

# Focus on the Humanities August 2015



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## Director's Message: The Power of Telling



As the crowd leapt to its feet to give a standing ovation, I felt a tremendous sense of relief. Over a year ago, I had the idea to bring "The Telling Project" to Mississippi. As part of the "Standing Together Initiative," each state humanities council was given money from the National Endowment for the Humanities to support programs related to military veterans. After lots of discussion, we decided that "Telling" would be the best way to serve the goals of Standing Together. The Telling Project comes into a community, interviews a group of veterans, turns those oral histories into a script, and then the veterans themselves work with a professional director and perform their own stories from the stage.

I spent the last year talking to lots of people about the project, using phrases that over time became clichés: a transformative experience for the cast; a moving experience for the audience. All the while, I hoped that this would be the case, but part of me worried about whether the show would live up to these high expectations. None of the five "actors" in the production had ever been on stage before. Would they be willing to share such personal stories with total strangers? But this past weekend at New Stage Theatre in Jackson, the shows were everything we had hoped for, and more. Everyone I spoke with after the performances commented how moving and important the stories were.

One former head of a major statewide cultural organization told me it was the most powerful piece of theater she had ever seen.

These performances exemplified the power of stories and of telling. What we heard sitting in the theater were honest, unfiltered accounts of what it's like to fight a war and what soldiers sacrifice in serving their country. In a democracy, we must understand the impact of war on the men and women we send to fight it. With an all-volunteer military, and a national media and general public easily distracted by the latest scandal or pseudo-event, it's too easy for many of us to look past the sacrifices of our soldiers and their families. It's too easy to make flippant statements like the sole purpose of the military is "kill people and break things" as one political candidate recently said. If we, as a society, are willing to listen to the stories of our veterans, we can make far more informed decisions about when to commit military force.

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As I left my chair, joining the crowd's standing ovation, I was in awe of the courage and strength of the performers: Troy Morgan, T.C. Rollins, Sonny Evans, Ken Oswald, and Peggy Gouras. Each of them gave their time, their commitment, and most importantly, the gift of their stories. Our partners at New Stage did an amazing job of creating a visually striking set, using projected photographic images that amplified the powerful moments of the show, and most especially, training the cast to give such moving performances. Max Rayneard of the Telling Project was able to elicit these deeply personal stories during the interviews and weave them into a compelling script that featured several "gut punching" moments, but still left the audience uplifted at the end.

Quite honestly, it is the best program the Mississippi Humanities Council has yet offered during my tenure, and it is one of the proudest moments of my professional career. The final three shows will be this weekend in Meridian – trust me, it's worth a drive to see them. They are free with no advance tickets required. If you can't make it, we plan to make a recording of the performance available online, and we will be partnering with the University of Southern Mississippi on an entirely new production of the Telling Project in November.

Our experience with the Telling Project shows how the humanities can be both simple and meaningful. Fundamentally, they are about telling and listening to stories about the human experience. With your help, the Humanities Council will continue to collect and share the diverse stories of Mississippians.

*Stuart Rockoff*  
*Executive Director*



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## Call for Humanities Teacher Award Nominations

Each of the state's colleges and universities are encouraged to nominate an outstanding humanities instructor to be honored by the MHC as Humanities Teacher of the Year. Each award recipient will receive an honorarium and will be honored at the MHC's annual awards ceremony in early 2016.

The Humanities Teachers Awards are chosen in conjunction with National Arts and Humanities Month, celebrated annually in October. Established in 1993, National Arts and Humanities Month seeks to create a national focus on the arts and humanities, as well as to encourage wider interest and participation in both fields. Through the Humanities Teachers Awards, the MHC seeks to adhere to the goals of National Arts and Humanities Month by promoting the continued knowledge of the humanities and celebrating the teachers who help to spread this knowledge in the classroom.



Only the president or academic dean may make the selection and teachers cannot be awarded more than once in any five-year period. As part of the award, each teacher must agree to give a lecture on research associated with a humanities subject in October or November 2015. These lectures will be free and open to the public. For more information, please contact Caroline Gillespie at [cgillespie@mhc.state.ms.us](mailto:cgillespie@mhc.state.ms.us).

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## MHC Director Speaks to Stone County Economic Development Partnership

On July 28, MHC Executive Director Dr. Stuart Rockoff had the pleasure of addressing a lunchtime meeting of the Stone County Economic Development Partnership in Wiggins. Rockoff talked about the importance of the humanities, the work of the Council, and encouraged members to attend an MHC grant writing workshop in south Mississippi later in the week. MHC board member Kathryn Lewis helped organize the event which drew a full house. After the talk, Stuart enjoyed a special guided tour of the area, focusing on the many wonderful murals of Stone County.



**MHC Director Stuart Rockoff with members of the Stone County Economic Development Partnership.**

As Stuart likes to say, "have PowerPoint, will travel." He would be happy to visit your community, free of charge, to talk about the power of the humanities and the exciting programs the MHC has to offer. Contact him at [srockoff@mhc.state.ms.us](mailto:srockoff@mhc.state.ms.us); 601-432-6752 if you would like for him to speak to your organization or civic club.

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## Family Literacy Project Receives Grant Awards

The MHC's Family Literacy Project, which works with literacy-challenged adults and their lower elementary children has recently received two grants. The first, from the Mississippi Arts Commission, will provide \$3300 to help pay for storytellers for its Prime Time Family Reading and Luciérnagas Family Reading programs throughout the state. The second grant, in the amount of \$1650, was awarded by The Community Foundation of Greater Jackson and will help pay for books to be given away to participants in programs in the Greater Jackson Area beginning with a program which will be hosted by Springboard to Opportunities at the Commonwealth Village apartments in northwest Jackson starting in mid-September. The Mississippi Humanities Council would like to extend a large expression of appreciation to these two organizations in helping support this important project.

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*of* GREATER JACKSON



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## Mississippi Moments Milestones

In recent weeks Mississippi Moments broadcast its 450th episode, 300 of which have been produced by current USM Oral History writer/sound engineer, Ross Walton. This project, an oral history-based radio program resulting from the cooperative efforts of the Mississippi Humanities Council, the University of Southern Mississippi's Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage, and Mississippi Public Broadcasting, airs daily on MPB radio at 12:30 pm. Beginning in August, and continuing through the next six weeks, the program will feature Hurricane Katrina related stories in recognition of the tenth anniversary of this Gulf Coast-wide natural disaster and the ensuing recovery. Since its inception in 2005, the Mississippi Moments program has received 87,466 hits on-line and reached several million MPB radio listeners.

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## Luciérnagas Family Reading Program Delights Young and Old in Tupelo



**Storyteller, discussion leader and program participants engage at a Luciérnagas session at St. James in Tupelo.**

The Luciérnagas Family Reading Program, a part of the MHC's Family Literacy Project, has now been traveling the state for 10 years. Fondly referred to as "Lucie," this bilingual Spanish/English program focusing on Hispanic parents and their lower elementary children, has now been held at locations from Pontotoc to Jackson to Hattiesburg. Participating parents and children alike are enthusiastic about the program and consistently inquire when it will be offered again in their community. A highly successful program has recently been completed at the St. James Catholic Church in Tupelo and one of our most productive programs, which has been held

at the M.R. Dye Public Library in Horn Lake for 5 consecutive years, will again be offered this fall. The maximum number of 24 families is already registered at this site with a waiting list growing!

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## Governor Appoints Retired Air National Guard Commander to MHC Board



Governor Bryant has appointed Major General Erik Hearon (ret.) to the Mississippi Humanities Council board. Major Hearon spent 40 years in the Mississippi Air National Guard, and retired as its commander in 2010. A decorated veteran, he has a distinguished military record, which can be seen [here](#). He served as assistant adjutant general of the Mississippi Air National Guard from 2006–2008 before becoming commander. As assistant adjutant general, he was responsible to the adjutant general for directing Air National Guard operations and establishing policy to ensure mission readiness. In addition to these leadership positions, Hearon also served as the assistant to the secretary of the Air Force for Manpower and Reserve Affairs.

Previous to his service in the National Guard, Hearon served in the Air Force in various capacities since his enlistment in the Mississippi Air National Guard in 1970. Upon completion of pilot training, he served as a pilot and instructor pilot at the 172nd Airlift Wing in Jackson, where he commanded a flying squadron and group. After the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, Hearon volunteered for three overseas tours, including missions in Iraq, Afghanistan, Qatar and Germany.

In addition to his military service, Hearon is a certified public accountant and practiced public accounting from 1970 until 1998. He is also involved in a number of community service organizations and projects, including the Rotary Club of Jackson, and is an executive committee member for the Trail of Honor and the Run for the Wall, both military recognition events in Jackson. He has a passion for history, and is currently working on a book about the family of Byron de la Beckwith and racial change in Mississippi.

Hearon is married to Marla Harbor. He has three children, Benjamin (16), Erika (34) and Meg (37), and three grandchildren. He lives in Ridgeland.

The Mississippi Humanities Council is governed by twenty-two Mississippians who serve four-year terms as volunteers. Five are appointed by the governor and the others elected by the Council.

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## MHC Awards Grant for 14th Annual Tennessee Williams Tribute in Columbus

The Mississippi Humanities Council has supported the annual Tennessee Williams Tribute in Columbus for several years, including a grant for two events at the 2015 festival: a Table Talk with Dr. Milly Barranger, dean emerita of the College of Fellows of the American Theatre, who will speak on “Three Behind-the-Scenes Women in the Career of Tennessee Williams” and a panel discussion featuring several Williams scholars addressing the topic “Couldn’t Have Done It Without You, Baby: A Look at the Women in Williams’ Live and Career.”



The Tennessee Williams Tribute will be headquartered in the little house at 300 Main Street, Columbus, where Thomas Lanier Williams (aka Tennessee Williams) and his sister Rose spent their early years. The home now serves as the city's Welcome Center. It holds unique Williams' treasures, including family photographs and original artifacts.

The Tribute, along with numerous related events, takes place September 6–13.

During the week-long celebration of the life and times of Tennessee Williams, winner of two Pulitzer Prizes, free seminars led by eminent Williams' scholars will focus on his many plays and films. The Tennessee Williams Scholar's Medallion will be awarded at an elegant luncheon on Friday. Thursday evening, the Moon Lake Party presents "Truman Talks Tennessee", by writer/actor Joel Vig who raises dinner theatre to new heights of hilarity and rollicking wit.

For theatre-goers, Williams' play "Suddenly Last Summer," a study of power and betrayal, performed with spine-chilling bravura by Broadway stars Brenda Currin and Beth Bartley with a regional cast directed by Augustin J. Correro, will be presented at multiple times throughout the Festival.

Friday's winner of the "Stella" Shouting Contest snags the coveted Stella Trophy, then dinner and a carriage ride to the theatre. On Saturday, the fourth annual 5K "Streetcar" Run offers more prizes. In St Paul's Episcopal Church, where the playwright was christened, the play is the theme of Sunday's sermon. Later Sunday, readings of his poetry include an excerpt from a newly-discovered short story by Tennessee Williams. Tours of gracious Victorian homes complete the festivities.

The Table Talk and Scholars' Panel, both supported by the Mississippi Humanities Council are free and open to the public. Admission is charged for other events.

For more information, visit [www.muw.edu/tennesseewilliams](http://www.muw.edu/tennesseewilliams) or call (662) 328-2787.

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## WINGS Performing Arts Presents *Remembrance* at the Kennedy Center

WINGS Performing Arts of the Lynn Meadows Discovery Center presented *Remembrance*, a musical play about World War I, August 6 at the Kennedy Center's Millennium stage in Washington, D.C. *Remembrance* was nominated to perform by the office of Senator Thad Cochran of Mississippi and with support from the Mississippi Humanities Council.

Dalessandro, chair of the World War I Centennial Commission, introduced the performance. He also met with the cast backstage. Video of the performance has been posted by the Kennedy Center [here](#).



Stage scene from *Remembrance*.

The original production, created and developed by WINGS Director Tonya Hays and WINGS high school students and alumni, toured schools and college campuses and was sponsored by the Mississippi

Humanities Council, the Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College Innovator's Award Grant and funding from the Junior Auxiliary of Gulfport. Twenty-five members of the WINGS high school ensemble, the Shooting Stars, along with family members traveled to Washington, DC. for the performance.

*Remembrance* was created in honor of the 100th anniversary of the Great War. The production features a woman in white singing a lament as she entreats the audience to join in the commemoration of those lost in World War I. A theatrical journey begins with the words from the men and women who lived this history. Based on the rich legacy of World War I poems, letters and music *Remembrance* honors the patriotism, sacrifice, desolation and aftermath of this tragic time. An ensemble cast of actors, dancers and musicians take on the roles of soldiers, sweethearts and musicians while functioning as troubadours with such songs as *Keep the Home Fires Burning*, *Over There* and *Always Remembered*.

*Remembrance* has taken the cast, crew and production team on a journey through a challenging time in history. The students performing and producing the show worked diligently through their research, design and committed performances to give voice to the men and women whose words and music they are honored to share with audiences. *Remembrance* swept half the major awards at the Mississippi Theatre Association. The show has toured and been performed for approximately 2,000 students, community members and veterans. The students have led workshops and talk backs for government and theatre classes.

WINGS Performing Arts program, now in its 16th year, nurtures the talent and spirit of young people through the arts, community service and leadership. WINGS has been awarded the Coming up Taller from the President's Council on the Arts and Humanities, the Mississippi Governor's Award for Excellence in Arts Education and the Mississippi Humanities Educator Award. More than 500 students from grades K-12 participate annually in this program. Ten productions throughout the year reach in excess of 40,000 audience members, including the traditionally underserved demographics of the young and the elderly. WINGS has performed across the country at the Tony Award winning Oregon Shakespeare Festival at the National WWII Museum's Canteen Theatre and in the Southeastern Theatre Conferences' Fringe Festival.

Ninety-eight percent of students completing the WINGS program go on to attend college. All receive scholarships and grant awards for their involvement and work in the program that prides itself on presenting innovative theatrical work such as *Remembrance*. The home of the WINGS program is Lynn Meadows Discovery Center, Mississippi's first children's museum which has been ranked as one of the Top 50 in the country.

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## **Next MHC Grant Deadline September 15, 2015**

September 15, 2015, is the next deadline for MHC regular proposals for amounts between \$2,000 and \$7,500. Application guidelines and forms are available on the MHC [website](#). Regular grant deadlines are May 1 and September 15 each year. Proposals must be emailed or delivered to the MHC offices by 5 p.m. on these dates. Programs and expenditures may not occur fewer than 10 weeks after the deadline date you selected. Please note that several updates have been made to the Mississippi Humanities Council Grant Guidelines and to the grant application forms. It is essential that applicants use current forms, available [here](#).

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## **MHC Welcomes Your Support**

Mississippi Humanities Council programs are engaging, inspiring and free of charge. Your gift makes a big difference to our mission of cultivating an understanding of our history and culture throughout the state.

You help us enrich peoples' lives through programs incorporating history, literature, music, politics, philosophy and other humanities-based disciplines that illuminate the human condition. Thanks to your support, we are able to serve all Mississippians: all ages, all geographic areas of the state, all walks of life.

**A small gift of \$25** will purchase two books for children participating in the Mississippi Humanities Council's [Family Literacy Project](#).

**A larger gift of \$250** will fund a lecture in a school classroom, local library or civic club, by a member of the Mississippi Humanities Council [Speakers Bureau](#).

**A \$2,500 contribution** will underwrite a six-week reading and discussion series in the Mississippi Humanities Council's [Family Literacy Project](#).

**A gift of any amount** can support any one of our ongoing programs:

- [Oral History Projects](#)
- [Smithsonian Exhibits](#)
- [Public Humanities Awards](#)

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