



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Mary F. Crean, 860.695.6360, mcrean@hplct.org

Kim Reynolds, 860.838.4055, Kimberly.reynolds@wadsworthatheneum.org

Hartford Public Library and Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

Finalists for 2013 National Medal

HARTFORD, Conn., March 4, 2013 – The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) today announced Hartford Public Library and the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art as finalists for the National Medal for Museum and Library Service. The National Medal is the nation’s highest honor conferred on museums and libraries for service to the community. The award as finalist, given to only 33 institutions nationally, celebrates libraries and museums that make a difference for individuals, families and communities.

“Museums and libraries serve as community gathering places and centers for lifelong learning, and we are very proud to announce Hartford Public Library and the Wadsworth Atheneum as finalists for the 2013 National Medal,” said Susan Hildreth, director of the IMLS. “This year’s finalists exemplify the many wonderful ways museums and libraries can respond to the needs and wants of the communities they serve.”

The IMLS is the primary source of federal support for the nation’s 123,000 libraries and 17,500 museums.

“We are honored to be among the best libraries and museums in the nation,” said Matthew K. Poland, the Library's Chief Executive Officer. "Thanks to the staff, the board, and the amazing people of Hartford we have created this ‘place like no other’ – a 21st century center for learning and civic engagement.”

The importance of civic engagement and community service was echoed by Susan L. Talbott, Director & CEO of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, the library's neighbor on Main Street. "We are so proud and honored that the museum's ongoing Community Engagement Initiative (CEI) -- aimed at transforming our relationship with our visitors and surrounding communities - has been recognized in such a profound way by the Institute of Museum and Library Services," Talbott said. "Since the inception of CEI in 2008, the museum has implemented numerous new programs in response to community feedback and has collaborated with more than 70 new partners, such as area social service agencies, the Boys & Girls Club, and local artists."

"I congratulate the Hartford Public Library and the Wadsworth Atheneum for this well-deserved acknowledgement," said Mayor Pedro Segarra. "Both institutions have rich historical significance, they elevate our community by offering a space to learn, explore, and be challenged to think more broadly about the world in which we live. The library, one of the most critical public spaces for any city, also offers much needed services and training for our constituents. I'm glad that both are being honored for all the work they do to make art, culture, history, and inspiration accessible to everyone."

Finalist status for the 2013 National Medal is recognition of the Hartford Public Library's broad agenda of public outreach and community service, an agenda which includes not only traditional library services but such programs as The American Place, which provides language and citizenship classes for new immigrants as well as assistance finding jobs and integrating into a new world. The Hartford History Center, which is a vast collection of three centuries of Hartford-related materials held within a museum inside the library, is another of the programs unique to the library, as is CTWorks@HPL, a partnership that offers a host of services for job seekers. In the last seven months, more than 2,100 people have been assisted in their efforts to find employment.

"The miracles of art and literature are hard to appreciate if you can't read or don't have good reading skills, or are desperate for work. We offer help finding jobs and help in learning to read as well as the kinds of enrichment programs that add to every life," Poland said. "We want the library to be a place where people truly live and explore as well as learn. Free jazz concerts on Sunday afternoons, book talks, homework clubs, community conversations and ArtWalk, where visitors view changing exhibitions of art with local connections, are all part of our goal, which is to serve our citizens."

Finalist status for the Wadsworth Atheneum recognizes the substantial progress the museum has made in reorienting its mission to be more welcoming and accessible to its immediate communities. The museum's Community Engagement Initiative is aimed at transforming the institution, significantly expanding the audiences it serves and enhancing how the museum serves both its traditional audiences and new ones that represent the diversity of the Hartford region. CEI programming was developed in direct response to feedback from the community, gathered during a series of "ChatBacks," town-hall style discussions which provided information from a range of visitors about the museum's programs and exhibitions.

"In just the past year, we have presented a wide array of CEI programs, including gallery talks and lectures, Second Saturdays, and Community Days," Talbott said. "In the process we engaged not just our visitors, but storytellers, musical groups, dance troupes, community organizations, and scholars in both the greater Hartford community and beyond. Educational programming and tours accounted for 36 percent of the museum's annual attendance of nearly 100,000 visitors last year."

On February 15, the Institute of Museum and Library Services in Washington began collecting stories from community members who have visited the Hartford Public Library and/or the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art. IMLS is encouraging community members to share their experiences and feedback about how the Library and/or the Museum has made a difference in their lives. The way to share your story, which will be posted on the IMLS Facebook page, is to go to www.facebook.com/USIMLS.

Each day, one of the nation's 33 finalists will be showcased on the IMLS Facebook page; the Hartford Public Library will receive this special exposure on Monday, March 4. The Wadsworth Atheneum will be featured on March 29.

To learn more about the Institute of Museum and Library Services, please see www.imls.gov

About Hartford Public Library

The Hartford Public Library traces its roots to 1774. It operates 10 locations in the City of Hartford. The Library receives more than 865,000 visits per year. Services include access to a large collection of materials for reading and research, as well as music and video. Programs provide education, information and enrichment to the people of Hartford in such areas as citizenship training, literacy, business skills

and cultural awareness. The mission of Hartford Public Library is to provide free resources that inspire reading, guide learning, and encourage individual exploration. According to a recent editorial in *The Hartford Courant*, “Indeed, the Library has established itself as the center of the community in Hartford.” To learn more about the Library, please see www.hplct.org.

About the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

The Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art is America’s first public art museum, founded in 1842. The museum is located at 600 Main St., Hartford, Connecticut and is open Wednesdays to Fridays, 11 am – 5 pm, Saturdays and Sundays, 10 am – 5 pm, and the first Thursday of every month 11 am – 8 pm. Please visit www.wadsworthatheneum.org for more information.