



NEBRASKA HUMANITIES COUNCIL

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N E W S R E L E A S E

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Omaha site of national humanities conference

Omaha has been selected as the site of the 2009 National Humanities Conference, which will be hosted by the Nebraska Humanities Council (NHC). Jane Renner Hood, NHC executive director, said the national planning committee, which met in the city last June and again Feb. 3-4, is very impressed with the cultural and historical opportunities that the council plans to showcase for its delegates during the Nov. 5-8 conference.

“Our board of directors is convinced that Omaha is the perfect site for this year’s conference theme, ‘Landscapes of the Heart: Renewing Public Life through the Humanities,’ with its twin sub-texts of philanthropy and environmental health,” Hood said. “We were delighted that the national planning committee, consisting of state humanities council representatives from Maine, Wyoming, Florida, Washington, D.C., Idaho, Illinois, Colorado, and Montana, agreed with us!”

Carol Gendler, NHC executive committee member serving on the national planning committee, said the Nebraska Humanities Council sees the National Conference as “an ideal opportunity for cultural leaders from across the nation to experience Omaha’s cultural treasures and learn from Nebraska’s best.”

As an example of the latter, she noted that the opening plenary session will feature former national poet laureate Ted Kooser, and the annual Capps Lecture will be given by Bob Kerrey at the Joslyn Art Museum. The lecture is given annually in honor of Walter Capps, a former chair of the Federation of State Humanities Councils and of the California Humanities Council.

It was in that capacity that Capps first met Gov. Bob Kerrey. In 1985 Capps, a professor of religion at the University of California at Santa Barbara, was invited by the Nebraska Humanities Council to present its Sower Award Lecture. He taught a course on the war in Vietnam that had become immensely popular among veterans, who saw it as an opportunity to tell their personal stories from their service in the Vietnam War. Kerrey later joined Capps in teaching the course at UC-Santa Barbara, which ultimately was featured on the CBS news program “60 Minutes.”

In 1995, when Capps was considering a run for Congress from California’s 22nd District, then-U.S. Sen. Kerrey urged him to bring his insights as a humanist to the House of Representatives, and Capps won the 1996 election. In October 1997, however, he died of a heart attack. The Federation of State Humanities Councils inaugurated the annual lecture to honor his lifelong dedication to the importance of the humanities in public life and named it the Capps Lecture.

According to Hood, it is particularly appropriate that Bob Kerrey give the 2009 Capps Lecture because “he exemplifies the ideal that Walter envisioned for public service. It is especially fitting that Kerrey give the lecture when the National Humanities Conference is in Omaha, because Bob and Walter are both examples of the best that Nebraska produces.” Capps was born in Omaha in 1934 and graduated from Benson High School.

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