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### **Joe Mantegna & Lt. Col. Robert Friend Named as Co-Grand Marshals for Fair's 71st Year**

**Indio, CA** - The 71<sup>st</sup> Annual Riverside County Fair & National Date Festival, which runs, February 17-26, 2017, has announced Joe Mantegna and Lt. Col Robert Friend as co-Grand Marshals for the Fair's Presidents' Day Parade. The Presidents' Day Parade will take place on Monday, February 20<sup>th</sup>. Mantegna and Friend invite the public to join them for this Grand Parade! The Parade will step down at 9:00 a.m. from the intersection of Miles Avenue and Deglet Noor Street in Indio, CA.

Criminal Minds star Joe Mantegna will serve as Co-Grand Marshal of the 71st annual Riverside County Fair & National Date Festival Presidents' Day Parade along with Lt. Col. Robert J. Friend, one of the oldest surviving members of the legendary Tuskegee Airman. What should be noted is that this will be an encore to the epic Criminal Minds episode Anonymous, which Mantegna directed and which also featured Lt. Col. Friend in a cameo appearance. "It's such an honor to be asked to be a part of this prestigious event" said Joe. "But it's even a bigger honor to share it with such a distinguished veteran as Lt. Col. Friend." To make the day even more special, there will be a fly over of an original P-51 D Mustang, the same type plane Lt. Col. Friend flew in World War II for the Red Tail Squadron, which even features his original "Bunny" art on the fuselage! Currently on display at the Palm Springs Air Museum, the plane includes the signatures of Friend and other surviving members of the original squadron.

Lt. Col. Robert Friend was born on February 28, 1920. In 1939, he became a student at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, where he earned a private pilot certificate in the Civilian Pilot Training Program. In 1942, he joined the Air Force and was sent to Tuskegee Institute for pilot training.

After receiving his wings he was assigned to the 332<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Group as a pilot then he was sent to Selfridge Air Force Base in Michigan for flight tactical aircraft transition before his combat tour. In 1943, Lieutenant Friend reported to the European Theatre of War as a member of Tuskegee Airmen's Distinguished 322<sup>nd</sup> Group, which was a Fighter Pilot Organization. As a skillful pilot of the P47 and P51 single engine planes, Lieutenant Friend flew as the wing man for the Commander of the group, Col. B.O. Davis. Lt. Col. Friend also served as Combat Operations Officer at the Squadron and Group levels. In this capacity he was responsible for planning and organizing the implementation of strategic and tactical air missions for the organization. Lt. Col Friend's awards include the Congressional Gold medal, Distinguished Flying Cross, Presidential Unit Citation, Bronze Star with Flying Cross and three Distinguished Service Medals.

Even though Joe Mantegna is one of the most recognized and successful actors in Hollywood, he is equally well known for his tireless devotion to veteran's causes. Since 2002, Joe has participated in the National Memorial Day Concert in Washington, DC along with co-host Gary Sinise. In 2005, he was appointed the Honorary Chairman for the Salute to Hospitalized Veterans. In 2012, Joe was appointed the National Spokesperson for the U.S. Army Museum to lead the fund-raising for the long-planned National Museum

of the United States Army and in 2013 he received the USO of Metropolitan Washington's prestigious Merit Award. A 2014 Lifetime Achievement Award winner from the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce for his dedication to the community and the craft of acting, Joe has also found time to work on behalf of Riverside County charities and received the 2015 Riverside International Film Festival's Lifetime Achievement Award.

The Riverside County Fair & National Date Festival is presented by Fantasy Springs Resort Casino, the desert's leader in gaming and entertainment. The Fair, in Indio, runs February 17-26, 2017. Gates open at 10 a.m. and close at 10 p.m. Purchase your tickets early and receive them at a discounted price: \$9 for adults, \$8 for seniors, \$7 for youth, \$7 for group tickets or bus tours (minimum of 25), and \$22 for Unlimited Carnival Ride Wristbands. For more information, call 800.811.FAIR or visit [www.datefest.org](http://www.datefest.org) where you can buy and print your Fair tickets at home.

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