PRESS TOUR: The Mister Rogers legacy continues in 'Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood'

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BEVERLY HILLS, Calif. -- It's been almost six years since the Post-Gazette broke the news that Fred Rogers' Oakland-based company -- formerly Family Communications, now The Fred Rogers Company -- was developing a new childrens' series.

Finally, it's almost here. The animated "Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood" will premiere on PBS stations, including Pittsburgh's WQED, on Labor Day.

Pittsburghers Joanne Rogers, widow of Fred Rogers; Kevin Morrison, chief operating officer of the Fred Rogers Company and an executive producer on "Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood" (pictured at right); and Fred Rogers Company president Bill Isler made the trip to Los Angeles where Rogers and Morrison appeared on a PBS panel discussing the new children's series this morning.

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At a breakfast press conference (see table decor at right), the Pittsburghers were joined by executive producer Angela Santomero ("Blue's Clues," "Super Why"), who said even though there's no Fred Rogers character in the show -- it's a next generation series about the children of the Neighborhood of Make Believe characters -- his presence is felt.

"We talked a lot about how to include him and we felt if he wasn't in it in any specific way, he's in it in the entire feel of the show," she said. "There are little nods of love formed into the entire series."
One critic asked why Daniel, the 4-year-old son of Daniel Striped Tiger on "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood," wears no pants but does wear a swimsuit at the beach.

"I'll give you two reasons why he doesn't wear pants," Morrison said. "The original Daniel didn't wear pants. Actually, he didn't even have legs. And the second is that we're sticklers for research at the Fred Rogers Company and we went to a large number of zoos and none of the tigers wore pants."

You can see Fred Rogers' fingerprints in "Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood" and elsewhere, including the video PBS commissioned earlier this year and in dedicated fan sites like The Neighborhood Archive: A Collection of All Things Mister Rogers, which even has its own blog site dedicated to recapping episodes of the original "Neighborhood."

Joanne Rogers said Fred was always amazed by the impact he had on people.

"He was a very private person, interestingly, but on the other hand he loved people. He liked to get to know people. He was curious about them and there was always the story that an interview would turn out to be the interviewer being interviewed," she said. "Been there, experienced that. It was natural for him to want to know about that person he was talking to. I think he would have been amazed at the love that's been shown and all the different tributes that have been made to him since his death."

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