed actor Ed Harris will be inducted into the Hall of Great Western Performers, as will Country Music Hall of Famer Kenny Rogers, who is being inducted posthumously.

Country Music Hall of Famer Toby Keith will posthumously receive the Special Directors' Award, a rare honor bestowed at the discretion of the Museum's Board of Directors, awarded to recipients who embody a profound commitment to preserving, interpreting and elevating the spirit of the American West.

Art Nicholas and Luster Bayless will be inducted into the Hall of Great Westerners. Richard Oliver will receive The Chester A. Reynolds Award, and Rex Tillerson will receive the Western Visionary Award.

The Museum will again host a Kick-Off Party on Friday, April 10, offering the public an exclusive opportunity to mingle with inductees and honorees while enjoying complimentary refreshments and live entertainment

For more information on the Kick-Off Party tickets, visit: [Kick-Off Party](#).

Tickets for the Saturday Western Heritage Awards ceremony are \$175 for Museum members and \$250 for general admission. Tickets are very limited.

For more information on awards ceremony tickets, visit: [Awards Ceremony](#).

Western Heritage Awards Creative Achievement Honorees

FILM & TELEVISION HONOREES

Western Lifestyle Program

“Break-a-Wave: A Cal Poly Rodeo Documentary,” produced by MakeLine Productions

Theatrical Motion Picture

“Broke,” starring Wyatt Russell, written and directed by Carlyle Eubank

Documentary

“The Return of the Sacred Red Rock,” directed by Jeremy Charles, produced by Benjamin Arrendondo

Fictional Drama

“T’áá Áłts’íísígo (Just A Small Piece),” from “Dark Winds,” directed by Steven Paul Judd, produced by AMC Studios

Docudrama

“Elkhorn: A Fine Welcome,” directed by Michael Ojeda, produced by Morningstar Entertainment

LITERATURE HONOREES

Nonfiction Book

“The Undiscovered Country: Triumph, Tragedy, and the Shaping of the American West,” by Paul Hutton, published by Penguin Random House

Poetry Book

“Stories We Didn’t Tell,” by Anna Citrino, published by Shanti Arts

Juvenile Book

“Badger Clark: Poetry Wrangler,” by Nancy Bo Flood, published by South Dakota Historical Society Press

Magazine Article

“Boley Rides Again: Can the Rodeo Save a Historic Black Town?” by Caleb Gayle, published by The Atlantic

Western Novel

“Narrow the Road,” by James Wade, published by Blackstone Publishing

MUSIC HONOREES**Original Western Composition**

“Burnin’ Vein,” recording artist Michael Martin Murphey, composed by Karla K. Morton and Alian Birklebach

Traditional Western Album

“The West That Money Couldn’t Buy,” recording artist Brenn Hill

Western Heritage Awards Inductees and Lifetime Achievement Honorees**Hall of Great Western Performers**

Ed Harris

Kenny Rogers

Hall of Great Westerners

Arthur Nicholas

Luster Bayless

Chester A. Reynolds Award

Richard Oliver

Special Directors’ Award

Toby Keith

Western Visionary Award

Rex Tillerson

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About the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum

The National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City is America’s premier institution of Western history, art and culture. Founded in 1955, the Museum collects, preserves and exhibits an internationally renowned collection of Western art and artifacts while sponsoring dynamic educational programs to stimulate interest in the enduring legacy of the American West. For more information, visit nationalcowboymuseum.org.

