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Kennedy Center Partners



FINAL SCENE: Swamp Gravy Brings a Taste of Rural Revitalization to the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

Act One: Economic Development

As the line in the movie *Field of Dreams* proclaims, "If you build it, they will come." In Colquitt, Georgia, they just keep coming.

The they in this case are politicians, historians and tourists who come to Colquitt

to see Swamp Gravy, an extraordinary theater performance that has catalyzed community involvement and created a new sense of pride for the small town. The citizens of Colquitt, Georgia have enjoyed watching their sleepy community awake to a rural revitalization driven by this group of community performers.

s with NAPE to Present *Swamp Gravy*

Professionally written, directed and designed, *Swamp Gravy* bases its productions on local oral histories recorded by community members. The group's name comes from a regional fish-camp dish made — like the play's stories — from things on hand. Featured in the magazine, *Southern Living*, as well as in numerous theater publications, *Swamp Gravy* has been designated as Georgia's official Folk Life Play by the state legislature, and the group performed during the Summer Olympic Games in Atlanta as part of the 1996 Cultural Olympiad.

"The stories told in *Swamp Gravy* help animate our region's heritage by preserving the knowledge of the past in a stunning production that combines drama, song, dance, and spectacle," the cast and crew of 100 will tell you.

In a recent article in *Initiatives*, the newsletter of the Institute for Cultural Affairs (ICA), Transformation Consultant Bill Grow explains how *Swamp Gravy* has transformed the town and enabled citizens to "reconnect with their roots."

"A veritable 'culture industry' has sprouted in this little town, where 10 percent of the residents are now active members of the local arts council," Grow writes. "A painter, a dramatist, and a musician have recently moved into town. A Creek Indian museum with a highly-reputed collection of Native American artifacts has relocated from Florida to Colquitt."

In the article, an ICA facilitator of *Swamp*

Gravy describes the transition. "What's really going on with *Swamp Gravy* is a ritual of reconciliation, in contrast to the prevalent onslaught of the rituals of suspicion," said Nan Grow. "It is a liturgical act of recalling the journey of a people, of bonding them in a shared creating, and of anticipating a hopeful future."

Not only has *Swamp Gravy* transformed citizen's attitudes, it has literally transformed the town. An abandoned warehouse is now *Swamp Gravy's* renovated theater, Cotton Hall; a restored antebellum inn is "the" place to dine before or after the play; area merchants are delighted that tourists continue to travel to Colquitt; and construction continues to create new jobs. In addition, the *Swamp Gravy* Institute has been created to assist in the replication phase of *Swamp Gravy*. A similar program called *Scrap Metal* is already underway in Chicago.

Substantial results for a town of 2,000.

"We occasionally hear how a tragic death brings new life to a community. In this small rural southern town, it is a celebration of life that has catalyzed revitalization," Bill Grow concludes.

Swamp Gravy Hits the Road

As part of the first annual NAPE Reddig Endowment Gala, *Swamp Gravy* will bring its original songs and choreography with traditional music and dance to the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC on Friday, November 22, 1996, from 7:00 p.m.-8:30 p.m.

Attendees will feel like they are part of the performance as *Swamp Gravy* actors move around the room telling the story of Zula B. Toole, a one-room school teacher who later became one of the nation's first female newspaper editors.

Co-sponsored by the Kennedy Center Education Division, the Gala is a major initiative to build the NAPE Reddig Endowment Fund. Proceeds from the Gala will be applied to the Elizabeth and Edward Reddig Endowment Fund, in support of the National Association of Partners in Education. The Endowment was created by NAPE Advisory Council member, Dr. Sally Reddig Schulze, in memory of her parents, Elizabeth and Edward Reddig. The Reddigs were leaders in the Cleveland, Ohio, business community and strong proponents of quality education for all students.

As of September 1996, the following corporations have pledged support for the event: Amoco Textiles and Fibres, Crystal Gateway Marriott, Home Savings of America, Honeywell Inc., Lamson & Sessions, Shell Oil Company, Restaurant Associates, TRW Inc., and USA TODAY.

Tickets for the Gala are \$50 each on a first-come, first-served basis. Three special categories of corporate, foundation and individual support are also available. Contributor \$500 to \$999; Benefactor \$1,000 to \$4,999; and Patron \$5,000+. For more information or to purchase a ticket, contact NAPE at (703) 836-4880.