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COMMUNITY FOUNDATION AND VILLAGE SQUARE RECEIVE KNIGHT GRANT TO REVITALIZE TOWN SQUARE

Tallahassee, Fla., – The Community Foundation of North Florida, in partnership with The Village Square, recently received a \$72,000 challenge grant to revitalize the dialogue among the city’s diverse residents around community issues. The project entitled “We the People” will create a 21st Century virtual and face-to-face public square by offering unique town hall forums, in addition to constructive online engagement through a community problem-solving Wiki. The project’s goal is to renew Tallahassee’s marketplace of ideas where good solutions rise from an informed citizenship, and where abundant information can be channeled into constructive results.

The grant was awarded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation as a part of the Knight Community Information Challenge. The challenge is a five-year, \$24 million initiative to help community and place-based foundations find creative ways to use new media and technology to keep residents informed and engaged. The Community Foundation of North Florida is one of 24 community and place-based foundations recently selected to receive a grant in this highly competitive national grant contest.

“Access to information is essential for the quality of life in our community and for providing resources to help increase access for all citizens,” said Joy Watkins, President of the Community Foundation of North Florida. “Through this grant contest, Knight is challenging communities across the country to respond to the changing media landscape and ensure that residents have access to information. We are pleased to be able to support Knight’s work in our area, strengthen The Village Square’s endeavors, and increase access to information for citizens in our community.”

“Information is as important to a thriving democracy as clean air, jobs and schools. As leaders, local foundations are taking the initiative to meet those information needs,” said Trabian Shorters, Knight Foundation’s vice president for communities, who leads the challenge. “This project and others like it help ensure that everyone has the information necessary to make decisions about their governments and their lives.”

“The Village Square appreciates this opportunity to partner with the Community Foundation and Knight Foundation,” said Liz Joyner, Executive Director of The Village Square. “The Village Square’s mission is to encourage civil dialogue about local concerns and to ensure the people of our community receive factual information about those issues. Our work is right in line with what Knight Foundation is trying to accomplish. This grant will enhance our work by allowing us to get more information to a broader audience.”

Allan Katz co-founded The Village Square in 2006 with Tallahassee Community College President Dr. Bill Law. “Rapid changes in the way we communicate with each other and the hyper-partisan environment nationally have left communities less able to deal with local and state issues constructively,” said Katz, a former Tallahassee city commissioner who has been nominated by President Obama to become U.S. Ambassador to Portugal. “The best ideas in a democracy come from engaged and informed citizenship,” said Law. “This project will bring more light and less heat to problems ahead of us.”

“The social glue of communities has changed substantially over the last 40 years,” said Joyner. “Civic clubs and service organizations used to knit us together to form a geographical community whose bond was greater than political difference. But ideology-based groups are on the rise and, as a result, our unique made-in-America social fabric is fraying.”

“We the People” will expand The Village Square programming on local and state issues through varying formats like “Dinner at the Square,” “Take-out Tuesday,” “Politics, Partisans & A Pint” and “Sunday Night Supper Club,” intentionally reviving community between people with diverse perspectives.

To compliment these face-to-face forums, the project will have an online component: A Wiki-based online problem-solving tool, where neighbors can collaborate to assemble relevant facts and resources for addressing local, state and national issues. “We hope to create an online community that defies the trend toward angry likeminded groups; where people will treat each other with the same respect as they do when they see neighbors at the grocery store or at their mailbox,” said Joyner.

“This grant presents a great opportunity for our organization and our community,” said Joyner. We have a lot of work ahead of us to raise the \$50,000 match required by Knight and to implement the details of the project. Our hope is that the community will rally with us to raise the matching funds and help us improve the vitality of our community by increasing access to civil and factual information in our community.”

To learn more about the project or to get involved with The Village Square, please go to www.tothevillagesquare.org or contact Liz Joyner at liz@tothevillagesquare.org or (850) 264-8785.

About the Community Foundation of North Florida

The Community Foundation of North Florida is a nonprofit public charity serving the 10-County Big Bend area by facilitating and promoting charitable giving and strengthening nonprofit organizations. The Foundation helps people give in perpetuity to their favorite charities and helps nonprofit organizations with grants, education and endowment building expertise. For more information, contact Joy Watkins, President, at jwatkins@cfnf.org or 850-222-2899 ext. 104.

About the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation advances journalism in the digital age and invests in the vitality of communities where the Knight brothers owned newspapers. Knight Foundation focuses on projects that promote community engagement and lead to transformational change. For more, visit www.knightfoundation.org.

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