



NEBRASKA HUMANITIES COUNCIL

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N E W S R E L E A S E

For release: Aug. 24, 2007

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Council receives NEH grant for Depression-era Chautauqua

The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) has awarded the Nebraska Humanities Council (NHC) a \$179,010 grant with an additional federal match of \$105,000 to support a new Chautauqua program that will tour 12 communities in Nebraska and Kansas from 2008 through 2010. The grant award was one of two special projects funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities as part of its “We The People” initiative.

The “Bright Dreams, Hard Times: American in the Thirties” Chautauqua will explore critical changes in cultural and political life in the 1930s through the lives of five historical figures: President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Louisiana Gov. Huey Long, Pentecostal leader Aimee Semple McPherson, Harlem Renaissance writer and folklorist Zora Neale Hurston, and humorist Will Rogers.

Each community selected to host the “Bright Dreams, Hard Times” Chautauqua will offer nearly a week’s worth of educational programming, including four evening presentations in the large Chautauqua tent by scholars portraying the historical figures; workshops for adults and children offered by the Chautauqua scholars on topics related to the theme of America in the 1930s; a documentary project for high school students reminiscent of the WPA photographic work of the ’30s; a Youth Chautauqua Camp for middle-school students to recover their local history; and an accompanying exhibition on the Dust Bowl. The grant also will support reading and discussion programs and a 1930s film series for each community before the arrival of Chautauqua next June.

According to Jane Hood, executive director of the NHC, the familiar Chautauqua format will be updated for audiences from Nebraska and around the world thanks to web technology. In addition to providing daily schedules, the Chautauqua web site will engage viewers through humanities essays, photographs, discussions with the scholars, and research that is done locally in each community, such as the documentary photographs produced by high school students.

“The Nebraska Humanities Council has been producing Chautauqua in our state for nearly a quarter-century,” said Hood. “I think this is going to be the most exciting one we have ever done. We are thrilled that the National Endowment for the Humanities has funded it for three years.”

If your community is interested in hosting the 2008 Chautauqua, contact NHC Program Officer Mary Yager at (402) 474-2131 ext. 103 or at mary@nebraskahumanities.org for an application. Applications are due Oct. 1.

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