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**FST RECEIVES \$500,000 LEGACY GIFT FROM THE MURIEL O'NEIL FUND
FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS OF THE
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF SARASOTA COUNTY**

(Sarasota, FL) — Florida Studio Theatre (FST) is pleased to announce the generous gift of \$500,000 from the Muriel O'Neil Fund for the Performing Arts of the Community Foundation of Sarasota County. With this gift, an endowed fund of the Community Foundation of Sarasota County was established to underwrite the Mainstage Series. The Fund will also support renovation of producing offices and construction of a new costume studio.

The amount of \$200,000 will be used for the renovation of and improvements to the Arnold Simonsen and Ronda Montminy Theatre Wing and the Roberta Leventhal Sudakoff Theatre Wing. The remaining \$300,000 will be used as an endowment fund to underwrite FST's Winter Mainstage Series into perpetuity.

Muriel O'Neil was not only an avid fan of FST's productions, but also a great friend of the theatre. In addition to many years of attending productions at FST, her dedication and selfless hours of volunteer work clearly demonstrated her passion and appreciation for the art of theatre. Through a relationship with the Community Foundation of Sarasota County, Gertrude Hight, M.D., sister to Muriel, established this gift to ensure Muriel's legacy would live on and support an area of the community her sister cherished.

"We feel so fortunate to be able to steward both Muriel and Gertrude's generous legacy through this gift," says Roxie Jerde, President and CEO of the Community Foundation of Sarasota County. "It's clear that Muriel had such a passion for our local arts organizations, and Florida Studio Theatre was one that sat so closely to her heart. We're pleased that Muriel's name will be remembered through this endowed gift that will impact so many people for years to come."

Work has already begun on FST's Costume Studio, which is housed in the Arnold Simonsen and Ronda Montminy Theatre Wing, with a projected completion in the spring of 2018. Renovations of FST's producing offices in the Sudakoff Theatre Wing are scheduled to begin this upcoming fall.

"I first met Muriel in New York City when I was visiting Arthur Gelb, the head of the New York Times Foundation," said FST's Producing Artistic Director, Richard Hopkins. "She was his much beloved assistant. Everyone at the Times loved her. Muriel was very influential in promoting FST to Mr. Gelb and the Times Foundation, resulting in our first gift from that venerable institution. That was only the beginning of our long friendship. She spent many hours volunteering and ushering for countless FST productions. She cared about the theatre and the experience each patron had walking through our doors. This legacy gift allows for someone who was very important to our theatre, to remain a part of it. Through her gift and the expansion opportunities now made possible, Muriel will continue to be a part of every production we bring to the stage."

Managing Director Rebecca Hopkins concludes with words of gratitude, stating, "Muriel O'Neil was a very special woman. She used to eat lunch on the back deck with staff members and my greatest memory of her was her sense of fun. She was up for anything. She would attend our Old Bags Luncheon every year and loved the games. She always had the most surprising items in her purse. She won 'Most Interesting' more than once. This gift means so much because it is in memory of Muriel. When I first got the call about all this, I was immediately filled with the warmth of her spirit. She understood the theatre down to its core."

Hopkins continued: "Every year, FST produces numerous shows with guest designers and artists in residence for these shows. Our costume studio is currently in the same building as our administrative producing offices, which, while convenient, does not provide designers and the shop manager with the necessary space to design, craft, and alter costumes. This gift will allow FST's production staff more space to let their inspiration and creativity run boundless, and free up space in our producing offices for departments that are expanding every year."

ABOUT COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF SARASOTA COUNTY

The Community Foundation of Sarasota County is a public charity founded in 1979 by the Southwest Florida Estate Planning Council as a resource for caring individuals and the causes they support, enabling them to make a charitable impact on the community.

Since our founding, the Community Foundation has been making the important connection between individuals' personal memories, passions, dreams and the fulfillment of their charitable goals. We help create permanent charitable funds of everlasting impact. These funds ensure that people of vision will have an enduring influence on the life of their community and the charitable causes they hold dear.

With assets of over \$333 million in more than 1,400 charitable funds, the Community Foundation awarded grants and scholarships totaling \$33 million dollars this past year in the areas of education, health and human services, the arts, animal welfare, and the environment. Since our founding, more than \$217 million has been invested back into the community through grants and scholarships.

Additionally, our support of local nonprofits goes deeper than the millions in grants we award each year. Our Community Investment team builds the capacity of local organizations to ensure donors' charitable dollars make an even bigger impact through our nonprofit services, workshops, and volunteer consultants.

Beyond our service to donors and nonprofit organizations, the Community Foundation also partners with local professional advisors in the region to provide highly personal and impact-orientated support, information, and expertise on planned giving and estate planning.

ABOUT FLORIDA STUDIO THEATRE

Known as Sarasota's Contemporary Theatre, Florida Studio Theatre was founded in 1973 by Artist Jon Spelman. Starting out as a small touring company, FST traveled to places such as migrant camps and prisons. The company then acquired the former Woman's Club building, becoming the first permanent venue. Shortly after Producing Artistic Director Richard Hopkins arrived, the building was purchased and renamed The Keating Theatre. In the years that followed, Florida Studio Theatre established itself as a major force in American Theatre, presenting contemporary theatre in its five theatre venues: the Keating Theatre, the Gompertz Theatre, the Parisian style Goldstein Cabaret and John C. Court Cabaret, and Bowne's Lab Theatre.

Even with its growth, Florida Studio Theatre remains firmly committed to making the arts accessible and affordable to a broad-based audience. FST develops theatre that speaks to our living, evolving, and dynamically changing world. As FST grows and expands, it continues to provide audiences with challenging, contemporary drama and innovative programs.

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