



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on July 6, 2012

Andy Griffith, R.I.P.

Actor and comedian Andy Griffith [died](#) July 3 at age 86 of a heart attack. The actor was best known for portraying small-town sheriff Andy Taylor in *The Andy Griffith Show*, which ran on the CBS television network from 1960-68. Griffith also won fame for his portrayal of country lawyer Ben Matlock in the show *Matlock* (1986-92) and won a Grammy Award for his platinum-selling gospel album in 1996.



But Griffith's Andy Taylor in the mythical small town of Mayberry, North Carolina, is what most Americans remember of Griffith. Of Mayberry, Griffith [told](#) Matt Lauer on NBC's *The Today Show* back in 1996 that it championed small-town, traditional values:

Though we never said it, and though it was shot in the 60s, it had a feeling of the 30s. It was when we were doing it of a time-gone-by. And we were very careful to keep our characters always very pure. If a joke made a lie out of a character, we'd lose its joke.

The *Andy Griffith Show* was a popular hit, especially with Griffith's co-star Don Knotts, who played the bumbling and excitable deputy Barney Fife. Knotts gathered five supporting-actor Emmy Awards for during his five-year run on the show. Of Knotts' unique humor, Griffith [told](#) Lauer in 1996:

Being the straight man, I got to be in the show and I had the best seat in the house at the same time. I played straight for all these fine comedic characters that we had, and I loved it.

The show also jump-started the career of actor/director Ron Howard as Griffith's son Opie, who was often the occasion for the sheriff/father to impart traditional American values in Griffith's southern drawl and unique story-telling ability. Griffith's character [inveighed against the modern penchant for secret government recording of criminal suspects' conversations](#) in one episode, in essence arguing against provisions of the Patriot Act some 40 years before it was enacted by Congress. In another episode, Andy Taylor enticed Opie and his friends to beg to hear [the story of Paul Revere's ride](#).

Though Griffith was politically liberal, [mostly backing Democrats](#) for public office and recording commercials in favor of Medicare, even conservatives will agree that his support of traditional American values in his various characters on television and in his music will be missed.

Photo: This Oct. 28, 2003 file photo shows actor Andy Griffith sitting in front of a bronze statue of Andy and Opie from the "Andy Griffith Show," after the unveiling ceremony in Raleigh,

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