

**National Endowment for the Arts Awards Grant to RaleighNow!  
Greater Raleigh's newest cultural entertainment endeavor  
picks up fourth foundation grant**

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**RALEIGH, N.C.** (December 16, 2003) - RaleighNow!, a unique cooperative marketing endeavor involving more than 30 Wake County cultural and heritage organizations, has been awarded a \$10,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. It earlier received a \$10,000 grant from the A.J. Fletcher Foundation, a \$5,000 grant from the American Express Foundation and a \$5,000 grant from the North Carolina Arts Council.

RaleighNow! is one of 86 recipients nationwide (four others in North Carolina) from organizations representing 39 states and the District of Columbia to receive a Challenge America: Access to the Arts Fast Track Review grant for projects that use the arts to address key community concerns. Most projects represent a partnership between a nonprofit arts organization and other community organizations including schools, convention and visitors' bureaus, economic development agencies, or libraries.

Arts Endowment Chairman Dana Gioia said, "These Challenge America Fast Track grants support communities across the nation in their efforts to cultivate local artistic resources and to provide greater access to the arts for both residents and visitors. Our investment in these communities is an investment in their cultural foundation."

Earlier this year, RaleighNow! was awarded grants from the A.J. Fletcher Foundation, American Express Foundation and North Carolina Arts Council.

"Being on both the presenter side and foundation side in Raleigh for almost 25 years, I have long seen a need for this type resource," said Tom McGuire, executive director of the A.J. Fletcher Foundation who previously served as executive director of the North Carolina Symphony from 1980-84. "Having a real-time forum for organizations to provide new and updated event information is a real asset for the presenters and a tremendous benefit for the consumers, whether they are residents

or visitors."

"American Express was glad to have the opportunity to support a program that encompassed such a diverse collection of cultural entities in one promotion," said Gene Pitzer, a member of the American Express Foundation committee that awarded a \$5,000 grant to tout the many educational aspects of the First Flight celebration. "It was a rare opportunity for a company like American Express to work with so many cultural groups under one umbrella."

"Arts organizations devote so much time developing their own programming that often they aren't able to give the same effort to marketing," said Maryanne Friend, director of marketing and cultural tourism for the North Carolina Arts Council. "RaleighNow! is a great complement to their existing promotions by reaching a much broader audience. As residents and visitors look for authentic experiences, RaleighNow! helps people connect with those opportunities by representing the full spectrum of culture within Wake County."

RaleighNow! is made possible through the generosity of private sector and media partners which support the contributions of Wake County's cultural and heritage organizations toward the area's economic vitality and quality of life. To date, RaleighNow! received approximately \$100,000 in financial commitments from participants, the private sector and grants/foundations to develop and launch RaleighNow! and more than \$250,000 in media trade support.

Those partners are the A.J. Fletcher Foundation, American Express Company, Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina, Capitol Broadcasting Company, Citysearch, Clear Channel Communications, Merrill Lynch, Metro Magazine, National Endowment for the Arts, The News & Observer, North Carolina Arts Council, Our State Magazine, Progress Energy, Sprint, Raleigh Arts Commission, Triangle Business Journal, United Arts Council of Raleigh/Wake County and WakeMed Healthcare.

#### ABOUT RALEIGHNOW!

More than 30 of Wake County's cultural and heritage organizations joined a new cooperative marketing endeavor (RaleighNow!) to build an identity of North Carolina's Capital City area and offer special deals

to support a reach within and beyond the state.

Designed to attract new audiences beyond local attendees and members and build crossover participation, RaleighNow! is the all-in-one, anytime resource for everything cultural -- museums, historic sites and artistic performances. All the schedules, performances, exhibits, special offers and last-minute deals are found on an easy-to-use website calendar and event hotline.

The RaleighNow! resource is unique to this area due to the experiential nature of the web site, availability of a database-driven event hotline and consumer access to both special offers and last-minute deals. Foremost, it will benefit the organizations and partners via branding messages, special offers, philanthropic perspectives and educational endeavors.

RaleighNow! launched in June 2003 with a website ([www.RaleighNow.com](http://www.RaleighNow.com)) and Sprint event hotline (919-645-4400) being a resource for residents and visitors alike. AAA Raleigh (800-921-2621, press 1) serves a concierge role by booking room reservations, selling tickets and providing ticket information.

In the first six months since its launch, the web site has generated more than 45,000 user sessions and 161,000 page views helping to satisfy the main goals of increasing attendance through new audience development and crossover participation. More than 725 individual have opted in to receive an electronic newsletter containing event information, special offers and last-minute deals.

At this juncture, the primary stakeholders are the Greater Raleigh Convention and Visitors Bureau (which administers this initiative), United Arts Council of Raleigh and Wake County, Raleigh Arts Commission, participating organizations from the historic sites, museums and performing arts and community support from the private sector, foundations and media.