RAD and GPAC LAUNCH NEW EFFORT TO IMPROVE ARTS AND CULTURE ACCESSIBILITY

PITTSBURGH—The region’s leading arts advocacy organization and a leading arts and culture funder today urged Allegheny County’s arts and culture presenters to meet the increasing demand for accommodations by utilizing shared technology and equipment. By doing so, according to the Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council (GPAC) and the Allegheny Regional Asset District (RAD), Pittsburgh will continue to be a leader in making arts and culture enjoyable for all.

At an event jointly sponsored by GPAC and RAD attended by nearly 100 representatives of arts and culture organizations, GPAC and RAD underscored their joint commitment to accessibility by demonstrating a new portable assistive audio technology system available at no cost for cultural organizations in the County. The technology can: amplify sound for those with hearing loss, provide audio description for visual content for people who are blind, and provide simultaneous translation into other languages. The equipment was made possible by a $14,638 grant from RAD to GPAC earlier in June.

“Quite simply, accessibility is possibility. By making our assets accessible to all, it is then possible for everyone to enjoy a jazz concert, a dance recital, a lecture, an exhibit, a baseball game, even a web site,” said Dusty Elias Kirk, RAD Board Chair. “RAD is pleased to make this grant to GPAC, and other shared resource funds to the community, as this makes possible greater participation, which in turn stretches the taxpayer’s dollars.”

“We’re thankful to RAD for supporting the collective work by arts nonprofits like City Theatre, the Pittsburgh Opera, FISA Foundation and many other organizations across the region to make the arts more accessible to people with disabilities,” said Mitch Swain, GPAC CEO. “We thank our members and partners who have been working together for the past several years to make this possible.”

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At the same meeting, the two organizations detailed a variety of accessibility equipment that is available to be easily shared by the arts and culture community. These include:

- Portable Assistive Listening System (two), hosted by GPAC and City Theatre (funded by RAD)
- Open Captioning Equipment hosted by City Theatre
- Portable Wheelchair Ramp hosted by Attack Theatre (funded by RAD)
- Portable Wheelchair Lift hosted by The Pittsburgh Cultural Trust (funded by RAD)
- Sensory-Friendly Performance and Event Supplies hosted by the Children’s Museum

According to a recent GPAC assessment, much of the assistive technology in local performances is outdated and failing as it was purchased and installed after the implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1992. Cultural organizations without dedicated assistive technology in their spaces, in the venues they rent or in nontraditional venues like parks, have relied on a shared, portable audio description system that, after ten years of consistent and increasing use, has stopped working. At the same time, however, smaller organizations that provide regular programmatic accommodations are experiencing steadily increasing demand for these services. “The demand for accommodations has outstripped our regional capacity to provide them. Upgrading the shared technology allows arts and cultural organizations to satisfy the growing demand for programmatic accommodations by increasing the number of accommodated arts and cultural experiences offered in Allegheny County,” said Swain.

The GPAC_RAD gathering comes five weeks in advance of the foremost arts and disability conference that will take place in downtown Pittsburgh. The Leadership Exchange in Arts and Disability (LEAD) conference, taking place August 1 - 6, 2016, is an immersive opportunity for staff members at organizations throughout the region and nation to learn about a wide range of content related to welcoming, accommodating, and including people with all types of disabilities in public programs and venues. For more information, visit www.pittsburgharts council.org/lead.

RAD supports and finances regional assets in the areas of libraries, parks and recreation, cultural, sports and civic facilities and programs. While RAD has provided capital grants for many years to improve physical access at the regional assets (elevators, ramps, etc.), since 2014, RAD’s initiative Regional Assets Are for Everyone has encourage the assets to make additional accommodations and provided grant requirements and funds to do so. RAD will provide $96.9 million in grants to 93 regional assets. www.radworkshere.org

GPAC is the leading voice for arts and culture across the Greater Pittsburgh region, driving the political, financial and professional support for the sector. GPAC has worked to increase access for people with disabilities to arts and culture in the Pittsburgh region since January of 2011 through its Increasing Access to Pittsburgh Arts and Culture initiative. Its accessibility work has helped local arts managers acquire the knowledge and skills to welcome people with disabilities as audience, as artists, as staff and as volunteers. www.pittsburgharts council.org