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**HARTFORD PUBLIC LIBRARY ONE OF 269 ORGANIZATIONS NATIONWIDE
TO RECEIVE THE BIG READ GRANT FROM
NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS**

*Hartford to Read and Celebrate The Adventures of Tom Sawyer
during The Big Read Project*

June 23, 2009—HARTFORD—Hartford Public Library today announced that it has received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to host The Big Read in partnership with The Mark Twain House & Museum and Hartford Stage. Hartford Public Library is one of 269 nonprofits—including arts, culture, and science organizations; libraries; and municipalities—to receive a grant to host a Big Read project between September 2009 and June 2010. The Big Read gives communities the opportunity to come together to read, discuss, and celebrate one of 30 selections from U.S. and world literature. The Big Read in Hartford will focus on Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.

“Hartford Public Library is delighted to celebrate *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* with our partners in 2010, the 175th anniversary of Mark Twain’s birth,” says Interim Director, Jenny Benedict. “In 2009, The Big Read became a regional attraction connecting over 40,000 people with Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*.”

Over two hundred and fifty programs will occur in the Capital region between April through June of 2010. Hartford Public Library will engage participants of all ages in a multitude of activities, including book discussions, bluegrass and Americana music performances, and a photo exhibition, “Life along the Connecticut River, 1870-1900.” At The Mark Twain House & Museum, The Big Read will play an important role in the 2010 commemoration of the centennial of Mark Twain’s passing in 1910.

Jacques Lamarre, Manager of Communications for The Mark Twain House, states, “We are excited to partner with the Hartford Public Library and twenty other community libraries in The Big Read by offering an array of family-friendly activities, tours, exhibitions, and more. A high point of this unique opportunity to discover or re-discover *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* will be the chance for Big Readers to visit Twain’s home in Hartford where the book was written and to see the story spring to life anew at Hartford Stage.”

Hartford Stage Associate Artistic Director Jeremy B. Cohen, who will direct "Tom Sawyer" for the theatre next spring, says of the partnership, "All of us at Hartford Stage are thrilled to be partnering with Hartford Public Library and The Mark Twain House for this ambitious and exciting project. Laura Eason's magnificent new adaptation of Twain's classic novel will bring the book to life in vivid and breathtakingly theatrical ways for local students and longtime theatregoers. Many thanks to the NEA and all our local sponsors for their support of this eagerly anticipated community event."

20 Capitol region libraries will participate, each presenting a book discussion. They include: Andover Public Library, Avon Free Public Library, Berlin-Peck Memorial Library, Prosser Public Library, Wintonbury Branch Library, Bentley Memorial Library, Welles-Turner Memorial Library, Granby Public Library, Manchester Community College Library, Richmond Memorial Library, Mark Twain Library Association, Newington Public Library, South Windsor Public Library, Stafford Library, Kent Memorial Library, Town of Tolland Public Library, West Hartford Public Library, Wethersfield Public Library, Windsor Public Library, and Windsor Locks Public Library.

“The Big Read highlights not only literature, but also what can be accomplished in partnership,” said NEA Acting Chairman Patrice Walker Powell. “I’m grateful to IMLS, Arts Midwest, and the many many nonprofits, local governments, and media outlets around the country that have partnered with the NEA to present hundreds of Big Read projects nationwide. We welcome our new community partners to The Big Read family and look forward to continuing this transformative dialogue between neighbors and across borders.”

The latest Big Read grantees represent 44 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Since the 2006 pilot program with ten participating organizations, the NEA has given more than 800 grants to support local Big Read projects. The selected organizations will receive Big Read grants ranging from \$2,500 to \$20,000 to promote and carry out community-based reading programs featuring activities such as read-a-thons, book discussions, lectures, movie screenings, and performing arts events. Participating communities also receive high-quality, free-of-charge educational materials to supplement each title, including Reader’s, Teacher’s, and Audio Guides.

“The Institute is pleased to support The Big Read, which brings communities together to enjoy literature in their public libraries,” said Anne-Imelda M. Radice, Director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the NEA’s lead federal partner for The Big Read. “Libraries are community anchors that serve as centers of engagement, literacy, and lifelong learning. There is nothing better than to read a great book and share your delight and insights with others.”

The Big Read is an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts designed to restore reading to the center of American culture. The NEA presents The Big Read in partnership with the Institute of Museum and Library Services and in cooperation with Arts Midwest. Support for The Big Read is provided by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Transportation for The Big Read is provided by Ford.

For more information about The Big Read please visit www.neabigread.org.

*The **National Endowment for the Arts** is a public agency dedicated to supporting excellence in the arts—both new and established—bringing the arts to all Americans, and providing leadership in arts education. Established by Congress in 1965 as an independent agency of the federal government, the Arts Endowment is the nation’s largest annual funder of the arts, bringing great art to all 50 states, including rural areas, inner cities, and military bases. For more information, please visit www.arts.gov.*

*The **Institute of Museum and Library Services** is the primary source of federal support for the nation’s 122,000 libraries and 17,500 museums. The Institute’s mission is to create strong libraries and museums that connect people to information and ideas. The Institute works at the national level and in coordination with state and local organizations to sustain heritage, culture, and knowledge; enhance learning and innovation; and support professional development. For more information, please visit www.ims.gov.*

***Arts Midwest** connects people throughout the Midwest and the world to meaningful arts opportunities, sharing creativity, knowledge, and understanding across boundaries. Arts Midwest connects the arts to audiences throughout the nine-state region of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. One of six non-profit regional arts organizations in the United States, Arts Midwest’s history spans more than 25 years. For more information, please visit www.artsmidwest.org.*

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