

February 20, 2013

To: Appropriations Committee

From: Garde Arts Center, New London Connecticut
Steve Sigel, Executive Director

Re: Directed Local Funds for Garde Arts Center in the 2014-15 Biennial Budget

On behalf of the Garde Arts Center board, staff and constituents, I would like to express our gratitude for your support these last two years of directed local grants to our institution. Given how critical this funding was to our organization and most importantly all those we serve, we hope you will continue this level of funding to the Garde in the next two years.

During the 2012 and 2013 biennial budget, the Garde Arts Center received \$285,000 each year in support of Southeastern Connecticut's regional non-profit center for the performing arts and education located in the heart of downtown New London.

The Garde Arts Center strives to engage, enrich, entertain and inspire the region of greater New London County, by 1) protecting, operating and enhancing the historic Garde Theatre and its facilities as a central cultural gathering place that 2) presents and hosts top-quality performing arts and film events and educational opportunities, 3) fosters community arts organizations, 4) strengthens community interaction and vitality, and 5) provides critical educational facilities and programs for the City and region.

Since 1988, the Garde has been the prime community-owned cultural activity generator and economic catalyst for the City of New London and Southeastern Connecticut. At a time of severe fiscal challenges for this City and New London County, these mandated grants helped remedy urgent operational and deferred maintenance issues, maintain the programming level and the resultant economic boost to New London and the region, and protect the investment that the State has made in the Garde and Downtown New London.

The quality and quantity of regional programs and services were maintained, access by economically and academically challenged populations were supported, and collaborations and organizational initiatives with regional non-profits, businesses and educational institutions were deepened.

The Garde these past two years will have served over 120,000 constituents, presenting and hosting 400 days of performances, film, civic events, meetings, and rehearsals. With its diverse presenting program of Broadway, dance, opera, symphony orchestra, contemporary music, variety acts, school-time performances and film, the Garde served primarily 63 towns in greater New London County. The largest cultural employer in the City and the region, the Garde provides jobs and internships throughout the year for production staff, stage crew, event managers, area students and local artists.

Based on multipliers from a recently completed state-wide analysis of arts spending in the CT Arts and Economic Report IV published by Americans for the Arts in 2012, the

Garde Arts Center – Directed Local Fund for 2014-15

Garde's annual economic impact exceeded \$5,000,000 including audience spending, household income impact, and state and local revenues, and created 93 FTE jobs in the region. The State grant of \$285,000 is multiplied 18 times over.

The Garde is a nationally acclaimed institution for its creative economic, educational, and civic development strategies. The Garde represented the arts and culture of Connecticut in the New England Foundation for the Arts 2011 Nonprofit Sector Impact Report as a model of inventive and collaborative success in fueling the region's creative economy. As stated by DECD Deputy Commissioner Kip Bergstrom at a public forum in August of 2012,

"I love the role that the Garde has played in making this place, from the quality of the theater and music it presents, to its convening of the community in times of crisis, to the way it has anchored and catalyzed the redevelopment of State Street. In fact, if you want an excellent example of how art can catalyze place-making, you need look no further than the Garde."

Because of the State's grant awards to the Garde in the past two years, the Garde staff and board provided a strong leadership role in regional collaboration and initiatives including:

- The New London City Canvas Project in partnership with the City of New London, Hygienic Arts and local artists
- Facilitating a Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Assessment process, that resulted in establishing a county-wide Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition which was recognized and funded in December by the DECD/Office of the Arts as a Designated Regional Service Organization and awarded its first grant.
- Playing a lead role in developing a regional K-12 arts education pathway with other cultural organizations, artists and resources in Southeastern Connecticut and housing and partnering with a proposed regional magnet High School for the Performing, Visual and Technical Arts.
- At the request of the City of New London School District and the State Department of Education Special Master Dr. Steven Adamowski, the Garde updated construction plans and developed an integrated K-12 facility and program plan to accommodate a regional magnet arts high school within its facilities.

Virginia Mason, the Executive Director of the United Way of Southeastern Connecticut, offered this perspective on the Garde's regional partnership strategies:

Your approach to partnership is so unique and special and I am sure that many of us need to know more about the Garde and all of its activities, strategy, and even needs! You use partnership as a tool to create really magic chemistry between diverse players. Because you are relaxed and flexible, you make it fun to do more than anyone could imagine.

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With direct funding from the State these past two years, the Garde was able to open its doors providing office space, program partnerships and production services for numerous local arts and civic organizations, including

- storefront space for costume storage and acting classes for Flock Theater
- workshop, meeting and screening spaces for the New London Film Commission and Southeastern Connecticut Film (SECTFilm)
- teaching space for the National Theater Institute of the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center
- exhibit space for local colleges, arts organizations, and social service organizations
- showcases for local musicians in the Garde's intimate 120-seat Oasis Room as well as on stage in the historic 1450-seat movie palace
- providing the performance home for the Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra, Eastern Connecticut Ballet, Connecticut Lyric Opera, Miss Connecticut Pageant, and numerous dance schools

The Garde was able to directly serve numerous civic organizations and address critical social issues through promotion, fundraising and public events by

- providing the venue and funding support for community responses to recent teen violence, most notably the New London Youth Talent Show which has filled the Garde Theater for two years straight
- hosting first-ever New London Latino Heritage Month collaboration
- fostering discussion and understand around issues of historic racial prejudice, by working with leaders of the African-American community, youth arts groups, Connecticut Landmarks, museums, Mitchell College, schools, the Connecticut Humanities Council, and Hartford's Judy Dworin Performance Ensemble to produce "New London Making History, Moving Forward"
- partnering with United Way to use Garde events to significantly increase donations to and awareness of the regional food bank
- improving literacy in New London public schools with Passport to Literacy reading program for third graders with the New London School District and New London Youth Affairs
- educating and involving more than 10,000 young people each year with performances, workshops, and after-school and summer programs, through its Partners: Artists, Community, Education (PACE) initiative

Thank you again for all your leadership and support.