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**INTERNATIONALLY KNOWN SINGER/SONGWRITER BETH NIELSEN CHAPMAN AND
STORYTELLER/AUTHOR KATHRYN TUCKER WINDHAM AMONG THOSE TO BE
HONORED AT "CELEBRATION OF THE ARTS" ON MAY 13**

Montgomery, Ala. - The Alabama State Council on the Arts will honor eight outstanding Alabamians at the 2009 "*Celebration of the Arts*" awards ceremony on Wednesday, May 13, 2009 at 7:00 p.m. The event will take place at the Montgomery Performing Arts Centre, Renaissance Hotel & Spa, 201 Tallapoosa Street in downtown Montgomery. A reception will immediately follow in the Atrium of the Performing Arts Centre.

The Council's "*Celebration of the Arts*" recognizes Alabama artists for their work and contribution to the arts in Alabama and across the United States and beyond. Al Head, Executive Director of the Council stated, "***This awards program is an opportunity for the state of Alabama to recognize some exceptional individuals who earned significant achievement and have brought great credit to their respective communities and to our state through their work.***"

This year's recipients include noted artists, arts patrons, and arts educators. Their contribution over a sustained period has greatly enhanced the cultural landscape in Alabama. This year's recipients are:

Dot Moore, *Guntersville* – The Jonnie Dee Little Lifetime Achievement Award
Beth Nielsen Chapman, *Montgomery/Nashville* – Alabama's Distinguished Artist Award
Dr. Mabry Miller, *Huntsville* – Governor's Arts Award
Hugh Williams, *Auburn* – Governor's Arts Award
Alvin Sella, *Tuscaloosa* – Governor's Arts Award
Ward Swingle, *Mobile/France* – Governor's Arts Award
Willie King, *Old Memphis* – The Alabama Folk Heritage Award
Kathryn Tucker Windham, *Selma* – The Alabama Living Legacy Award

In offering his congratulations to this year's recipients Governor Bob Riley noted, "***I commend these special Alabamians for their efforts, time and investment to improve the quality of life for all citizens of our great state. They join an outstanding list of other luminaries who have been recognized by the State Council on the Arts over the past thirty years.***"

The Jonnie Dee Little Lifetime Achievement Award represents recognition for someone who has devoted a lifetime of energy, service, and contributions to the arts in Alabama and is named after past Council member, Jonnie Dee Riley Little who died in 1988 after serving with great distinction on the Council and in support of the arts in Alabama. **This year's recipient is Dot Moore of Guntersville**, who was instrumental in the beginnings of the community theatre group known as "The Whole Backstage" more than 35 years ago. Moore has worked in all areas of the arts including a high school English, Art and Humanities teacher, a director and designer of plays and a photographer. An accomplished artist and

seamstress, Moore often painted and built sets based on her life experiences and travels abroad.

The Distinguished Artist Award honors a professional artist who is considered a native or adopted son or daughter of Alabama and who has earned significant national acclaim for their art over an extended period. **This year's recipient is Beth Nielsen Chapman of Montgomery/Nashville.** Chapman is a singer/songwriter who has written hits for stars such as Bonnie Raitt, Neil Diamond, Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings, Emmylou Harris, Michael McDonald, Bette Midler, Anne Murray, Amy Grant, Keb' Mo' and Roberta Flack. Her song, "This Kiss" was recorded by Faith Hill and won ASCAP's 1999 "Song of the Year" award. "This Kiss" was also nominated for a Grammy.

The Governor's Arts Award honors individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the arts in Alabama. **Four awards will be given this year:**

Dr. Mabry Miller of *Huntsville*

Hugh Williams of *Auburn*

Alvin Sella of *Tuscaloosa*

Ward Swingle of *Mobile/ Gere-en-Tardenois, France*

Dr. Mabry Miller of Huntsville promoted and encouraged the love of art and music in Alabama for more than 50 years. In 1958, she was instrumental in establishing the Huntsville Symphony Orchestra and served on the Symphony Board for many years. Dr. Mabry helped to organize the Huntsville Community Chorus where she was a performer for several years. She served as President of the Huntsville Opera and was a member of the Women's Guild. She served the Huntsville Museum of Art for thirty-four years.

Hugh Williams of Auburn was born in Alabama and spent most of his adult life teaching visual art at Auburn University. His teaching career spans 59 years, and still continues today. Hugh has taught and influenced thousands of people of all ages. Former students have overwhelmingly exclaimed praise for what his guidance meant to their careers and their lives in general. Hugh's work has been exhibited at major art museums and is collected nationally and internationally. He began his career in the time of an explosion of activity in expressionism in New York City where he succeeded in that circle. Hugh will again be exhibiting his work in New York City during February 2009.

Alvin Sella of Tuscaloosa has been a professor at the University of Alabama for over 46 years and at age 89 is still teaching and painting. Sella was recommended to the University of Alabama by the president of Sullins College, (who was an Alabama native), and he joined the faculty in 1961. His students include such renowned artists as Thornton Willis, William Christenberry and Frank Fleming. Some of his students have gone on to teach in Alabama, such as Lowell Vann of Samford University.

Ward Swingle of Mobile and France founded The Swingle Singers in the 1960s, introducing to the world a new musical style, which now bears his name; Swingle-Singing is synonymous with the art of using the voice as an instrument in a fusion of jazz and classical styles. In the 1960s and 70s, Ward Swingle gained international recognition for his musical genius through his innovative Swingle arrangements, Grammy-award winning recordings, and the creation of a new musical style. At the age of 79, he continues to make contributions to his art.

The Folk Heritage Award was established to recognize master folk artists who have made outstanding contributions in the arts in Alabama. **This year's award is given posthumously to Willie King of Old Memphis, Alabama who passed away on March 8.** King's debut album introduced him into the blues world. King's music was acclaimed by critics worldwide and received awards from Living Blues Magazine for Best Male Blues Artist (2001), Best Blues Album (2000) and Best Contemporary Blues Album (2000).

His grandparents, who were local sharecroppers, raised Willie and his siblings. Music was important to the King family - Willie's grandfather was a gospel singer, and his absent father was an amateur blues musician. Young Willie made a diddley bo by nailing a baling wire to a tree in the yard. By age 9, he had a one-string guitar that he could bring indoors to play at night.

In 1967, Willie King moved to Chicago in an attempt to make more money than he could down South. After a year spent on the West and South Sides, he returned to Old Memphis, Alabama, just across the border from the Mississippi Prairie. A salesman - of shoes, cologne, and other frivolities - Willie traveled the rural roads hawking goods and talking politics. Choosing not to work under the "old system" of unequal treatment, King joined the civil rights movement near the end of the decade.

In 1987, a chance meeting at a festival in Eutaw, Alabama, blew Rooster Blues founder Jim O'Neal away: According to O'Neal, King's "juke-joint musical style and political lyrics knocked me down." The two kept in touch for the next 13 years, during which O'Neal relocated his label, and King concentrated on his own community, forging relationships with local youth through a blues education program, through his organization The Rural Members Association.

The Alabama Living Legacy Award was established to recognize those special individuals that did not fall within the other categories. This award may include posthumous, legislative, or special project recognition. **This year's award is given to Kathryn Tucker Windham** of Selma. Windham is a storyteller and published author. She is considered to be Alabama's premier storyteller. Windham is a favorite of listeners to Public radio because they treasure her like a friend who shares intimate, evocative memories of swimming holes, penny candy, eccentric neighbors, and lazy days spent counting buzzards and stamping gray mules.

After graduating from Huntingdon College, Kathryn Tucker Windham became the first woman hired by the Alabama Journal in Montgomery. However, her journalism career began in her hometown of Thomasville, Alabama, where, as a teenager, she wrote movie reviews for her cousin Earl Tucker, the editor of the local newspaper. Though it was a small town, she has lived a large life and shares its wonders through her richly textured stories and essays.

The Alabama State Council on the Arts promotes Alabama's diverse and rich artistic resources while highlighting excellence and education experiences. To reserve tickets for the "Celebration of the Arts" or for more information on the State Council on the Arts, phone Barbara Reed at 334-242-4076, ext. 223. You can also visit the Council's website at www.arts.alabama.gov