



CASA ROMANTICA
CULTURAL CENTER AND GARDENS

**NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS ANNOUNCES
ORANGE COUNTY AND SAN CLEMENTE ONE OF 127 COMMUNITIES
NATIONWIDE TO RECEIVE A BIG READ GRANT FOR FIRST HALF OF 2008**

*San Clemente to read and celebrate **To Kill a Mockingbird**
during Big Read program*

February 3, 2008 —Washington, DC—The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) continues its drive toward making the Big Read the largest federal reading program in U.S. history. The NEA announced that Casa Romantica Cultural Center and Gardens in partnership with the Orange County Public Library System are two of 127 cultural arts organizations, libraries, municipalities, institutions of higher education, and science organizations to receive a grant to host a Big Read celebration of one of 16 classic novels from January-June 2008. The NEA launched the Big Read nationally in 2007 in partnership with the Institute of Museum and Library Services and in cooperation with Arts Midwest.

The latest Big Read grantees represent 38 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The NEA inaugurated the Big Read as a pilot project with ten communities in 2006. By 2009, approximately 400 communities in the U.S. will have hosted a Big Read since the program's launch.

The Big Read is an NEA program designed to revitalize the role of literary reading in American popular culture. *Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America*, a 2004 NEA report, identified a critical decline in reading for pleasure among Americans. The Big Read is designed to encourage reading for pleasure and enlightenment.

The Orange County/San Clemente Big Read Program will have its kickoff on March 5, 4 p.m. at Casa Romantica Cultural Center and Gardens. At the heart of the program is the plan to have the entire community read the same book at the same time. The chosen book for Orange County is To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee. A key component of the program is a series of book discussion groups planned throughout Orange County's various communities. Screenings of the movie will also be offered in various locations. The program will continue through April 10. Local partners include the San Clemente Library, San Clemente Times, San Juan Dispatch, Camp Pendleton Marine Base and Moulton Elementary School. The Big Read for military communities is made possible by The Boeing Company.

“The Big Read is a chance for our community to explore themes of family, tolerance, injustice, youth, neighborhood and race, together,” said Jan McKay, Casa Romantica's Executive Director. “By reading and sharing this book, we can have a much greater impact in support of literacy countywide. This program joins the myriad of programs here at the Casa that encourages literary

arts alongside fine art, history, ecology and cultural offerings. We are thrilled to be working with the library system on this project.”

“In just two years, the Big Read has grown from ten communities to include nearly 200 towns and cities nationwide. Although each of these communities celebrates its Big Read program in its own way, one theme we consistently hear back is that the Big Read is not just bringing citizens back to the joy of reading, but also reinvigorating the very idea of community,” said NEA Chairman Dana Gioia. “I am delighted to announce the newest round of Big Read communities in this program, which is about so much more than reading.”

The organizations selected to participate in the Big Read for the first half of 2008 will receive grants ranging from \$2,500 to \$20,000 to promote and carry out community-based programs. Participating cities and towns also receive reader’s guides and teacher’s guides for each novel, audio guides that also can be used as radio programming, publicity materials, an online organizer’s guide for running a successful Big Read program, and access to a comprehensive Big Read Web site. Each local program will include events, such as read-a-thons, book discussions, film screenings, and library and museum exhibits, aimed at avid and lapsed or reluctant readers alike.

"The Big Read is reaching across state and international borders," said Dr. Anne-Imelda Radice, Director of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the NEA's lead federal partner for the Big Read. "As director of the IMLS, the federal agency that funds libraries and museums, I am pleased to support this initiative that is creating a new generation of readers. The sky is truly the limit with this partnership."

For more information on the Big Read, including program FAQs, the complete list of Big Read novels, and application deadlines, please visit www.neabigread.org.

A listing of all the Big Read grants awarded for programming in January-June 2008 is also available at www.neabigread.org. A Master Calendar of events for Orange County will be listed there and programs specific to San Clemente will also be available on the Casa Romantica web site: www.casaromantica.org.

“We hope everyone will get ready to read the book and join in on the discussion groups,” said McKay. “Find your copy of the book and get ready to be a part of it all.”

Casa Romantica Cultural Center and Gardens is a non-profit organization based in San Clemente, CA. Built in 1928 by San Clemente city founder Ole Hanson, Casa Romantica was purchased by the city in 1989 and listed on the Registry of Historic Places in 1991. The Casa is dedicated to preserving California's rich history and traditions while serving as a cultural and educational resource for the broader community and for visitors to Orange County. Casa Romantica offers programs that feed the soul and inspire young and old alike. The facility is open year-round.

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.*

Casa Romantica Cultural Center and Gardens
415 Avenida Granada, San Clemente, CA 92672
Tel 949.498.2139 Fax 949.498.2192 www.casaromantica.org

###