



New England
Foundation
for the Arts

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 26, 2007

**NEW ENGLAND FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS ANNOUNCES APPOINTMENT OF
DAWN SPEARS (NARRAGANSETT)
AS COORDINATOR OF NEW NATIVE ARTS INITIATIVE**

(BOSTON—March 26, 2007) Rebecca Blunk, Executive Director of the New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA), today announced that artist and educator Dawn Spears (Narragansett) has accepted the position of Native Arts Coordinator at NEFA.

Spears and her husband, Cassius are members of the Narragansett Tribe of Rhode Island, where most recently she worked with the Natural Resources Department creating and implementing educational programs for their Environmental Enhancement Grant. An artist and educator, Spears has worked extensively in Rhode Island and Connecticut, coordinating cultural workshops and classes. Working with the Mashantucket Pequot Tribe for over a decade, she was involved in and directed a variety of cultural initiatives: their Summer Youth Program, the Schemitzun Feast of Green Corn and Dance, and most recently the 17th century modeled village at Schemitzun. She also worked on the Pequot Language Project and co-organized the Revitalizing Algonquian Languages Conference.

Spears worked with the Foxwoods Dance Troupe and the One Nations Dance Troupe both administratively and as a dancer, which included international touring. Spears has also been involved with the Language Initiative for the Narragansett Tribe, and served on the Board of Directors at Tomaquag Indian Memorial Museum.

Said Spears, “As an educator of Eastern Woodland Native culture, my art and my work reflect all facets of my life. With the loss of my mother, Diosa Summers in 1992, came my determination. Maintaining a strong traditional family connection is what keeps our culture alive. I believe in the preservation of Native arts in our communities, and I will continue educating the public about who we are through promoting our cultural expressions.”

Spears will provide leadership at the staff level to NEFA’s new Native Arts Initiative, a grant making and service program that addresses needs identified by Native artists and community members. The program is being developed in partnership with the Maine Indian Basketmakers Alliance. For more information about NEFA’s Native Arts Initiative, visit: www.nefa.org/projinit/nativeartsinit.html.

NEFA’s Native Arts Initiative received lead funding from the Ford Foundation’s IllumiNation program late last year with a \$250,000 grant. Chosen for its demonstrated leadership in supporting the arts, culture and artists, NEFA is one of seven organizations nationally to receive funding from the Ford Foundation for this purpose, joining a distinguished group - the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian; First Peoples Fund; Seventh Generation Fund; American Composers Forum; Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art; and the Evergreen State College Foundation Longhouse Education and Cultural Center.

“IllumiNation is about building support for the future of Native American arts in this country,” said Elizabeth Theobald Richards, Ford Foundation Program Officer for Knowledge, Creativity and Freedom. “Through the program, Native and non-Native led arts intermediaries will come together to look at sustainable, strategic, and culturally-appropriate ways to support and uphold America's first arts communities. My hope is that IllumiNation will help shine new light on the incredible aesthetic quality and diversity of expression coming from the field.”

The Ford Foundation

The Ford Foundation was created by Henry and Edsel Ford in 1936 and is focused on strengthening democratic values, reducing poverty and injustice, promoting international cooperation and advancing human achievement.

New England Foundation for the Arts

NEFA creatively supports the movement of people, ideas, and resources in the arts within New England and beyond, makes vital connections between artists and audiences, and builds the strength, knowledge, and leadership of the creative sector. NEFA is a 501c3 that operates with funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, the New England state arts agencies, and from corporations, foundations, and individuals. For more information please visit www.nefa.org or call 617.951.0010

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