

THE IOLA REGISTER

Potterton wins 'Buster'

By **BRUCE SYMES**
Register Wire Editor

Gerald Potterton, animator and filmmaker from Canada, was presented the "Buster" Saturday afternoon at the Buster Keaton Celebration for his contributions to art and his dedication to filmmaking in the spirit of the award's namesake.

Honored by Keith Goering of the Iola Keaton Celebration Committee and Patricia Elliott Tobias of The Damfinos, which jointly present the award annually, and handed the trophy by actor, longtime Keaton friend and last year's winner James Karen, Potterton said, "I know just what Buster would have said at a time like this, and that's 'Go figure.'"

Potterton directed Keaton in "The Railrodder," the 1965 comedy travelogue made by the National Film Board of Canada, and has numerous film credits to his career. He directed "Heavy Metal," the 1981 cult classic that was rereleased two years ago as "Heavy Metal 2000," and has garnered three Oscar nominations.

Potterton praised the comic genius for whom the award was established in accepting the "Buster."

"I remember I called Buster once and he picked up the phone and said 'Go ahead.' Instead of saying 'hello,' I thought later that was how he met life. It was 'Go ahead and give me all you've got,' and with his resilience and perseverance he overcame a lot and succeeded," Potterton said.

"I couldn't have accomplished what I have without many important people, two of whom sadly aren't here, and that's Eleanor (Keaton) and



Register/Bruce Symes

Gerald Potterton received his award from James Karen, from left, Patricia Elliot Tobias and Keith Goering.

Buster."

EARLIER IN THE DAY, Potterton had reminisced about the filming of "The Railrodder," during which he and his crew spent six weeks traveling more than 3,000 miles across Canada with the Keatons.

The idea for the travelogue was conceived in the NFB cafeteria, he said, and the outline was scratched on a single piece of paper. He took it to New York City to approach Keaton with the idea and to ask him to star in the film.

"I knocked on the door and Buster answered," Potterton recalled. "I told him our idea, and he said 'Wait a minute' and walked to the window, which was open, and yelled out to New York, 'Quiet!'"

"He came back, sat on the sofa and thought a minute, and then he said he'd do it."

Narrating a videotape of behind the scenes moments from "The Railrodder" experience, Potterton at one point said, "That's Buster telling the cameraman what to do. ... That's Buster telling me what to do. ... He was always telling everyone what to do."

During footage of one of Keaton's public appearances in Canada, Potterton said, "He was excellent in crowds. It might seem like he was bored, but he was incredibly nice, always answering every question and signing every autograph."

On a more personal level, Potterton said, "He was a great friend and a great man."