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ARENA STAGE CONSTRUCTION OFFICIALLY UNDERWAY ON EXPANSION TO BUILD ARENA STAGE AT THE MEAD CENTER FOR AMERICAN THEATER

***** Today's ceremony announced a new matching challenge for the Next Stage Campaign and a \$7.5 million gift from Arlene and Robert Kogod to name the 200-seat Cradle theater *****

(Washington, D.C.) Arena Stage held a groundbreaking ceremony today to officially commence construction on its 47-year-old theater campus in Southwest, D.C. This expansion and renovation will make way for the new Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater, a three-theater facility dedicated to the development and production of American theater.

The ceremony included remarks from members of the Arena Stage community who helped pave the way for the expansion; the announcement of two significant leadership gifts to the Next Stage Campaign; and an on-site demolition that cleared the exact location for the Mead Center's third theater, The Cradle.

Mark Shugoll, chairman of the Arena Stage Board of Trustees, led the ceremony's proceedings alongside Artistic Director Molly Smith and Executive Director Stephen Richard. Together the three reflected on the 8-year journey of this campaign and acknowledged the remarkable work of all involved. Several of those key contributors voiced their shared enthusiasm, including Architect of the project Bing Thom; former Board President John Derrick; D.C. Ward 6 Councilmember Tommy Wells; former D.C. Ward 6 Councilmember Sharon Ambrose; and lead project donor Jaylee Mead. Verbatim quotes from all to follow.

In December 2006, Arena announced the Mead Challenge—an influential matching tool created by Jaylee and her late husband Gilbert Mead that pushed the raised campaign total to \$100 million of the \$125 million goal. The challenge also brought the Meads' total campaign support to nearly \$35 million, the largest individual gift given to an American regional theater to date. Today Richard announced that Arlene and Robert Kogod, longtime supporters of Arena, were so inspired by the Meads that they pledged \$7.5 million towards the challenge. This gift, originally announced as anonymous and the largest gift of the Mead Challenge, was made to directly support the creation of the design's third theater, the Cradle.

"Upon learning about the Cradle, Arlene and Bob understood how important this space would be for new playwrights, not only for D.C., but the entire regional theater movement in the country and world," said Richard. "In recognition of the Kogods' extraordinary gift, Arena Stage is pleased to announce the name of the third performance space in the Mead Center, **The Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle.**"

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Smith announced another couple inspired by the Mead's philanthropic vision. She shared that Trustee Beth Newburger Schwartz and her husband Richard Schwartz recently designated Arena Stage to be the beneficiary of a planned gift, known as a CRAT (charitable remainder annuity trust), valued at \$500,000. This gift comes in the form of a challenge, **The Newburger-Schwartz Challenge**. This challenge matches any new planned gifts to Arena Stage up to \$500,000 through December 2008 on a one-to-one basis. When met, this challenge will bring their total contribution to the campaign to \$1 million.

The ceremony concluded with a symbolic site clearing for the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle. The theater's familiar parking hut, which welcomed patrons into the complex's parking lot since the late 1980s, was demolished for the crowd by a caterpillar excavator. The hut stood on top of the exact location where the Cradle will be built.

Verbatim:

"This momentous occasion would not have been possible without the incredible leadership of Stephen Richard and Molly Smith. An organization is nothing unless the financial health and stability is assured and we have Stephen to thank for this. When Molly joined him at Arena, more than 10 years ago, she thrilled the Board and patrons with a bold, new vision. With today's groundbreaking, we begin a journey that will finally give that vision a facility worthy of it."
— Mark Shugoll, Chairman of the Arena Stage Board of Trustees.

"When I joined Arena Stage 10 years ago, I shared my vision for the future of one of the nation's most prestigious theaters. Our mission is to make Arena Stage the home not only in Washington, DC, but for the country, of American voices and playwrights. Where but in the nation's capital could we celebrate and nurture American voices—be they writers, actors, directors or designers... However, in looking at our facility, we were handicapped by what we were able to do because of the sheer size and scope of our two theaters. The Arena Stage of old was missing a cradle, an incubator for new plays and blossoming playwrights. Now a decade later we stand here today, ready to break ground on the Mead Center—the future home of Arena Stage and American theater."
— Molly Smith, Arena Stage Artistic Director

"Throughout this journey, Arena Stage has been fortunate to have many stellar partners. One of those champions has been the D.C. government, which has provided key leadership support for this project from its very beginnings. Arena Stage and our plans to build the Mead Center have always been recognized by the city as the catalyst for the revitalization of the community. We celebrate the fact that this administration shares our commitment to Southwest."
— Stephen Richard, Arena Stage Executive Director

"This day is about commitment. Arena depends on commitment, the commitment and vision that established what has now become a landmark in American theater, the commitment of all the people who have been talked about today, the commitment of theatergoers and theater lovers, like Jaylee and her husband, the commitment of all the board members who have been steadfast in their support, and the commitment of the District of Columbia government, which has been generous."
— Sharon Ambrose, former D.C. Ward 6 Councilmember

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"Where [Arena] chose to be, to continue here in Southwest, D.C., is very important to all of us; it is a great endorsement to our city; it's a great catalyst for what is going to happen here, this Renaissance that my predecessor [Sharon Ambrosel] helped lead for an extraordinary new area in our nation's capital. Arena will be a jewel of many jewels in this crown, but you're one of the first ones to be fitted into that."

— Tommy Wells, D.C. Ward 6 Councilmember

"Gilbert and I were inspired by Bing [Thom] in a way that made us want to be a part of it. Gil especially could see a vision of what Arena could be. I think that Gil was very pleased with the way things were going. I know we were pleased with the success of the Mead Challenge and how others stepped up to meet the challenge. We still have more to raise to make this wonderful building come to pass. I want to thank you for today's event and all the people who are taking part."

— Jaylee Mead

"When I first started talking to Molly about her visions for the design I told her in choosing an architect you have to fall in love, get married and eventually become pregnant. Well this has been a long pregnancy, but the baby's coming. It's going to be a painful process, but it will be joyful. In the tradition of what Arena has been and what it is, it is a great privilege for me to be here today and to see the beginning of the birth of this child."

— Architect Bing Thom

The renovation will be a breathtaking expansion of the current campus allowing Arena Stage to focus on the strengths of the two existing spaces – The Fichandler Stage and the Kreeger Theater – while reinventing the surrounding building and adding the Arlene and Robert Kogod Cradle. The theater has currently raised \$107 of its \$125 million fundraising goal since the Next Stage Campaign launched in 2002. Arena Stage at the Mead Center is scheduled to open for the 2010/2011 season.

To allow for a timely and cost-effective renovation, Arena Stage has begun operating at a temporary venue, Arena Stage in Crystal City, in Arlington, VA. Minutes from the current location in Southwest, D.C., the area around Arena Stage in Crystal City boasts many well-known restaurants, is convenient to the Crystal City Metro and has free evening and weekend parking. The theater is roughly the same size as the Kreeger and seats 460 patrons. Details on programming for the Arena Stage 2008/09 season, including productions at the Lincoln Theater in D.C., will be shared at a later date. For more information on Arena Stage in Crystal City or The Mead Center for American Theater visit www.arenastage.org.

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