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*Backgrounder*

**HARTFORD: A CULTURAL MECCA**

***Ranking Among the Top 6 Percent of North American Regions for Arts and Culture, and in the Top 20 Cool Places to Have Fun***

Hartford boasts an extraordinarily active arts and entertainment scene with nearly 200 arts, cultural and heritage organizations. The experts agree: *Places Rated Almanac* ranked Hartford among the top 6 percent of North American cities for arts and culture; and noted economist Richard Florida picked Hartford as one of the “Top 20” best places to live, work, start a family and have fun in the U.S. Greater Hartford also runs the tenth-largest United Arts Fund in the nation, demonstrating its strong commitment to the arts.

“It’s truly amazing that the city of Hartford has such a vibrant cultural presence with a small population of 124,131 and a location so close to Boston and New York City. With Hartford being a home to many leading attractions, the city is able to offer a superior quality of life for residents and a great draw for visitors,” says Michael R. Kintner, campaign manager of the Hartford Image Project. “Special kudos to the Greater Hartford Arts Council for making an enormous contribution by helping to build one of the nation’s most vibrant art communities.”

***A Look at the Top 15 Attractions***

As Connecticut’s premier presenter of the performing arts, **The Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts** has delighted and inspired audiences for more than seven decades and plays a leading role in the state’s cultural life. The Bushnell presents major Broadway tours, symphony orchestras, family presentations, travel films, comedy, opera and dance. This nonprofit organization also is renowned for community programs, as well as being a leading educator and advocate of the arts.

With an annual roster of over 500 events and an annual audience of over 600,000, The Bushnell is a major economic driver for the Hartford region and the state of Connecticut. The number of annual events and attendance has increased by 50 percent with the opening of its \$45-million, 90,000-square-foot expansion. Bushnell Executive Director David Fay said, “Our hope is that this new building will introduce a broader audience to the arts and strengthen our ties to the total community.”

**Hartford Stage** is one of America’s most distinguished not-for-profit professional resident theaters. Established in 1963, the theater is internationally known for

entertaining audiences with a wide range of the best of world drama, from classics to provocative new works and neglected works from the past. The theater was founded to provide, in the words of its founding documents, "serious theater that probes beneath the surface and reveals the meaning of events and often the motives of men, theater that holds the mirror up to nature for both our amusement and our instruction; proven masterworks and contemporary works of merit whose primary purpose are cultural, artistic, entertaining and educational."

The theater has earned many of the nation's most distinguished awards, including a Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre, the Margo Jones Award for Development of New Works, OBIE awards, a New York Critics Circle award, a Dramatists Guild/CBS Award and an Elliot Norton Award, to name just a few.

**TheaterWorks** is commonly referred to as "Hartford's Off-Broadway" theater, and it has acquired the reputation for first-rate stagings of edgy plays that have enjoyed success in New York's smaller theaters. The theater also completed a major renovation, which has improved the seating and sightlines considerably.

Founded in 1942, **The Connecticut Opera** is the sixth-oldest professional opera company in the U.S. Its goal is to continue to elevate its artistic product, while at the same time reach out to more diverse audiences through imaginative programming and outreach efforts. In the mid-1970s, the opera's award-winning educational and touring company, Opera Express, was founded and, to date, has brought operatic programs to more than 3 million youths, seniors and disadvantaged citizens. During the early 1980s, The Connecticut Opera received national and international recognition through pioneer arena productions of "Aida" and "Turandot." Over the past few years, the opera has presented free operatic concerts in Bushnell Park.

**The Hartford Symphony Orchestra** (HSO), marking its 61<sup>st</sup> season in 2004-2005, is Connecticut's premier musical organization and is widely recognized as one of America's leading regional orchestras. The HSO believes passionately in the performance of live symphonic music and its value to diverse populations in the community. To that end, it has developed innovative programming with special appeal to young professionals, Latinos, African Americans and children, many of whom break down the "fourth wall" of the stage.

The HSO presents more than 60 concerts annually – from The Masterworks Series, Hartford Symphony POPS!, and Family Matinees at The Bushnell Center for the Performing Arts, to The Choral Collection, a series presented in collaboration with The Hartford Chorale and CONCORA, and the Talcott Mountain Music Festival in Simsbury. Highly talented resident musicians and a daring new musical director have helped the Orchestra reach its highest artistic level ever.

**Real Art Ways** is an edgy, alternative multi-disciplinary organization that presents and supports contemporary artists and their work, facilitates the creation of new work, and creatively engages and informs audiences and communities. It started in the 1970s during the boom of "alternativity" and has continued to grow and evolve with a national and international reputation. Visitors can enjoy first-run independent films; art exhibitions, artist talks and educational programs; concerts, workshops and talks on musical creativity; and public art projects in Hartford communities.

Established in 1842, the **Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art** is America's oldest public art museum. Named after the founder, arts patron Daniel Wadsworth (1771-1848), and after the Athenaeum in Rome (itself named for Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom), it was the first American museum to acquire works by Caravaggio, Frederic Church, Salvador Dalí, Joan Miró, Piet Mondrian, Balthus and Joseph Cornell – and to mount the first major Picasso retrospective in America. It also hosted the first American performance by Balanchine's new ballet company (now the New York City Ballet).

Today its Hudson River School landscapes, Old Master paintings, modernist masterpieces, Meissen and Sèvres porcelains, early American furniture and decorative arts, and MATRIX contemporary art shows are world-renowned. The museum also is home to the Amistad Foundation collections of African-American art and artifacts. The Wadsworth presents more than 15 special shows each year, many inspired by masterworks in the museum's holdings, while others are solo shows by emerging artists. A \$63-million renovation is underway to expand and restore the museum.

**The New Britain Museum of American Art's** founding in 1903 entitles the institution to be designated the first museum of strictly American art in the country. That year, a \$20,000 gift of gold bonds to the museum's former parent, the New Britain Institute, from industrialist John Butler Talcott, created funds to purchase "modern oil paintings." Subsequent purchases, with advice from New York museums and galleries, further defined "modern" to mean American works of art, now numbering more than 5,000. With particular strengths in colonial portraiture, the Hudson River School, American Impressionism, and the Ash Can School, not to mention the important mural series "The Arts of Life in America" by Thomas Hart Benton, the museum relies heavily on its permanent collection for exhibitions and programming, yet also displays a significant number of borrowed shows and work by emerging artists. The museum is building a 43,000-square-foot addition, slated to open in 2006.

The 36-room, 33,000-square-foot **Hill-Stead Museum** is one of America's finest examples of Colonial Revival domestic architecture. It was designed by Theodate Pope, Connecticut's sixth licensed female architect, as a retirement home for her parents. Today, visitors savor the site's rich art, architecture and landscape. Holdings include two Monet "Haystacks," as well as works by Degas, Cassat, Manet and Whistler. The museum also has a lively poetry program, including the Sunken Garden Poetry Festival featuring nationally recognized poets.

Literary legends also made Hartford their home. Mark Twain wrote some of his best-loved classics here in his 19-room Victorian mansion. Now called **The Mark Twain House & Museum**, it fosters an appreciation of the legacy of Mark Twain as one of the nation's defining cultural figures, and demonstrates the continuing relevance of his work, life and times. Designated a National Historic Landmark in 1963, the Mark Twain House has been preserved and is open to the public for guided tours.

In the backyard of Twain's beloved home is a new \$16.5-million, 33,000-square-foot Museum Center, which was designed by Robert A.M. Stern, founder of Robert A.M. Stern Architects and dean of the Yale School of Architecture. "With this new center, we are ensuring that Twain will remain indestructible in a perishable world," said John V. Boyer, executive director of The Mark Twain House & Museum. "We want his unique voice to remain a presence for future generations." The museum offers exhibitions, lecture series and special programs about Twain's writing and the literary elite of his time

– and draws more than 60,000 visitors annually from the U.S. and more than 70 countries.

Next door to Twain's home, the **Harriet Beecher Stowe Center** preserves and interprets the author's Hartford home and the Center's historic collections to create a forum for vibrant discussion of her life and work, and to inspire individuals to embrace and emulate her commitment to social justice by influencing positive social change. The Center is on the Connecticut Freedom Trail and the Connecticut Women's Heritage Trail. Its Visitors Center and two late-19<sup>th</sup>-century houses are open for tours and provide an intimate glimpse into the life of the author of "Uncle Tom's Cabin."

For contemporary music and sports, Hartford is home to three major venues. The **Meadow Music Center**, a 30,000-seat indoor-outdoor theater showcases leading rock, pop and country music. The 16,500-seat **Hartford Civic Center Coliseum** continues to operate as the region's premier indoor athletic and concert hall, hosting Hartford Wolf Pack hockey and UConn men's and women's basketball games, and major music attractions, such as the Rolling Stones, Billy Joel and Elton John. **Rentschler Field**, an open-air stadium with 40,000 seats, opened in 2003 and accommodates the University of Connecticut's Division 1A football team and hosts various athletic events and large-scale concerts. The \$92-million stadium on 8.5 acres is one of the cornerstones of economic development in the city.

Hartford's waterside location is a major feature with new developments. **Riverfront Recapture**, a private, non-profit organization, has been leading the effort to restore public access to the Connecticut River in metro Hartford with \$60 million to date. Riverfront Plaza in downtown Hartford offers a variety of free festivals and performances from spring through fall, which attract tens of thousands to the river. A regional network of parks and public recreational facilities has been taking shape on the new Riverfront with improvements becoming available each year.

The new public recreational facilities also have made the Riverfront a popular destination, drawing tourists, competitors and spectators from throughout the Northeast and the rest of the nation. Riverfront Recapture offers a wide range of recreational activity for the public, including rowing, cruises, fishing tournaments, festivals, Dragon Boat races, concerts and youth programs. Additionally, a major sculpture park is being developed.

At Adriaen's Landing, \$500 million in mixed-use development is underway adjacent to Riverfront Plaza in downtown Hartford. The project includes a convention center, a hotel, housing and a retail/entertainment complex.

### ***For More Information on Arts and Entertainment***

As Hartford grows into a 24/7/365 living city, it offers dynamic and vibrant action, keeping residents entertained and ensuring excitement for both business and leisure visitors. An in-depth overview of the arts and entertainment scene and a comprehensive arts and entertainment calendar in the Hartford region are available at [www.hartford.com](http://www.hartford.com) or at the **Greater Hartford Arts Council** (GHAC) Web site and at [www.connectthedots.org](http://www.connectthedots.org).

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