

TV watchdog begins 21th year

NEW YORK (AP) — Jay Leno, Garrison Keillor, Jane Pauley and Shelley Duvall joined congressmen, network executives, Mickey Mouse and Mr. Rogers on Monday to celebrate the 20th anniversary of Action for Children's Television.

The Massachusetts-based advocacy group was founded by Peggy Charren, a frequent visitor to Capitol Hill, where she testifies against commercialism and violence in children's programming.

"When we started in 1968, our goal was really to put ourselves out of business," said Charren. "We thought we'd make children's television so great, there would be no need for an advocacy group for children's television. I actually thought we'd do it in two years."

Rep. Edward Markey, D-Mass., one of the participants in Monday's program, suggested that if Massachusetts Gov. Michael Dukakis wins the presidential election, Charren might have a much greater voice.

Referring to Charren, he told the crowd, "Michael Dukakis' chairman of the FCC (Federal Communications Commission) —

so you better get to know her well. She's been ringing doorbells since 1962 for him."

Markey expressed optimism for legislation that would restore limitations on commercial time in children's programming, a prime issue for ACT, which is especially opposed to a trend toward "30-minute commercials" for children's toys.

But the birthday party accentuated the positive, and the highlight was presentation of ACT Hall of Fame awards to stations, institutions and people who have, according to ACT, contributed most significantly to high-quality children's TV.

Leno, emcee of the celebration at Tavern on the Green, joked at one point that children who watch cartoons probably believe "if you hit a dog with an axe, you get two dogs. If you hit it again, you get hot dogs."

Then Rep. Al Swift, D-Wash., presented awards to KRON-TV of San Francisco, KING 5 Television in Seattle and WMAQ-TV of Chicago for excellence in locally produced children's shows.

Keillor presented the award to

The Disney Channel. The cable channel Nickelodeon received an award presented by Duvall. Marlene Sanders gave the award to PBS.

Lee Salk presented the award to Fred Rogers and his company, Family Communications. "We try to help children and their families feel as good as possible about who they are and what they can become, so they can look at their neighbor and feel the same way," said Rogers, who then asked the crowd to observe a minute of silence to think about those who have been important in their lives.

Phylcia Rashad presented an award to Group W Television Stations. Weston Woods, a home video company that encourages children to read books, received an honor presented by artist and author Maurice Sendak. Pauley presented the award to The Children's Television Workshop, producers of "Sesame Street."

ACT's "super hero" award went to Lloyd N. Morrisett, president of The John and Mary R. Markle Foundation, for supporting educational television for children.