



Speech by Rip Rapson:

## **Kresge Invests \$8.8M in Local Arts and Arts Organizations**

*Announcement at Detroit Institute of Arts reception.*

October 16, 2008

Welcome everyone. I am Rip Rapson, president of The Kresge Foundation. I am delighted by the turnout tonight. Press conferences and receptions such as this are new for Kresge. We are, as most of you know, a national, private foundation located in metropolitan Detroit. Sebastian Kresge, a longtime Detroit native who built our nation's first chain of five-and-ten-cent stores – the S.S. Kresge stores – established the foundation in 1924.

Here tonight are several members of the Kresge family – Katherine Lutey and her sister Susan Drewes, both members of our board of trustees, as well as Cynthia Kresge. I can also see a number of current and former trustees and many Kresge grantees. There are representatives from the arts, economic development, corporate and philanthropic communities. We have Councilman Joanne Watson representing the city of Detroit, and many members of the press in attendance. Thank you all for coming.

I am a relative newcomer to Detroit. When I arrived a couple of years ago, the reality of Detroit was a powerful, welcome surprise. It is a magnificent, muscular and proud city. On my first day at the foundation, I was told that it was once called the Paris of the Midwest. It is clear why. From Pierre L'Enfant's masterful layout of the city streets, to the extensive collection of Art Deco buildings, its vibrant cultural traditions, to its proud claims of birthing the American middle class, it is a city that has been defined and redefined in ever-wider cycles of aspiration and creativity. As we look to this future, those qualities can again define a trajectory of hope, of promise, of opportunity.

Two years ago, the Kresge board of trustees gave us the go-ahead to participate meaningfully and directly in setting that trajectory. We have identified five ways we hope to do that:

- By promoting a robust regional economy,
- By offering incentives to expanded investment in a vibrant downtown,
- By strengthening Detroit's neighborhoods,
- By protecting the region's environmental and natural resources, and
- By supporting a thriving arts and cultural community.

Although no one of these objectives is more important than another, we know a vibrant arts community is essential if our other objectives are to be realized.

The arts matter to every dimension of community life. In his book "Art Matters," Sir John Tusa, the recently retired managing director of the Barbican Centre, the largest performing arts center in Europe, framed this slightly differently. He said:

"The arts matter because they are universal; because they are nonmaterial; because they deal with daily experience in a transforming way; because they question the way we look at the world; because they offer different explanations of that world; because they link us to our past and open the door to the future; because they work beyond and outside routine categories; because they take us out of ourselves; because they make order out of disorder and stir up the stagnant; because they offer a shared experience rather than an isolated one; because they encourage the imagination, and attempt the pointless; because they offer beauty and confront us with the fact of ugliness; because they suggest explanations but no solutions; because they present a vision of integration rather than disintegration; because they force us to think about the difference between the good, the bad, the false and the true.

"The arts matter because they embrace, express and define the soul of civilization. A nation without arts would be a nation that had stopped talking to itself, stopped dreaming and had lost interest in the past and lacked curiosity about the future."

So, too, a city. But we are here tonight to say that it won't happen here. Not on our watch. Tonight, on behalf of The Kresge Foundation, I am honored to announce an \$8.8 million investment in individual artists and arts and cultural organizations in Wayne, Macomb and Oakland counties. This investment has four parts.

First, to advance the art forms and professional careers of artists from the visual, performing and literary arts, we are providing fellowships of \$25,000 each to individual artists living and working in the tri-county area. In 2009, we will award 18 Kresge Artist Fellowships. In 2010, we will award another 18 fellowships.

Second, we will launch, later this year, an annual Eminent Artist Award to recognize an exceptional artist for his or her professional achievement and contributions to the cultural community. Accompanied by a \$50,000 award, this award will both honor an individual of the highest excellence and serve to call attention to the role of cultural leadership in a particular discipline.

Third, we are providing unrestricted, multiyear operating support to small, medium and large arts and cultural organizations in order to help them achieve long-term sustainability. This is an investment without strings. We awarded 53 organizations arts-support grants in late 2007. A new cohort of recipients will be notified later this month.

And fourth, we will search out ways to strengthen the infrastructure that serves the cultural community – the Cultural Alliance, ArtServe Michigan and other organizations that are our cultural connective tissue. Although these investments are through 2010, our commitment will not end there. We need to tend to an arts ecosystem in metropolitan Detroit that, while rich in diversity and assets, is desperately underfunded and underappreciated. That act of tending is a long-term imperative, requiring an ever-expanding group of partners – public, private and philanthropic. We hope that our actions tonight start in motion a process of building that ever-widening circle of understanding and support.

In that spirit, I have asked three of our partners to speak briefly tonight. Tania McGee is the executive director of the Sphinx Organization, which is a 2007 recipient of an Arts Support grant.

Richard Rogers is president of the College for Creative Studies. The college is administering the Kresge Artist Fellowships and the Kresge Eminent Artist Award.

And Randy Paschke is the board chair of ArtServe Michigan. ArtServe will be providing individual professional development services for the Kresge Artist Fellows.

### **Closing remarks**

Thank you Tania, Rick and Randy. I appreciate your enthusiastic comments.

Before I close, I want to recognize the Detroit Institute of Arts and its bold move to completely reorganize its collection in order to make their significant treasures more intellectually accessible to a greater swath of the population.

And we are so pleased to have enjoyed the Harvey Reed Quartet. Harvey Reed is on the piano, with John Douglas on trumpet, Ibrahim Jones on bass and Butter Hawkins on the drums. Many of you have heard these musicians perform at the International Jazz Festival and at Orchestra Hall. It was terrific to have them play together here tonight.

Artists and arts and cultural institutions elevate our awareness and cultivate conditions that nurture and reward new ideas, unexpected perspectives and fresh thinking. They speak to us at an emotional level – uniting us, provoking us, challenging us and inspiring us. They help us to interpret our reality and expand our spirit.

In closing, I want to be clear – Kresge Arts in Detroit is not about The Kresge Foundation. It is about our arts community and their importance to our region – to all of us.

We put our name on this effort to lend the wholehearted endorsement of The Kresge Foundation as a champion and advocate. We want to take a stand and send a message – art matters.

In a few years' time, we hope the diversity of support for the arts approaches the world-class and world-encompassing diversity that is the arts in Detroit.

Thank you and good night.