

For Immediate Release

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International Literacy Day in New Mexico

Saturday, September 8, 2007, marks the 40th annual observance of “International Literacy Day” throughout the world, and the New Mexico Coalition for Literacy will celebrate “Literacy Day” in New Mexico on Friday, September 7 from 10 am to 12 noon with a press conference, proclamation reading, and meet the author event in the Rotunda of the Roundhouse. Marten Griego, author of “*Leaving the House of Tears*,” will speak as keynote. He was once an adult literacy student of ReadWest, Inc., Rio Rancho, – functionally illiterate just 8 years ago – now, he serves on their board of directors. Marten is this year’s recipient of the prestigious, national Ruth J. Colvin and Frank C. Laubach Award for Excellence in Individual Achievement. The Governor has issued a proclamation, declaring September 8, 2007 as “Literacy Day” in the state of New Mexico. Local literacy programs throughout the state have encouraged their Mayors to declare Literacy Day in their communities as well, and will commemorate the day with their own celebrations.

In 1966, the day was established upon the recommendation of the 1965 World Conference of Ministers, to call attention to the global effort to promote literacy and education as a central mission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). We are currently in the fourth year of the “Literacy Decade,” as proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2003 as an initiative that aims to increase literacy levels 50% by the year 2015. This year, United Nations Secretary Kofi Annan advocated for increased efforts to close the education gap, which he calls “a fundamental inequality in our globalizing world.” Likewise, in December of 2005 former New Mexico Governor, Garrey Carruthers, announced, “If New Mexico does nothing more than it has so far to raise the education level of its residents, and particularly of its largest, fastest growing and least educated minority groups, it can expect to see a marked drop in coming years in the percentages of its workforce with associate’s, bachelor’s, and professional degrees and declines, as a result, in the prosperity of its economy and the solidity of its tax base.”

In the United States, the Literacy Decade is being coordinated by the National Coalition for Literacy under their National Literacy Summit Initiative. The Initiative's ten-year goal is to improve our nation's system of adult literacy, language, and lifelong learning services by the year 2010. Its Action Agenda, *From the Margins to the Mainstream: An Action Agenda for Literacy*, was developed through grass roots consensus building, and is a blueprint for community action nationwide. The action agenda and background information can be found at: http://www.national-coalition-literacy.org/summit_initiative.html.

Here in New Mexico, low literacy continues to be a persistent problem, with at least one in every five adults reading at or below a 5th grade level - a conservative estimate. Nearly half of all adults have literacy skills at the two lowest levels identified in the National Assessment of Adult Literacy. At these levels, adults exhibit some reading and writing skills, but lack the skills needed to understand a bus schedule or write a simple letter. In terms of literacy level 2, 46% of New Mexico's population is at this level or below. As a benchmark in practical terms, nearly two-thirds (64%) of all jobs today require literacy skills beyond level 2, while only 12% require skills at level 1 and 24% at level 2, according to a study by the Milken Institute.

During the 2006-2007 program year, 5,723 individuals received literacy services sponsored by the New Mexico Coalition for Literacy through the NM Adult Literacy Legislative Appropriation of the Office of Cultural Affairs/New Mexico State Library. Local literacy programs served 4,771 students out of this total. 78% of those who enrolled in pre-GED studies completed them, 55% of students without a high school diploma or GED enrolled in an adult basic education program, and 1 in 5 students on public assistance were able to leave public assistance as a result of enrollment in a literacy program.

Literacy efforts in New Mexico are coordinated by the New Mexico Coalition for Literacy, a statewide organization located in Santa Fe, that provides training and technical assistance to over 90 local literacy programs around the state. Information about literacy in New Mexico, including the locations of local programs and how you can volunteer, can be found on the Coalition's website: www.nmcl.org, by writing to info@nmcl.org, or by calling 1-800-233-7587.

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