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Arts groups gather, hear federal official announce 19 grants

BY BEVERLY CRAWFORD
News correspondent

TUSCALOOSA—The newly confirmed chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, Livingston Biddle, spoke Friday at the first-ever gathering of seven Alabama arts groups. And he brought good news.

In the quiet, self-effacing manner that typifies him, Biddle followed a brief address which stressed federal-local cooperation and arts-humanities togetherness with the announcement of a "first record" 19 grants totalling \$147,750 to be awarded in Alabama in fiscal 1978. Six of the grants will go to programs of the Alabama State Council on the Arts and Humanities.

OTHERS OF interest locally are:

—\$15,000 to the Jefferson County Committee for Economic Opportunity to support productions, mini-classes in dance and drama and a training program in music for youth.

—\$10,000 to the Alabama School of Fine Arts for continued support of a training program in music for youth.

—\$5,000 to UAB for support of a modern dance instructor and an administrator for the dance program.

—\$5,000 for the Birmingham Creative Dance Group Inc. to support performances and workshops for the community and movement classes for senior citizens and handicapped youth.

BIDDLE'S ADDRESS opened a three-day conference that marks the first time seven state arts groups have met to consider arts in the state as they are and as they could be in the future.

Biddle, asked in a brief question-answer session if he would describe himself as eccentric, admitted that the description might be considered apt, at least in his native Philadelphia, where he grew up in the lap of the "eastern establishment."

He proposed the structure of what is now the National Endowment when he worked as an aide to U.S. Sen. Claiborne Pell, D-R.I.

His commitment to speak in Tuscaloosa was made before his Senate confirmation as Endowment chairman, and he told the Alabama group that his visit was the first by a state group.

came out of a sense of affection and sympathy for your undertakings," he said, describing Alabama's arts program as "one of the most effective, efficient and imaginative programs in the country."

BIDDLE DESCRIBED his perception of the federal government's role in the arts as that of a catalyst. "We are thinking of a partnership," he said.

He said the arts have become "somewhat polarized," with the emergence of words like "elitist" and "populist" to describe two conflicting approaches. The elitist view, he said, would have arts dependent on institutions, while in the populist view, arts would flourish at the grassroots level.

"When I was being confirmed, I told the Senate I would like to build bridges and not further fracture that division," said Biddle. "And if elitism is construed to mean 'the best' and populism to mean 'access,' I would propose 'access to the best.'"

"We have to view the arts as a whole, and with a oneness that will bring together the segments that are now believed to be squabbling."

BIDDLE SAID precedent-setting leadership is coming from arts councils in the states. "It is up to the government," he said, "to respond with a similar kind of unity."

He praised the Tuscaloosa conference as "a wonderful step forward, in keeping with my theme of partnership and the unified approach."

In addition to healing any schisms between the arts and the humanities which linger, it is Biddle's goal to improve cooperation between federal and state governments. To that end, he said, he hopes to establish an deputy or assistant chairman position within the National Endowment. That position, he hopes, would "interface with state and local arts organizations."

"I look to a new era for the arts with your help," he told the gathering. "And I pledge you all my very best effort."

IN HONOR OF Biddle's visit to Alabama, Gov. George Wallace declared him an honorary lieutenant colonel in the Alabama state militia. And the week of Nov. 14-20 was declared Arts Week.

Other organizations awarded National Endowment grants for the humanities this year are:

—\$5,000 to the Alabama Filmmakers Co-op in Huntsville to support production and post-production facilities for independent filmmakers.

—\$2,500 to the Alabama Shakespeare Festival in Anniston for salaries of the company's administrative and artistic personnel.

—\$15,000 to Culture in Black and White in Mobile for a free training program in art, ceramics, dance, drama, music, photography and creative writing for culturally deprived youngsters.

—\$10,000 to the City of Florence for assistance in designing an adaptation of a brick Georgian home and auxiliary buildings to serve the needs of the Florence City Arts Commission as identified in a survey conducted under a City Spirit grant.

—\$5,000 to the Huntsville Ballet School for classical ballet training for high school students.

—\$10,000 to the Macon County Commission in Tuskegee for support of an instruction and training program in visual arts, dance and music for Macon County.

—\$6,000 to the Mobile Opera Guild for the engagement of guest artistic

personnel who will also act as consultants to the Guild.

The six grants to ASCAH programs are:

—\$7,500 to support a program to provide training demonstrations and workshops by professional artists in prisons.

—\$10,000 to add two teachers to the music program for the disadvantaged in Tuscaloosa County.

—\$10,000 to assist the Wiregrass Sacred Harp Singers in a training program for young people.

FROM THE literature program, two grants announced are:

—\$5,000 to support a writer in residence at Bryce Hospital.

—\$3,000 to support a poet in residence in Alabama prisons.

The sixth ASCAH grant provides \$8,750 for the continued support of a museum coordinator to promote educational workshops and seminars for professionals, college instructors and teachers in the state.

Also in the literature program, creative writing fellowship grants of \$7,500 were awarded to William Cobb of Montevallo and Carolynne B. Scott of Springville.