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Arts Council of Johnson County Receives \$10,000 Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts

Grant to Support Playwright-in-Residence Program

LENEXA, KS — The Arts Council of Johnson County (ACJC), in partnership with Theatre in the Park (TTIP), has been awarded a \$10,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). This grant is to support an artist residency at the new Johnson County Arts & Heritage Center (AHC). The playwright-in-residence will collaborate with a visual artist, a composer, and middle school students to develop and perform an original musical theater production for the public. The playwright-in-residence will be provided with space in the AHC and a stipend to create new work.

NEA Chairman Jane Chu said, “The National Endowment for the Arts is committed to nurturing artists and the arts in communities across the country. Supporting projects from collaborating organizations such as the ACJC and TTIP represents a wise investment in both the Johnson County community and the creative vitality of the nation.”

The AHC was created in part to answer the community’s cultural needs as well as to provide much needed new space for the County museum and winter and workshop space for TTIP. The AHC will be located near downtown Overland Park, a walkable neighborhood that’s home to locally owned small businesses, restaurants and galleries. Both the ACJC and TTIP will have offices in the new AHC, and this grant will support one of the first collaborations to be part of the new Arts & Heritage Center. As the ACJC and TTIP work together to create this inaugural Playwright Artist Residency, this is the first program of its kind for either partner.

This program responds to feedback gathered from a new regional cultural plan for the Kansas City metro. One of the needs that ranked highest among Johnson County residents is for more opportunities for arts participation and engagement. The core of AHC’s programming will focus on community engagement: arts-based summer camps, visual and performing arts classes for K-12 and adult learners, interactive museum exhibitions and programs, and community theatre productions. This grant provides an entirely new way for community members to get involved.

“We are thrilled about the opportunity this grant presents to a talented playwright to create a new musical theatre production within our community,” said Sarah VanLanduyt, Executive Director, Arts Council of Johnson County. “As we prepare to move into the new Johnson County Arts & Heritage Center in 2017, this grant will support our new artist in residency program that will be housed there. This new endeavor will part of an engaging array of arts offerings that will be available in that facility.”

The Playwright residency is designed to provide an opportunity for the participating artist to create new work. The resident artist will work with middle school students to develop an original musical. The production will focus on an issue decided upon by and important to participating students and will debut at the AHC in December 2017. The residency will include the collaboration with two additional artist mentors: a visual artist to work with 10 middle



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school students to visualize the musical and a composer to help 10 other students develop three original songs for the musical. The resident playwright artist will receive a stipend and workspace inside the AHC. Artist mentors will receive stipends.

“We’re very excited about the opportunity to bring middle school aged children into the AHC and create a piece of theatre that speaks to issues important to THEM!” said Tim Bair, TTIP’s Producing Artistic Director. “The collaboration of 30 middle schoolers and professional mentors opens a door of huge creative possibilities, and will provide great learning opportunities for everyone as we all work together toward a finished musical theatre piece that incorporates the creative spirit of all players in the final product. I’m so hopeful that this is the beginning of a wonderful partnership with the Arts Council, InterUrban ArtHouse and the creative and talented group of artists in our community.”

The InterUrban ArtHouse is an organization that provides affordable studio space and small business training for artists and is located near the AHC. The ACJC and TTIP anticipate contracting with InterUrban ArtHouse for use of their space for the visual art component, and working with their staff to help select the visual art mentor. Details are still being finalized about the selection process for the playwright in residency, along with the artists mentors and student involvement.

About the Arts Council of Johnson County:

The Arts Council of Johnson County is dedicated to the enrichment of the community through the Arts. By focusing on the Arts as an effective economic development tool to foster a strong regional identity, ACJC advocates for policies that strengthen the Arts in Johnson County and the metropolitan area; champions Arts learning opportunities for all ages; amplifies Johnson County’s voice in the broader metropolitan area Arts discussions; and contributes to the growth of the Arts within the 21 municipalities of Johnson County. The ACJC works to build a creative culture, transforming the region into a vibrant, thriving area desirable to residents, new businesses, visitors and tourists. Learn more at artsjoco.org.

About Theatre In the Park:

For 46 years, the Theatre in the Park (TTIP) program, produced by Johnson County Parks and Recreation, has presented live theatre performances in a Johnson County park. With annual attendance of approximately 35,000, TTIP productions draw patrons from throughout the Greater Kansas City area. The Theatre provides creative challenges for hundreds of performers (actors, orchestra, crew) as well as employment opportunities for area residents. On June 20, 1980, a permanent stage built within Shawnee Mission Park was dedicated for these productions. Funding raised by the Shawnee Mission Sertoma Club paid for this new stage. Many improvements have been made to the theatre since 1980, including upgraded dressing rooms, public restrooms, a set construction shop, a technical bunker, concession stand and a permanent box office. In 2010, an outdoor picnic Pavilion was constructed on the Theatre grounds. In 2014, new air conditioned dressing rooms were built to accommodate the ever growing casts of TTIP’s yearly musical theatre season. Learn more at theatreinthepark.org.

About the National Endowment for the Arts:

The NEA is the federal agency that supports and funds the arts to give all Americans the opportunity to experience creativity and participate in the arts. NEA programs and funding support thousands of activities in communities large and small across the country. To learn more about the National Endowment for the Arts, please visit arts.gov. Follow the conversation about this and other NEA-funded projects on Twitter at @NEAarts.

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