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Media Alert for Theatre Editors and Journalists

Special Challenge Grant Announced at Dedication ceremony for the Bette Aitken *theater arts* Center

Attendees at this special event included major capital campaign donors,
city and state officials, and community leaders



February 18, 2015 in Anaheim, CA ... On Saturday, February 7, Chance Theater's Board of Directors, staff and resident artists held a special event to honor their major capital campaign donors and give them a literal standing ovation. The guest of honor at the event was community leader, Bette Aitken, whose husband Wylie surprised her last year with a \$250,000 gift to the Chance to name the theater's new home after her.

A few of the Chance's biggest supporters had their own surprise in store tonight and thanks to them, the completion of the "Bold New Home" capital campaign feels much more within reach.

The evening's festivities began with a champagne reception where friends of the Chance and VIP guests received backstage tours. The official ceremony took place in front of the theater arts center on a stage setup underneath the Chance's new marquee. Chance founding artist Erika C. Miller and veteran performer Camryn Zelinger started the party with a musical duet, accompanied by Chance resident artist Robyn Manion.

Guests next heard from South Coast Repertory's Co-Founding Artistic Director Martin Benson, who spoke about discovering the Chance years ago and how he was astonished at the quality of work. "The talent was so profound and

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the choice of plays were so interesting and vital... in fact, that might be a great word to describe this theater. There's a vitality here that is indescribable." Benson joined the Chance's Board of Directors in 2012.

The Chance's new Board Chair, Scott B. Well stepped up to the microphone next to acknowledge the dedicated work of the entire Board of Directors, the staff, resident artists and the donors to the capital campaign. He made a special acknowledgement of immediate past Chair, Mary Kay Fyda-Mar and his wife (and fellow board member) Georgia Well, who has been overseeing the construction process of the new space with the staff.

"This is the coolest, hippest theater I've ever seen," said Anaheim Mayor Tom Tait before he presented certificates of recognition to the naming donors for the capital campaign. "There's a few people who really went above and beyond and none of this would happen without these folks." The certificates, which were signed by the entire Anaheim City Council, were given to Yvonne & Damien Jordan, Mary Kay Fyda-Mar, Sophie & Larry Cripe, Tod & Linda White, and Wylie & Bette Aitken.

To date, the Chance had raised \$620,000 of its \$770,000 capital campaign goal. However, with the second phase already under construction, the pressure was on to raise the remaining \$150,000 as quickly as possible to pay the remaining expenses without having to secure additional loan funding.

Enter Board Vice-Chair Larry Cripe and capital donor Tod White. "We would love to say that we're through, but we're not. We still have a bit of gap," said Cripe. "To that end, that presents a problem, but there's also a solution."

"My wife Linda and I, and Larry and his wife Sophie we thought about it and we have come up with a solution," continued White. "We have put together \$75,000 as a challenge grant, which means that everybody who gives money to the Chance between now and the annual gala on August 29, will have that money matched. That's a pretty good deal. Even if you're not an investment banker, that's a pretty good deal." Before leaving the stage, both Cripe and White led the very enthusiastic 100-plus person crowd in three cheers to the new space.

"This new addition -- when it's finished -- will allow us to do more and be more for this community," said Founding Artistic Director Oanh Nguyen. "It will allow us to keep telling contemporary stories that promote connection and compassion and inspire creativity. It allows us to keep investing in local artists, while continuing our new works program that involves artists from all over the country. In addition, we can now offer more youth programming that aims to (more)

introduce young people, not just to live theater, but to their own artistic impulses that we believe will serve them in any path they choose to follow in life.”

And finally the guest of honor, Bette Aitken, took the stage to a full standing ovation. “I think that the Chance inspires people. They inspired me. I was just on my way to get a coffee or something one day when I saw the sign. So one night I decided to find out what the Chance was... I loved it. I really loved it. So thank you very much, Chance people, for making theater available to North County as well as South County. Thank you so much for all the things you do for us.”

“That coffee was the most expensive coffee I’ve ever had,” said Wylie Aitken, her husband who had surprised her the year prior with the naming gift. After the laughter subsided, Wylie continued, “We believe that they have become part of our family. I can tell you their passion is only exceeded by their absolutely incredible, incredible talent.”

Wylie had another surprise in store, but this time it was for the Chance. “Bette and I talked this afternoon and we’re going to be the first people to step up for the \$75,000 challenge. Bette and I are going to donate an additional \$25,000 to this incredible theater.”

Managing Director Casey Long says that the overwhelming generosity gives the company confidence moving forward, “Tonight's announcement of the \$75,000 challenge gift and the immediate follow-up of the \$25,000 gift means that our almost two year journey of creating a bold new home for the Chance, and for Orange County, is closer to reaching the finish line than ever!”

The dedication ceremony wrapped up with a live musical performance leading up to the reveal of the new Chance Theater marquee, designed by local theater artist (and frequent Chance scenic designer) Bradley Kaye. The words “Bette Aitken theater arts Center” are mounted to the side of the building with a soft white glow behind it that can easily be seen from La Palma Avenue. Miller, Zelinger and Manion were joined on stage for one final performance by resident artists James McHale, Jocelyn A. Brown and Bill Strongin, as well as Chance artist Lisa C. Zaradich.

Other special guests in attendance for the dedication ceremony included South Coast Repertory Artistic Director Marc Masterson, President of the Segerstrom Center for the Arts Terry Dwyer, Senator Lou Correa, Anaheim City Council Members Lucille Kring and Gail Eastman, Federal Judge Dave Carter, State Superior Court Judges Steve Denton, Peter Wilson and Jim Dicesare, and retired judges Jim Gray and Bill McDonald.

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To schedule interviews, request photos, or for any additional information, please contact Casey Long at (714) 900-3284 or by e-mail at casey@chancetheater.com.

ABOUT CHANCE THEATER

Proud to be one of the leading ensemble-driven theatre companies in Southern California, CHANCE THEATER has won five Ovation Awards (including two for Best Production of a Musical--Intimate Theater for *Triassic Park -- The Musical* and *Jerry Springer: The Opera*), four LADCC Awards including the Polly Warfield Award for Excellence, and was twice named "Outstanding Arts Organization" by Arts Orange County. The Anaheim City Council recently named Chance Theater "the official resident theater company of Anaheim". Founded in 1999, Chance Theater is focused on its goal of being Orange County's premiere mid-size contemporary theater by contributing to a more compassionate, connected, and creative community. As a constituent member of Theatre Communications Group, Network of Ensemble Theaters, and the LA Stage Alliance, Chance Theater continues to bring national attention to the Southern California and Orange County theater scenes.

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