

News Release



For Immediate Release

STAKING ITS CLAIM TO NATIONAL PROMINENCE, PITTSBURGH'S AFRICAN AMERICAN CULTURAL CENTER ANNOUNCES A NEW NAME— THE AUGUST WILSON CENTER FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN CULTURE AND \$10 MILLION SUPPORT FROM THE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

PITTSBURGH, PA, February 17, 2006 – Four years after being incorporated, three years after the start of an ambitious building program, and two years after its first full season of performances and exhibitions, Pittsburgh's African American Cultural Center today announced that it is taking a new name: the *August Wilson Center for African American Culture*.

To help realize the Center, the office of Governor Edward G. Rendell announced yesterday that the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is committing \$5 million towards the Center's building, which is scheduled to break ground in spring 2006, with further funding to be made available after the initial sum is drawn down.

At a news conference held today at the Center's temporary Gallery in Downtown Pittsburgh, Democratic Senator Jay Costa announced of behalf of Senators Robert Mellow, Jim Ferlo, Sean Logan and Wayne Fontana, a \$1 million grant, adding to the governors commitment. Adding to the announcements, State Representative Jake Wheatley (District 19) announced a further grant of \$500,000, that he worked to secure with the assistance of House Minority Whip Mike Veon, Rep. Joseph Preston, and other Allegheny County members of the Democratic Caucus of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives.

With this extraordinary public support--which comes in addition to commitments of over \$7 million from the City of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County and \$8.5 to date from the

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foundation and corporate communities---and a distinguished new name, the August Wilson Center for African American Culture moves immediately into the realm of major institutions.

The name, which has been conferred with the blessing of the Estate of August Wilson, identifies the Center with a Pittsburgh native who rose to international fame as one of America's great playwrights. Over the span of a ten-play cycle, nine of them set in Pittsburgh, August Wilson (1945-2005) dramatized with unsurpassed imaginative power the pain, humor, and poetry of an entire century of African American experience, decade by decade. In adopting his name, the fast-developing Center pays tribute to an exemplary artist, while announcing its aspiration to become a comprehensive, national organization.

"We know this name gives us a lot to live up to, as does the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's magnificent support," said Neil A. Barclay, President and CEO of the Center. "But we have already shown what we can achieve, even before completing our new home, and we recognize the perfect fit between our mission and August Wilson's life, art and all that he inspired. We intend to honor his name, as we are honored by it."

Although unable to attend the news conference in person, representatives from the Estate of August Wilson sent a message, which was shared at the press conference by Board Member Sala Udin. "The Estate of August Wilson is honored that the Center has chosen to change its name to the August Wilson Center for African American Culture. We know that this recognition, in his home town of Pittsburgh, would have meant so very much to him. We thank the Center for this lasting tribute to both the man and the artist." Barclay noted, "We are deeply grateful to August's estate, and especially to his wife, Constanza Romero."

Governor Edward G. Rendell said, "Pennsylvania has long been a leader in the arts, and in sparking economic and civic development through cultural initiatives. We are proud to support the August Wilson Center for African American Culture, which now takes its place in the forefront of our state's great institutions of art, history, and heritage."

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According to Pittsburgh Mayor Bob O'Connor, "The African American Cultural Center already enriches the people of Greater Pittsburgh. Once it opens in 2007, The August Wilson Center for African American Culture will take its place as a premier destination for people everywhere."

Incorporated in 2002, the August Wilson Center for African American Culture is a not-for-profit organization that presents performing arts, visual arts, and education programs celebrating the contributions of African Americans within the Pittsburgh region and the impact of cultural expressions from Africa to the African Diaspora. During the winter-spring 2006 season, the Center is presenting two visual arts exhibitions (of hand-painted movie posters by artists in Ghana, and of images of children and youth by legendary *Pittsburgh Courier* photographer Charles "Teenie" Harris); performances by singer CeCe Winans, the spoken-word group Universes, and the contemporary music ensemble Imani Winds; and a special evening with filmmaker Spike Lee.

Other recent presentations have included dance concerts by Ronald K. Brown/Evidence, Philadanco, Alonzo King's Lines Ballet, Ralph Lemon, and Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater; a solo theater performance by poet and musician Sekou Sundiata; the exhibition *Women of a New Tribe*, showcasing photographs by Jerry Taliaferro; and *Generations*, an exhibition of six Pittsburgh-based African American artists.

The Center is scheduled to break ground in spring 2006 for its new 80,000 square foot facility designed by architect Allison G. Williams, FAIA, principal of the San Francisco-based firm Perkins+Will. Built in the heart of Downtown Pittsburgh on Liberty Avenue, between the David L. Lawrence Convention Center and the Pittsburgh Cultural District, the \$35.9 million facility will feature a 500-seat theater with fly loft and orchestra pit; a flexible 200-seat performance space; a 4,000 square foot permanent exhibition gallery, dedicated to the African American cultural history of Western Pennsylvania; a 4,000 square foot gallery for changing art exhibitions; a music café with 1,500 square foot seating area, offering both performances

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and food of the African Diaspora; activity spaces for families, schoolchildren, and adults, under the auspices of the Center’s outreach and education department; and a large gift store and cyber café with direct street access.

“With its spectacular, triangular site in the heart of Downtown Pittsburgh, the Center gives us the opportunity to create a civic building that is distinctly African American in character and welcoming in its outlook,” according to Allison G. Williams. “The design is meant to be transparent and accessible, drawing energy from the street and revealing to everyone the life within. The most notable feature on the outside—a bow-shaped structure of metal and glass, rising on the strategic corner of Liberty and 10th—gives a sense of movement to the building, an expression of the dynamic culture within bursting with pride.”

The August Wilson Center for African American Culture demonstrates how culture, in its broadest sense, can be the most powerful factor contributing to our ability to understand ourselves, while building a path toward global understanding and peace in a troubled world. From this core of understanding, the Center’s patrons gain new appreciation for the remarkable African Americans who were born and nurtured in the Pittsburgh region, as well as the shared experiences of communities and cultures of all races, creeds, and national origins worldwide. On these principles, the dedicated founders, supporters, and audiences of the Center are building a welcoming yet provocative destination for all people.

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