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Contact: Krystin Anderson
Tel.: (801) 229-7379
Email: kmanderson@orem.org

OREM LIBRARY KICKS OFF BIG READ
***The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* Stars in Third Annual Literary Program**

September 2, 2009--Orem, Utah--Readers of all ages are invited to participate as the Orem Public Library kicks off the Big Read 2009 celebrating Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. For five weeks, the Library will host a series of performances, book discussions, presentations and film screenings about the book, its author, and the purpose of the Big Read, an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts. Events will open with a kick-off on September 14 - featuring music by the Utah Baroque Ensemble and a presentation by Utah Shakespeare Festival founder Fred Adams - and run through October 16.

One of Twain's best-known novels, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* tells the story of a clever but mischievous boy growing up along the Mississippi River in the late 1800s. His (mis)adventures resonate with readers young and old, the latter of whom Twain hoped, "to pleasantly remind...of what they once were themselves, and of how they felt and thought and talked, and what queer enterprises they sometimes engaged in" (Preface to *Tom Sawyer*). The Library chose this book because it not only appeals to a broad spectrum of readers - it also provides needed stress relief from everyday pressures.

Librarian Lori Stevens explained: "With national issues and their accompanying stressors at the forefront of everyone's minds, we wanted to provide Orem residents a chance to sit back, relax and enjoy a novel about the universal themes of community, friendship, freedom and forgiveness. Set in the slower-paced, 'unwired' Missouri of the 1800s, readers drift into a world rich with home-cooking, common sense, and adventure purchased with a lively imagination."

This year is the third time Orem has participated in the Big Read. In 2007, more than 5,800 residents participated in Big Read events about Willa Cather's *My Ántonia*. This number increased to 8,400 in 2008 events, which focused on Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Stevens said the program has had a positive impact on the community:

"Since we started the Big Read three years ago, we have seen a unifying effect in the community. Residents from 3 to 103 were able to participate in the programs. Programs were taken out to schools, assisted living centers, and retirement homes. At the library, strangers who normally wouldn't converse with each other, stayed after the evening's event was concluded to discuss the ideas that were presented. Audiences had a chance to hear about lives that were very different and in some cases not so different from their own. We hope to provide an environment or place where this kind of community engagement can continue to occur and happen on an even broader scale."

Those interested in participating can pick up a brochure or a copy of the book at the Orem Library reference desk. Books are provided free, one per household while supplies last, thanks to the donations of numerous national, regional and local sponsors.

The Big Read is an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts designed to restore reading to the center of American culture. The NEA presents the Big Read in partnership with the Institute of Museum and Library Services and in cooperation with Arts Midwest. The Big Read brings together partners across the country to encourage reading for pleasure and enlightenment.

For a complete listing of Orem Big Read events and for additional information about Mark Twain and *Tom Sawyer*, visit www.orembigread.org. See www.neabigread.org for details about the Big Read program.

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For more information, please contact Krystin Anderson at (801) 229-7379 or kmanderson@orem.org.