



NEWS AND INFORMATION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Jefferson County, Alabama to be Honored with the 2005 National Award for County Arts Leadership

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Americans for the Arts, in conjunction with the National Association of Counties (NACo), will present the 2005 National Award for County Arts Leadership to the Jefferson County Commission of Birmingham, AL. The award will be officially presented to the commission during the annual NACo meeting in Honolulu, HI, on Monday, July 18, 2005. This is the first time that a county in the state of Alabama has received such an award.

The National Award for County Arts Leadership is part of a series of Public Leadership in the Arts Awards given annually by Americans for the Arts. The award honors an elected county board or individual leader who has significantly advanced the arts in the communities they serve. The Jefferson County Commission was chosen due to its endorsement and support of a countywide cultural master plan, and for increasing its financial contribution to the arts by more than \$3 million annually.

Robert L. Lynch, president and CEO for Americans for the Arts, stated, "The work of the Jefferson County Commission on behalf of the arts has helped make Jefferson County a national leader in promoting strong arts and cultural programs. The commission is exhibiting visionary leadership in the state of Alabama by dramatically increasing funds to the arts and cultural sector while funds on the state level are declining."

In 2002, the Jefferson County Commission appropriated funds to partially underwrite the development of a Cultural Master Plan for the Greater Birmingham Region. The Jefferson County Commission ultimately endorsed the findings of the Cultural Master Plan, and based upon that plan's recommendations, voted to increase its annual contributions to the arts and cultural sector from \$1.4 million to \$5 million. The Commission designated the Cultural Alliance of Greater Birmingham as its regranting agency, establishing a transparent, open,

highly accountable, and nonpoliticized granting process that includes participation by area residents.

The Jefferson County Commission is, by example and consultation, leading the way for Alabama's remaining eleven counties and numerous municipalities to provide support for arts and cultural activities. The Jefferson County Commission's appropriation is the largest source of funds for arts and culture in the state, appropriating 60 percent more than the state legislature during the same period.

Americans for the Arts established the National Award for County Arts Leadership in 1999 to recognize the positive role county government leaders play in improving arts programs, increasing funding to the arts, and making the arts accessible in their communities. Past recipients include the Broward County Board of Commissioners of Broward County, FL; Douglas M. Duncan, County Executive in Montgomery County, MD; the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors; County Commissioner Park Helms of Mecklenburg County, NC; and County Commissioner Betty Lou Ward of Wake County, NC.

Americans for the Arts is the leading nonprofit organization for advancing the arts and arts education in America. With offices in Washington, D.C. and New York City, it has a record of more than 50 years of service. Americans for the Arts is dedicated to representing and serving local communities and creating opportunities for every American to participate in and appreciate all forms of the arts. Additional information is available at www.AmericansForTheArts.org.

NACo, the only national organization that represents county governments in the United States, continues to follow the traditions established by those early county officials. With its headquarters on Capitol Hill, NACo is a full-service organization that provides an extensive line of services including legislative, research, technical, and public affairs assistance, as well as enterprise services to its members. The association acts as a liaison with other levels of government, works to improve public understanding of counties, serves as a national advocate for counties, and provides them with resources to help them find innovative methods to meet the challenges they face. NACo is involved in a number of special projects that deal with such issues as the environment, sustainable communities, volunteerism and intergenerational studies. Additional information is available at www.naco.org.

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