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“UNITY BREAKFAST” WITH NATIONAL ICON HARVEY B. GANTT

Columbia, SC ---- The Renaissance Foundation and its partners will host a “Unity Breakfast” on Thursday, June 19, 2008 at 8:00 a.m. at the Columbia Metropolitan Convention Center. The Unity Breakfast will celebrate the progress of the business and arts communities’ efforts to create a Cultural Arts Center on a historic site in downtown Columbia. The keynote speaker for this event will be the Honorable Harvey B. Gantt, former Mayor of Charlotte, North Carolina. A hardhat tour at the site of the new center will be held immediately following the breakfast from 10:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m.

“We want to create a Cultural Arts Center that will become a Mecca for preserving history and showcasing the arts,” says Mary Skinner-Jones, Executive Director of The Renaissance Foundation. “We have been in the capital campaign mode for the past two years and we need to accelerate our efforts to reach our goal. This breakfast is the first in a series of upcoming events to increase community awareness of our historic venture.”

The current structure is located on the corner Sumter and Taylor streets and is steeped in historical significance. It was built as an African Methodist Episcopal church in 1921 and designed by John Anderson Lankford, one of the nation’s first registered African American architects. It is on the National Historic Registry and a Historical Tour Site, as well. Once the transformation from church structure to cultural arts center is complete, it will serve as a performing arts center as well as a museum. According to John Sherrer, of The Historic Columbia Foundation “All capital projects of this nature require considerable planning and funding. In the case of rehabilitating historic structures, this is especially true, as the goal of rehabilitation is to preserve those elements that contribute to the unique character of the building. As a unique downtown landmark, this is a treasure for all Columbians, especially the African American community, whose accomplishments will be celebrated through thoughtful adaptive reuse of this former church building.”

This historic preservation project is just good for economic development according to The Greater Columbia Chamber of Commerce. “Once completed this performing arts venue and heritage tour site will attract additional tourist and contribute greatly to the economic impact to the City of Columbia and throughout the Midlands,” says Chamber Director Ike McLeese.

The Cultural Council of Richland and Lexington Counties would also like to see the project succeed. “Five years ago, the City of Columbia Arts Task Force determined a need for a mid-sized arts facility for music and other performing arts. The Renaissance Foundation 500-600 seat performing arts venue and museum will certainly address that need, according to Andrew Witt, Executive Director of the Cultural Council. “We’re happy to support in this effort.”

Paying for the Project

The total cost of The Renaissance Foundation Cultural Arts Center is estimated at \$6 million dollars. Of that amount the Renaissance Foundation still needs to raise \$1.5 million in order to utilize historical tax credits to finance the project. This funding method is often used to finance historic preservation projects. To date, The Renaissance Foundation has secured \$1.8 million dollars in cash, in-kind and pledged contributions.

For sponsorship and ticket information of the Unity Breakfast, please contact The Renaissance Foundation at (803) 733-5634, or online at www.renaissancefoundationsc.org.