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16th Biennial AEC CONFERENCE ON SOUTHERN LITERATURE Grows to Feature More Events, More Writers

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn.— **Roy Blount**, Southern writer and humorist and frequent guest on NPR's "Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me," will deliver a keynote address at the **2011 AEC Conference on Southern Literature**. Also among the 51 distinguished authors at the April book festival will be **Charles Frazier**, author of the literary masterpiece-turned film *Cold Mountain*; novelist **Richard Bausch**, 2010 winner of the prestigious Dayton Peace Prize; and celebrated short story writer **Elizabeth Spencer**, subject of a documentary that will premiere at the event.

Hosted by the **Chattanooga Arts & Education Council (AEC)**, the Conference, which distinguished man of letters Louis Rubin calls "the leading literary event in the South," will be held **April 14-16**. All events are held at the historic Tivoli Theatre located in the heart of downtown Chattanooga.

According to AEC Executive Director Susan Robinson, the 2011 Conference has been expanded to include more events, more writers and more community outreach than ever before. "We will have one of the strongest programs in the history of the conference this spring," says Robinson.

The traditionally two-and-a-half-day event will be expanded to three full days, kicking off on Thursday, April 14, with the local premiere of *Landscapes of the Heart: The Elizabeth Spencer Story*, complete with a conversation between Spencer and the film director Kevin McCarthy.

"Book Notes" – a new after-party event – will take place immediately after novelist **Dorothy Allison's** evening address on Friday, April 15. Admission to "Book Notes" is included with Conference registration, offering attendees a rare opportunity to mingle with the guest speakers while enjoying live music in a casual setting.

51 Conference participants include Lee Smith, Jill McCorkle, Ron Rash, Percival Everett, Josephine Humphreys, Ann Patchett, Tony Earley, Beth Henley and Natasha Trethewey, speaking on topics such as "A Writer's Response to Environmental Threats," "Southern Politics and Southern Literature," and "The Ultimate Conflict— Writing About War."

Other highlights of the Conference include the presentation of the Lifetime Achievement Award to **Ernest J. Gaines** (*A Lesson Before Dying*, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*) and a special tribute to **Harper Lee**.

"We are delighted to have a tribute to Harper Lee on the program to mark the 50th anniversary of *To Kill a Mockingbird* that occurred last year," says Robinson.

Community outreach has also been expanded, with events occurring around city the entire week of April 11. Writers will visit with Chattanooga high schools, book clubs and teachers. A local gallery will display paintings by **Clyde Edgerton** and **Louis Rubin**.

Since 1981, the Conference on Southern Literature has been a destination for book lovers from around the country. This biennial literary festival brings hundreds of avid readers and writers together for three days of lectures, panel discussions, readings and fellowship.

What makes this Conference unique is its partnership with the **Fellowship of Southern Writers (FSW)**, an organization of the South's most outstanding writers that holds its biennial meetings in conjunction with the Conference and houses its archives in the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Library.

Founded in 1987 by 26 renowned Southern writers, the FSW recognizes and encourages literature by honoring outstanding literary achievement with awards and prizes, by encouraging young writers and by recognizing distinction in writing through election to membership in the FSW. The novelists, poets, historians, playwrights, critics and editors who founded the FSW include **Robert Penn Warren, Eudora Welty, Walker Percy, Cleanth Brooks, William Styron, Louis Rubin** and **Shelby Foote**.

"By somehow cornering the Fellowship of Southern Writers, the leaders of the AEC performed one of the great literary coups of the 20th century," says **Clyde Edgerton**, bestselling-novelist, Fellowship member and Conference speaker.

"Together in one place these literary giants meet every other year. They talk, read, perform, conspire, celebrate, and also listen to readers. What a blessing, what a gift for those who participate in the art of literature as readers and writers.

"I love coming to Chattanooga because it's one of the few places on earth where I feel enveloped in art and 'mission' and tradition," says Edgerton. "This is because of the way the AEC plans the literary conference and, all the while, feeding literature to citizens and school children while the conference is going on."

The AEC, a non-profit organization that began as the Adult Education Council, is the only organization still in existence of 12 pilot agencies founded by a Ford Foundation grant in 1952. In 1983, the organization changed its name to the Arts & Education Council to more accurately reflect its outreach in Chattanooga to all members of the community.

Conference events, readings and panel discussions are open to the public. For more information or to register, visit SouthernLitConference.com or call 1-800-267-4232 to request a brochure.

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