

After 34 Years of Service, Executive Director Marion Cott to Retire at end of 2006

Marion Cott has been with the Kansas Humanities Council since 1972 and was the organization's founding director. At the time she took the position, the Council (then known as the Kansas Committee for the Humanities) was one of only 13 state humanities organizations established by the National Endowment for the Humanities as an experimental outreach program. "Kansas became the testing ground for ways to connect the ideas and concepts of the humanities with issues relevant to the general public," Cott said. "We developed programs and services that even now are commonplace among the 55 councils in the states and territories."

Under Cott's leadership, the Council's reach and its significance for Kansans have grown dramatically. The Council's grants and programs in literature and literacy, cultural heritage and history, and contemporary issues reach Kansans of all ages, education and economic levels. From only 14 grants awarded its first year of operation, the Council now annually supports over 700 programs in more than 150 communities.

During her tenure, the Council has been recognized at both the state and national level for program quality and excellence. KHC has received two Exemplary Awards from the National Endowment for the Humanities in support of statewide programs, one on health care and human values and a second on African American literature and heritage. An NEH Merit Award recognized overall program focus and quality. In 1995, KHC received the Distinguished Service Award from the Wichita - Sedgwick County Arts and Humanities Council.

The Council has also advanced a number of high profile programs that promote public involvement with the humanities. Most notably, KHC, in collaboration with four other state councils, re-introduced touring summer chautauquas and revived a tradition of community learning and dialogue that disappeared in the early decades of the 20th century. Now the Great Plains Chautauqua and the Kansas Chautauqua are much anticipated summer events in Kansas communities statewide.

From a federal experiment to a major cultural organization, Cott has guided the Council's efforts to diversify its funding and engage Kansas corporations, foundations, and citizens in support of public humanities programs. The Council began with a one-year, one-time \$125,000 grant from NEH, and now manages an annual budget of \$1 million. Kansas was the first council in the nation to receive an appropriation from its state government. Presently over 500 Kansans are donors to Friends of the Humanities; foundations and corporations support special projects and initiatives.

Cott has compiled a record of community and professional service at both the state and national level. She serves on the board of directors of the Federation of State Humanities Councils and is Vice-President of the Great Plains Chautauqua Society board. She has served on numerous state commissions and boards, including the Friends of Kansas Libraries and the Travel Industry Association of Kansas. She was a member of the advisory board of the Kansas Territorial Sesquicentennial Commission and Kansas Bicentennial Commission.

Judy Billings, Lawrence, the Council's board Chair, expressed the board's appreciation for Cott's commitment and zeal for the humanities. "The Council and the state of Kansas have greatly benefited from her leadership and devotion to our mission," she said.