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**ARTS LUMINARIES AND YEAR OF ALABAMA MUSIC TO BE SPOTLIGHTED AT
“CELEBRATION OF THE ARTS AWARDS” ON TUESDAY MAY 17**

Montgomery, Ala. - The Alabama State Council on the Arts will honor eight outstanding Alabamians at the 2011 "Celebration of the Arts" awards ceremony on Tuesday, May 17, 2011 at 7:30 p.m. The event will take place at the Alabama Shakespeare Festival (ASF), 1 Festival Drive, Montgomery, Alabama.

The Council's "Celebration of the Arts" honors Alabama artists and special individuals for their contributions to the arts in Alabama and beyond. Al Head, Executive Director of the Council stated, "This awards program is an opportunity for the state of Alabama to recognize and thank some exceptional individuals who have realized significant accomplishments personally and have made our state a better place to live through their work." Specially tailored performances will salute each honoree's career and body of work. The evening's format is a combination of video tributes, award presentations and performances with a reception following to allow guests to congratulate the recipients.

This year's recipients include artists, community arts leaders, arts educators and a former First Lady. Their contribution over a sustained period has greatly enhanced the cultural landscape in Alabama. They are:

Joe McInnes, *Montgomery* – The Jonnie Dee Little Lifetime Achievement Award

Rebecca Luker, *Birmingham/New York* – Alabama's Distinguished Artist Award

Dale Kennington, *Dothan* – Governor's Arts Award

Dr. Henry Panion, III, *Birmingham* – Governor's Arts Award

Sena Jeter Naslund, *Birmingham/Louisville* – Governor's Arts Award

Joyce Cauthen, *Birmingham* – Governor's Arts Award

James Bryan, *Mentone* – The Alabama Folk Heritage Award

Former First Lady Patsy Riley, *Montgomery/Ashland* – Special Council Award

The Jonnie Dee Little Lifetime Achievement Award recognizes someone who has devoted a lifetime of energy, service, and contributions to the arts in Alabama and is named after a past Council member from Auburn who died in 1988 after serving with great distinction on the Council and a lifetime of supporting the arts in Alabama. This year's recipient is **Joe McInnes**, the past vice-president and CEO of Blount International Inc., past president of the Blount Foundation and the immediate past director of the Alabama Department of Transportation. As president and director of the Blount Foundation, Mr. McInnes was instrumental in the development of the Montgomery-based Alabama Shakespeare Festival. McInnes directed foundational funding to many arts organizations and arts projects throughout the state. An example of his past state and community involvement includes president of the Montgomery United Way, president of the Tuckabatchee Area Council Boy Scouts, chairman of the Alabama State Council on the Arts, board director of the Alabama Humanities Foundation and trustee of the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts. In 2003, he accepted an appointment from Governor Riley as director of the Alabama Department of Transportation after having retired from Blount International Inc. with 30 years of senior management service.

The Distinguished Artist Award honors a professional artist who is a native of Alabama and who has gained significant national recognition over an extended period. This year's recipient is **Rebecca Luker** a native of Birmingham who now resides in New York City. Luker was most recently active on Broadway in Disney's *Mary Poppins* in the role of Mrs. Banks. Rebecca received a Tony Award nomination and Outer Critics Circle Award nomination for Best Featured Actress. Other Broadway productions include *Nine* playing the role of Claudia opposite Antonio Banderas. For her portrayal of Marian Paroo in the revival of *The Music Man*, Rebecca received a Tony Award nomination, Outer Critics Circle Award nomination, and a Drama Desk Award nomination. Rebecca has also starred as Maria Rainer in the revival of *The Sound of Music* (Outer Critics Circle Award nomination). She performed the roles of Magnolia in *Show Boat* (Tony Award nomination), Lily in *The Secret Garden* (Drama Desk Award nomination), and Christine in *The Phantom of the Opera*.

In addition to her work in theatre, Luker has a successful vocal career with several critically acclaimed CDs. She has appeared with many symphony orchestras including the Alabama, American, Baltimore, New Jersey and St. Louis Symphonies and the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra. Ms. Luker received a Bachelor's of Music degree from the University of Montevallo in Alabama.

TV credits include a Hallmark Hall of Fame movie *Cupid and Cate*, *Law and Order SVU - Poison*, *The Good Wife - Taking Control* and several PBS broadcasts including *The Boston Pops Concerts*, *My Favorite Broadway - The Leading Ladies* and *The Love Songs*, *The Rogers and Hart Story*, and *Some Enchanted Evening* to name a few.

The Governor's Arts Award honors individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the arts in their respective communities and the state of Alabama. Four awards will be given this year:

Dale Kennington, Dothan – Governor's Arts Award

Dr. Henry Panion, III, Birmingham – Governor's Arts Award

Sena Jeter Naslund, Birmingham/Louisville – Governor's Arts Award

Joyce Cauthen, Birmingham – Governor's Arts Award

Dale Kennington, currently residing in Dothan, creates large paintings with oil on canvas. These pieces capture scenes of everyday life. Born in Savannah, Georgia and living all but the first six months of her life in Alabama, Kennington received a BA degree in art history and design in 1956 from the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa.

In the early 1970s, Kennington began painting portraits of children in Dothan, continuing for about 15 years. Her work moved from portraiture to narrative canvases, which she has designated as "contemporary realism." These works begin with what she calls a "rapid-fire sketchbook," dozens of camera shots of certain scenes. The images are combined to create a picture from her imagination, a fictional story. These pieces include canvases of street scenes and barbershops; people at swim meets, waiting in line, playing pool, and conversing in restaurants. Kennington became a master Southern storyteller with her paintings, although actually allowing the viewer to create the stories from the images she has placed on canvas.

Kennington's goal, "to produce better work this year than I did the year before," and her study of Asian standing screens led to a monumental series of work beginning in 2002. She painted two separate series of double-sided, free standing wood screens. The halves of each monumental screen capture complementary, deeply layered approaches to a single idea, often dealing with themes of movement and departure.

Kennington's paintings are included in more than twenty-five public collections throughout the United States, including The Federal Reserve; American Committee for UNICEF, New York, NY; Cheekwood Museum of Art, Nashville, TN; and every art museum in Alabama. Internationally her work is in the collection of King Carl Gustav XVI of Sweden and the United States Embassy, Paris, France. She was one of twelve artists selected for the exhibition *Voices Rising: Alabama Women at the Millennium*, presented at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington D.C. She is listed in *Who's Who in American Art* and is part of the "Art In Embassies" program of the U. S. Department of State.

Dr. Henry Panion, III of Birmingham holds degrees in music education and music theory from Alabama A & M University and Ohio State University, respectively. He is best known for his work as conductor and arranger for superstar Stevie Wonder. Dr. Panion has led many of the world's most notable orchestras, including the Royal Philharmonic, the Bolshoi Theater Orchestra, the Birmingham (England) Symphony, the Orchestra of Paris, the Melbourne (Australia) Symphony, the Rio de Janeiro Philharmonic, the Ra'anana Philharmonic, the Nice Symphony, the Gothenburg Symphony, and the Boston Pops Orchestra. The two-CD set *Natural Wonder* features Dr. Panion conducting his arrangements of many of Stevie Wonder's award-winning, chart-topping songs with Stevie and the Tokyo Philharmonic.

As a producer, composer, arranger, and orchestrator, Dr. Panion's work has produced two Grammy Awards, two Dove Awards, and a host of other national music awards and nominations. From 1994 to 2000, Dr. Panion served as chair of the Department of Music at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Other honors include a 1995 Distinguished Alumni Award from Alabama A & M University and a 1996 Distinguished Alumni of the Year Award from the Ohio State University. He is the 1996 recipient of the Caroline P. and Charles W. Ireland Award for Scholarly Distinction and the 2009 recipient of the Congressional Black Caucus' Civic and Cultural Advancement Award. Dr. Panion was inducted into the Alabama Jazz Hall of Fame in 1995, as well as the Alabama A & M University Hall of Fame in 2000. The University of Alabama System Board of Trustees has honored Dr. Panion for his many contributions to the field of music by bestowing upon him the distinguished appointment of University Professor. In 2009, Dr. Panion was appointed to the post of Cultural Ambassador for the City of Birmingham, Alabama.

Dr. Panion's current project is being the creative force behind *Gospel Goes Classical* featuring Juanita Bynum, Jonathan Butler, and the GGC Symphony Orchestra and Choir. He made history topping the Billboard charts on both the Gospel and Classical Crossover Charts simultaneously. Other artists for whom Dr. Panion has had the opportunity to conduct and/or arrange include The Winans, Chet Atkins, Eugenia Zuckerman, Aretha Franklin, The Blind Boys of Alabama, Chaka Khan, the Lionel Hampton Orchestra, and American Idol winners Carrie Underwood and Ruben Studdard.

Sena Jeter Naslund was born in Birmingham. Her mother taught music and her father was a doctor. In high school she played cello with the Alabama Pops Orchestra. She won a music scholarship to the University of Alabama but turned it down in favor of studying writing at Birmingham-Southern College. While she was there she attended the Breadloaf Writers' Conference - a two-week series of lectures, workshops and classes. Since 1926, the conference has been held annually at the Breadloaf Inn, Middlebury, Vermont and claims to be the oldest writers' conference in the USA.

After graduating from Birmingham-Southern, she was accepted at the Iowa Writers' Workshop at the University of Iowa where she received her MA and PhD degrees in creative writing. In 1971 she was hired as a Visiting Professor in the MFA program at the University of Montana. The following year, she accepted a teaching position at the University of Louisville in Kentucky, where she directed the creative writing program and was awarded the university's first Distinguished Teaching Professor honor.

Naslund is currently “Writer in Residence” at the University of Louisville and director of the Spalding University MFA Writing Program. She is also the Poet Laureate for Kentucky. Naslund is the founder and editor of *The Louisville Review* and the Fleur-de-Lis Press. Some of her many published novels include: *Sherlock in Love* (1993), *The Animal Way to Love* (1993), *Ahab's Wife* (1999), *Four Spirits* (2003), *Abundance* (2006), *Adam and Eve* (2010); and two collections of stories: *Ice Skating at the North Pole* (1989) and *The Disobedience of Water* (1997). Naslund’s fiction has been published in many journals including *The Paris Review*, *The Georgia Review*, *The Iowa Review*, *The Michigan Quarterly Review* (where she won the Lawrence Prize in fiction), *The Indiana Review*, and *The Alaska Quarterly Review*. She has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Kentucky Foundation for Women, and the Kentucky Arts Council, and has won the Harper Lee Award and the Southeastern Library Association Fiction Award.

Joyce Cauthen of Birmingham is the former executive director of the Alabama Folklife Association, a statewide organization that sponsors research, promotion and preservation of Alabama's folk culture. She is the author of *With Fiddle and Well-Rosined Bow: Old-Time Fiddling in Alabama*, published in 1989 by the University of Alabama Press, and has served as the producer of numerous recordings of traditional music of Alabama, including *Possum Up a Gum Stump: Home and Commercial and Field Recordings of Alabama Fiddlers*. She served as editor of *Benjamin Lloyd's Hymnbook: A Primitive Baptist Song Tradition* and produced its accompanying CD. Cauthen’s last project was a CD and booklet entitled *Bullfrog Jumped*, which features recordings made across Alabama of children's folksongs and games in the 40s. She is a graduate of Texas Christian University and has a master's degree in English from Purdue University.

Cauthen has worked with the Alabama Folklife Association, the Alabama State Council on the Arts, the Birmingham Cultural and Heritage Foundation, and other organizations celebrating and preserving the old-time musical traditions of the state.

The Folk Heritage Award was established to recognize master folk artists who have made outstanding contributions in the arts in Alabama. This year’s recipient is **James Bryan** of Mentone. Bryan has been a fiddler almost since birth. He won his first competition at 12, apprenticed with bluegrass master Kenny Baker, and took the title of Tennessee Valley Fiddle King at 17. Bryan eventually joined Norman Blake's Rising Fawn String Ensemble, where his mastery of the fiddle and repertoire of old-timey songs was honed. In the mid-1980s he recorded *Lookout Blues* and *The First of May* with Rounder Records, a decade later collaborating with guitarist Carl Jones in recording *Two Pictures*. Bryan now lives in Mentone and continues to make musical appearances.

Bryan, one of the 16 former fiddle kings who have reigned during 39 years of competition at the Tennessee Valley Old Time Fiddlers Convention (TVOTFC) have spread their musical influence worldwide. He has entertained in places as diverse as the Smithsonian Institute’s Bicentennial Celebration on The Mall in Washington, D.C., onstage at the Grand Ole Opry, and before a U.S. President. Bryan has recorded traditional fiddle tunes for posterity and mentored young fiddlers in their own music studios across the country.

The Special Council Legacy Award recognizes individuals who make unique contributions for the public arena that will have a lasting import on future generations in Alabama and beyond. This year’s recipient is **Former First Lady Patsy Riley** who spearheaded the project to have a statue commissioned and created for Statuary Hall in Washington DC of world-renowned Alabamian Helen Keller. The statue was unveiled October 7, 2009 has now been placed in the new Visitor Center in the United States Capitol. It was in Statuary Hall where the Riley’s conducting tours first had the idea of Helen Keller needing to be one of the

two individuals representing the State of Alabama in the Hall. Her husband Bob was serving as a US Representative at the time (1997-2003).

Mrs. Riley served as honorary chairperson of the “Helen Keller Campaign and Artists Selection Committee” with Dr. Joe Busta, Vice President for Development and Alumni Affairs at the University of South Alabama, and Elmer Harris, retired CEO of Alabama Power Company; serving as co-chairs of the committee. A selection committee made up of museum directors, Keller family and Tusculumbia community leaders reviewed proposals from more than 30 different artists before selecting Edward Hlavka to create the bronze statue. The committee worked with the Alabama State Council on the Arts, which coordinated the selection process. Mrs. Riley wanted Helen Keller, one of the world’s most recognized and honored Americans to not only represent Alabama in Statuary Hall but to be an inspiration to the millions of visitors to the Capitol. The Helen Keller sculpture is the first sculpture in the U.S. Capitol of an American with disabilities, and the first sculpture of a child.

The program of the evening will celebrate “The Year of Alabama Music” and performers for the event will begin with David Hood & the Decoys and Eddie Floyd.

David Hood & the Decoys are a rock n’ roll band, featuring five of the most seasoned musicians anywhere. David Hood, bass guitarist, was a member of the world famous Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section, better known as “The Swampers”, made famous in the song “Sweet Home Alabama.” David has played on a list of albums that reads like a who’s who of the music industry, such as Aretha Franklin, Bob Seger, Rod Stewart, The Staple Singers, Paul Simon, Traffic, and many more. David was recently inducted, along with the rest of “The Scampers,” into the Musicians Hall of Fame in Nashville, TN.

Eddie Floyd is a soul/R&B singer and songwriter, best known for his hit song “Knock on Wood” in 1967. The song was originally intended for Otis Redding, but Floyd recorded it and he and other R & B notables such as Wilson Pickett made it a hit. Floyd founded The Falcons, which were forerunners to future Detroit vocal groups such as The Temptations and The Four Tops. Eddie Floyd was born in Montgomery, but raised in Detroit, MI.

The Alabama State Council on the Arts is the official state arts agency of Alabama. The staff of the Council, directed by Al Head, administers the grants programs and provides technical assistance in arts planning and programming. The Council receives its support through an annual appropriation from the Alabama Legislature and funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency.

The Alabama State Council on the Arts promotes Alabama's diverse and rich artistic resources while highlighting excellence and education experiences. The “Celebration of the Arts Awards” event is FREE and open to the public, but TICKETS MUST BE RESERVED. Tickets are limited and are on a first come, first serve basis. For ticket reservations, please contact one of the following: ASF Box Office at 334-271-5353, or The Arts Council at 334-242-4076. For more information visit: www.arts.alabama.gov.

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Photos of award recipients are available upon request. Contact: Barbara Reed, Public Information Officer, 334-242-4076, ext. 223 or barbara.reed@arts.alabama.gov