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PRESS RELEASE

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Washington County Library System in partnership with  **Announces The**



Launch Of Its Inaugural

December 15, 2017 (Greenville, Miss.) — The Washington County Library System in Greenville, Miss. in partnership with the Greenwood, Miss. - based Turnrow Books Company, will unveil its inaugural Literary Arts in the Delta Festival (Lit in the Delta Fest) Tuesday, December 19, 2017 on the steps of the E.E. Bass Cultural Arts Center in Greenville, Miss., at 11:00 a.m.

The free all-day Festival is slated during National Reading Month, March 10, 2018 at and in front of E.E. Bass Cultural Arts Center, 314 Main Street and at and in front of William Percy Library, 341 Main Street in Greenville, Miss., 9 a.m. – 6 p.m. with food vendors, art and books for all ages.

The Festival seeks to engage communities from 17 counties in the Mississippi Delta Region including: Bolivar, Carroll, Coahoma, DeSoto, Holmes, Humphreys, Issaquena, Leflore, Panola, Quitman, Sharkey, Sunflower, Tallahatchie, Tate and Washington in the State of Mississippi; and the counties of Chicot and Desha in the State of Arkansas.

The Festival will have more than 30 literary artists, including ReShonda Tate Billingsley and the legendary songwriter, documentary producer, former owner of Memphis-based Stax Records and former president of Motown Records Group, Al Bell. Mr. Bell, a Delta native (Brinkley, Ark.) is a Lifetime Grammy Award recipient and would present a lecture on his literary works in entertainment and the music industry. He has written and promoted artists including Prince, the Staple Singers, Issacs Hayes and countless artists. Bell's award-winning documentary, Wattstax will discussed.

National best-selling author, ReShonda Tate Billingsley, has written over 45 books, including published books for youth. She is an actress, TV producer and a national poetry champion. As such, she will be a part of a session critiquing and judging a Mississippi Delta Region Young Authors Competition.

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Dolly Parton Imagination Library, Heifer International and Scholastic will be on hand at the Festival as part of a panel discussion and to share how books in the homes and hands of youth and families will impact learning for a lifetime.

Dr. Maya Angelou film, Still I Rise will also be presented throughout the Festival day as well as art by ArtsPlace Mississippi.

Kay Clanton, Washington County Library System director says this Festival is not only a first for our region, but it fulfills an unmet need. “Greenville boasts “more published writers per capita” than any other town in the nation. Shelby Foote, Hodding Carter III, Ben Wasson, William Alexander Percy, Ellen Douglas, Beverly Lowry, Bern Keating ,William Faulkner, Angela Jackson, Steve Azar, Julia Reed and many more birthed great literature from our region. Yet our region has never had a festival to engage and immerse in the literary arts until now, “Clanton said.

Clanton says the Festival is giving the community, region and youth exposure to authors and writers that they wouldn’t necessary have a chance to see in person. “The community, as well as students from schools in the Mississippi Delta Region would be exposed to authors, publishers and writers who they perhaps, would not otherwise see in person. It would also give them a sense of community and regional pride to have such a high level of rich participation in their community. Another advantage to this Festival is giving the community and region a way to acquire quality cultural programming that is local and free, she said.”

Clanton said, “One very important aspect of our Festival is connecting youth with authors and writers to inspire their interest and enjoyment in reading and writing. With reading and writing workshops throughout the Festival, we are giving youth and communities in our region some of the same literary opportunities that other regions in our country have.”

Mayor Errick D. Simmons says he is proud that the city is becoming a literary destination for creative placemaking in the Mississippi Delta Region. “Creative placemaking is a very positive way to support economic and community development efforts. Our city is pleased to be a part of creating a destination for the literary arts. With our Festival, we are fulfilling an unmet void and helping to build and contribute to social, human and economic capital for our region and that puts us on the right side of history,” Mayor Simmons said.

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The Festival is made possible in part with grant funding from the Mississippi Humanities Council. The Young Authors Writing Competition is made possible in part with grant funding from the Northwest Mississippi Community Foundation.

Delta Radio, Courtney Marketing PR and Turnrow Books Company are premier sponsors of the Festival. Additional sponsors include Mississippi Valley State University, Scholastic, Hope Credit Union, Planters Bank and Trust, and the Reed Family Charitable Foundation.

Festival partners include Washington County Economic Alliance, the Community Foundation of Washington County, Greenville and Washington County Convention and Visitors Bureau, Washington County Board of Supervisors, Greenville Arts Council and E.E Bass Cultural Arts Center.

Washington County Mississippi is in U.S. Congressman Bennie Thompson, State Representative John Hines, Sr., and State Senator Derrick Simmons' District.

For more information, visit www.LitintheDeltaFest.com, "like" Literary Arts in the Delta Festival on Facebook, and follow @LitintheDeltaFest on Twitter and Instagram.

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BACKGROUND

Greenville boasts “more published writers per capita” than any other town in the nation. Shelby Foote, historian, novelist and narrator/writer of PBS’s widely acclaimed Civil War series was born in Greenville. Poet and biographer William Alexander Percy, novelists Walker Percy, Ellen Douglas and Beverly Lowry and PBS commentator Hodding Carter III also grew up in Greenville. William Faulkner was a frequent visitor (and occasional resident) when another Greenville author, Ben Wasson, served as the Nobel Prize winner’s literary agent. Hodding Carter won the Pulitzer Prize as Editor of Greenville’s Delta Democrat Times. Bern Keating is Greenville’s most prolific penman with more than two dozen books and hundreds of articles in publications ranging from *National Geographic* to *Playboy*.

The purpose of this Literary Arts in the Delta Festival is to create a regional literary destination for Greenville, Washington County and the Mississippi Delta Region that will give everyone an opportunity to experience and engage in a culturally rich free space for literature, literacy, reading, writing and published works that is highly curated and educational. Artists will offer insights on their foray into the literary arts, share their published works through discussions, workshops, exhibits, films, television, writing and book signings.