

**Contact: Heather Heunermund, Executive Director
New Mexico Coalition for Literacy
800-233-7587 505-982-4095 fax
info@nmcl.org www.nmcl.org**

Literacy Day in New Mexico at the Capitol in Santa Fe, 2009

To mark the 44th annual celebration of International Literacy Day (ILD), the New Mexico Coalition for Literacy (NMCL) will celebrate Literacy Day in New Mexico on September 8, 2009 from 4:00 - 5:00 pm in the rotunda of the Roundhouse with a press conference, the reading of a gubernatorial proclamation, and special guest speakers, Hakim Bellamy, poet, and Jason Yurcic, poet and author. There will be a presentation on “visual literacy” by Donna Aragon and Deanne Howland, NMCL trainers. They will use the work of actor/director, Giancarlo Esposito, who may be among the speakers, as well. Join us for music and light refreshments. To open, there will be a check presentation by Loretta Armenta, President of the Qwest Foundation in New Mexico, for their grant to the NMCL. The general public and press are invited and encouraged to attend. TV, radio, and newspaper interviews are most welcome.

This year’s theme is “Poetic Justice: How the Arts Cultivate Literacy and How Literacy Cultivates the Arts.” As Giancarlo Esposito recently stated during an interview, “You can’t be truly free unless you’re literate” and this year’s Literacy Day will highlight one of his films, Gospel Hill, including the many ways that the arts and film industry facilitate literacy development. Literacy, in turn, leads to the preservation of arts and culture, which helps build a truly free society. In like manner, UNESCO leads the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD) under the slogan of “Literacy as Freedom.” Launched at UN Headquarters in 2003, the UNLD aims to increase literacy levels and to empower all people everywhere. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) established September 8 as ILD in 1965 to highlight the importance of literacy to individuals, communities, and societies around the world. Here in New Mexico, Governor Bill Richardson has issued a proclamation, declaring September 8, 2009 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 mark the day with their own celebrations.

Almost half of our adult citizens in New Mexico are functionally illiterate, reading at or below the 5th or 6th grade level, even those with high school diplomas or college degrees. Some have limited reading/writing skills, but lack the ability, for instance, to understand a bus schedule or fill out a job application. During the 2008-9 fiscal year, 5,265 individuals received literacy services funded by the NMCL through the Adult Literacy Legislative Appropriation of the Department of Cultural Affairs/New Mexico State Library, grants, and donations. It is estimated that as many as 700,000 to 1 million adults in New Mexico could benefit from literacy services. It is well-documented that literacy programs increase both workers’ productivity on behalf of their employers and the workers’ earnings. For example, if each of the adult students served by New Mexico literacy programs in the 2008-9 fiscal year increased their earnings by just one dollar per hour, their total annual income would increase by \$8.1 million.

Located in Santa Fe, the NMCL is a statewide funding, training, technical assistance, and professional development organization that provides assistance to local literacy programs around the state. Information about literacy in New Mexico, including the locations of local programs offering free, private, one-to-one tutoring and how you can volunteer to teach an adult to read, can be found on the NMCL’s website (www.nmcl.org), by e-mailing info@nmcl.org, or by calling 800-233-7587.