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GAMM LITERACY PROGRAM GROWING WITH GREATER DEMAND Increased Financial and Community Support Put Pilot Program on Solid Footing

PAWTUCKET, RI (March 24, 2008) —**Tony Estrella**, artistic director for **The Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre** (The Gamm), is pleased to report **increasingly diversified financial support and growing community demand** for the non-profit organization's **Pawtucket Literacy and Arts for Youth (PLAY)** mid-way through the program's second fiscal year.

"The arts in public schools are too easily dismissed when budgets get tight. And, as we know, they are always tight," Estrella said. "I am very proud that The Gamm can help ensure a well-rounded education for our area public school students. It's part of our artistic mission to make the arts a fundamental part of the social and cultural conversation among people of all ages."

PLAY proved an unequivocal success during its pilot year, The Gamm's 2006-2007 Season, highlighting a growing demand for supplementary arts education in the city's high schools and middle schools. **The City of Pawtucket Planning and Redevelopment Department** helped launch the then-brand-new educational initiative through a federal **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)**. A growing number of federal and local government agencies, foundations and businesses have since followed suit, providing major support for **PLAY** during the current fiscal year. They include:

- **Carter Family Charitable Trust** (\$25,000)
- **National Endowment for the Arts, MetLife Foundation** (\$10,000 each)
- **Amica Companies Foundation** (\$7,500)
- **McAdams Charitable Foundation, June Rockwell Levy Foundation, Verizon Foundation** (\$5,000 each)
- **Ocean State Charities Trust** (\$4,500)
- **City of Pawtucket Planning and Redevelopment Department/Community Development Block Grant** (\$4,290)
- **Rhode Island Council for the Humanities** (\$4,200)
- **Rhode Island State Council on the Arts** (\$4,000)
- **Hassenfeld Foundation** (\$2,500)
- **Pawtucket Credit Union** (\$2,000)

PLAY includes in-school residencies, artist-teacher partnerships and after-school drama programs under the direction of **Gamm Education Director Steve Kidd**. The success of **PLAY** at **Tolman and Shea High Schools and Jacqueline M. Walsh School for the Performing and Visual Arts** during its pilot year has resulted in the recent participation of **Slater and Jencks Junior High Schools**. In all, **more than 400 students and 30 teachers have participated in PLAY this year.**

Other highlights include:

- From September through December, **PLAY** worked with students and teachers in English, history and acting classes at Tolman and Shea High Schools to bring curriculum "from the page to the stage." Over the course of more than 65 hours, **PLAY** led students in a variety of "literacy through performance" exercises based on a kinesthetic model of learning.
- **PLAY's** after-school **WORD!** (formerly "Playmakers") project comprising students from **Tolman High School** and **Jacqueline M. Walsh School for the Performing and Visual Arts** produced **Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet**. Students from the pair of schools, separated only by a parking lot, teamed up for seven weeks

under the direction of **J.M. Walsh Drama Teacher and Gamm Resident Actor Karen Carpenter**. Students participated in every aspect of the production, including acting, technical direction, marketing and box office sales. The project culminated in three public performances in December at Tolman, attended by over 300 students, teachers, family members and community supporters. **WORD!** was launched last year with a full production of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Plans for a Spring production are underway.

- Ongoing **student matinee performances supplemented by curriculum-based study guides** allowed **PLAY** participants and middle- and high-school students across the region to experience live professional theater **free of charge or at significantly reduced prices**. In all, **over 3,000 public- and private-school students have participated in The Gamm's educational programs over four seasons**.

About Education Director Steve Kidd

A Gamm resident artist, Kidd has acted and directed in L.A., Chicago, New York, Boston and London. Steve holds a Master's degree in Theater Studies from Brown University, and was a **member of Brown's acclaimed ArtsLit Program** operating in Rhode Island for more than ten years. **Steve will be honored as one of ten recipients of the National Child Labor Committee's prestigious Lewis Hine Award on March 31 in New York City**. The annual award goes to unheralded professionals and volunteers who devote extraordinary time and energy to helping children and youth move toward self-sufficient and satisfying adulthoods. Steve is being honored for his decade of work at Camp AmeriKids/AmeriCares, a summer camp for children with HIV/AIDS where he serves as program director during the summer.

About The Gamm

Founded in 1984 as Alias Stage, the nonprofit **Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre** performs great works of the classic and modern theater in an intimate setting that fosters the vital relationship between author, actor and audience. As the cornerstone of **The Arts Exchange** at the Pawtucket Armory, The Gamm seeks to engage and enrich the community through affordable entertainment and educational programming. The Gamm is a member of **New England Area Theatre** (NEAT), a bargaining unit of the Actors Equity Association.

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