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## A new day in the 'Neighborhood'

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*Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* is making room for a new generation of neighbors.

Premiering Labor Day weekend, *Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood* is an animated extension of the late Fred Rogers' beloved PBS classic. The star in this new half-hour weekday series, aimed at children 2-4, is Daniel Tiger, the 4-year-old son of Daniel Striped Tiger, Rogers' first puppet. He and his friends, all sons and daughters of Rogers' original puppet characters, go through adventures and sing songs meant to teach social skills -- from dealing with disappointment to controlling anger and learning patience.

Produced by The Fred Rogers Company, the show arrives with the cooperation and blessing of Rogers' widow, Joanne Rogers. "My feeling is he would really be pleased with this," she says.

Unlike the original show, which was built around Rogers as our guide to the Land of Make Believe, *Daniel* is led by an animated tiger cub. Joanne Rogers had originally hoped to find a human host to step into her husband's tennis shoes, but, she says, "there is nobody else. It really is as simple as that. Fred didn't spend much time worrying about that when he was alive, because he thought there were people who might be possibilities. But it just didn't work."

And while the old *Neighborhood* used puppets instead of cartoons, that's not because Fred Rogers was opposed to animation, she says. "He looked

into it. It just never happened. He liked the idea of having some animation."

The new series is produced by *Blue's Clues'* Angela C. Santomero, who says she was a huge fan of the series growing up. "It's nothing new to her," says Rogers. "That's a real blessing. And she's well known to PBS, and that's another plus."

*Daniel*, of course, is not meant to replace the original *Neighborhood*, which will continue in reruns. But in today's TV economy, particularly on PBS, merely repeating the show was not going to be enough to keep The Fred Rogers Company going. "If we didn't start producing programs, we're not going to make it. That's just a fact of life."

And here's another fact: It's nearly impossible today to make the economics of children's television work without having toys attached. So while the older Daniel Tiger didn't come as a plush toy, his son will.

The Fred Rogers legacy goes on in many ways, some homage, some parody, some knock-offs and some just nasty. His widow says she avoids looking at most of them, but she does enjoy one in particular: The *Garden of Your Mind* Web video mashup, which reminds her of the "silly" and "whimsical" Fred she knew.

"The more I see it, the more I like it. It's like a part of Fred that I knew. He was not always so measured. So that's really like the Fred I knew."