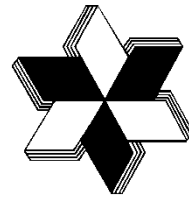




# CITY NEWS



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## WICHITA PUBLIC LIBRARY RECEIVES BIG READ GRANT

*Grant Enables Area to Celebrate Zora Neale Hurston's "Their Eyes Were Watching God"*

Mayor Carl Brewer, congressional spouse Vicki Tiaht and Director of Libraries Cynthia Berner Harris announced The Big Read returns to Wichita this fall, thanks to a \$17,050 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA). Mrs. Tiaht will again serve as honorary chair of Wichita's reading initiative, which will feature Zora Neale Hurston's "Their Eyes Were Watching God" in October 2010.

"Earlier this year, Big Read program funding seemed in jeopardy," said Mayor Carl Brewer during a news conference to announce The Big Read grant. "During one of my scheduled calls with Vice President Biden, I emphasized the success of Wichita's first two Big Read programs. I told the Vice President that it is important that the federal government work with local communities to encourage reading and literacy. I'm pleased the National Endowment for the Arts has realized the impact of Big Read programs. I am especially happy to announce that Wichita is again to be a Big Read community."

The Wichita Public Library is one of only 75 not-for-profits to receive a grant to host a Big Read project between September 2010 and June 2011.

"The Big Read Wichita's 2010 selection 'Their Eyes Were Watching God' opens the door to greater understanding among our community," shared honorary chair Vicki Tiaht. "While the African American experience in contemporary Kansas is certainly different from that of Janie Mae Crawford's, this book may be used to explore subjects that we could never share before. We are very hopeful that October will be a time of great literature, enjoyable programs and presentations and new opportunities for diverse friendships."

"The arts in general – and literature, in particular – often serve as an expression of our shared values. This is exactly why they are so effective as a fulcrum for community engagement," said NEA Chairman Rocco Landesman in a prepared statement. "Thanks to these 75 grants, communities nationwide will be inspired, delighted and challenged by a book they are discovering for the first time, or an old favorite to which they are returning."

Organizations selected for Big Read grants receive between \$2,500 to \$20,000 to promote and carry out community-based reading programs featuring activities such as read-a-thons, book discussions, lectures, movie screenings, and performing arts events. Participating communities also receive high-quality, free-of-charge educational materials to supplement each title, including reader's, teacher's, and audio guides.

One of the components of Wichita's previous two Big Read programs that have earned national attention is the integration of arts and natural science elements into the reading program. The most

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notable examples of this were the nationally award-winning posters and bookmarks created to promote the program, and thanks to the Wichita Art Museum, appropriate artwork again will be used in conjunction with the program.

*Girl* by Gwendolyn Knight Lawrence is a serigraph from 2004 that is evocative of Janie Mae Crawford, the main character of "Their Eyes Were Watching God." It will be among the works featured an accompanying exhibit at the Wichita Art Museum during the kickoff at 2 p.m., Saturday, Oct. 2. Dr. Camaletta Williams will interpret the life of Zora Neale Hurston and answer questions at 2:30 p.m., Sunday, Oct. 10 at the Central Library, 223 S. Main. A Harlem Renaissance celebration will conclude the month on Saturday, Oct. 30, at Old Cowtown Museum. Additional companion exhibits, gallery talks, museum tours, lectures and, naturally, book discussions provide a multitude of ways to experience and celebrate Hurston's novel. Events can be found on The Big Read - Wichita website at [www.bigreadwichita.org](http://www.bigreadwichita.org). Even more will be announced as the project draws nearer.

The Big Read is an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts designed to restore reading to the center of American culture. The NEA presents The Big Read in partnership with the Institute of Museum and Library Services and in cooperation with Arts Midwest. Support for The Big Read has been provided by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation, the Boeing Company, the Poetry Foundation, and the Ford Motor Company.

For more information about The Big Read – Wichita, visit [www.bigreadwichita.org](http://www.bigreadwichita.org). The national Big Read program's website is [www.neabigread.org](http://www.neabigread.org).

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**The National Endowment for the Arts** is a public agency dedicated to supporting excellence in the arts, both new and established; bringing the arts to all Americans; and providing leadership in arts education. Established by Congress in 1965 as an independent agency of the federal government, the Arts Endowment is the nation's largest annual funder of the arts, bringing great art to all 50 states, including rural areas, inner cities, and military bases. For more information, [www.arts.gov](http://www.arts.gov).

**The Institute of Museum and Library Services** is the primary source of federal support for the nation's 122,000 libraries and 17,500 museums. The Institute's mission is to create strong libraries and museums that connect people to information and ideas. The Institute works at the national level and in coordination with state and local organizations to sustain heritage, culture, and knowledge; enhance learning and innovation; and support professional development. For more information please visit [www.imls.gov](http://www.imls.gov).

**Arts Midwest** connects people throughout the Midwest and the world to meaningful arts opportunities, sharing creativity, knowledge, and understanding across boundaries. Arts Midwest connects the arts to audiences throughout the nine-state region of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. One of six non-profit regional arts organizations in the United States, Arts Midwest's history spans more than 25 years. For more information, please visit [www.artsmidwest.org](http://www.artsmidwest.org).

The **Wichita Public Library** provides collections and services that inform, entertain and enrich the quality of life in Wichita. For more information, please visit its web site.