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Houston passes NY as top recipient of grants for arts

HOUSTON (AP) — Five Houston art groups will receive more than 10 percent of the \$21.5 million in challenge grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, allowing the city to replace New York as the top grant recipient, officials announced Tuesday.

Two of Houston's art museums, its ballet, symphony orchestra and a theater will share \$2.35 million, Endowment Chairman Frank Hodsoll announced Tuesday in Houston.

"They are the best of the best," Hodsoll said. "All of this is a tribute to Houston. I would simply like to thank Houstonians for their efforts to make the United States a better place to live in."

The NEA grants are given to the country's leading art organizations to help them achieve long-term financial stability, he said.

Every year, panelists of artists, critics and administrators, judge hundreds of applicants, he said.

Endowment spokeswoman Ellen Kotzen said, "The competition is really stiff. It's really unusual for Houston to be getting more money than New York."

New York is thought of as the nation's cultural core and has led other cities in receiving the grants since they were started in 1977, she said. This time, 10 New York art organizations will share \$2.15 million, Hodsoll said.

Hodsoll said the Houston groups will have to raise more than \$7 million above their usual budgets in three years to keep the awards. NEA requires groups to triple the awards with non-governmental donations, he said.

Hodsoll said matching the grants could be difficult, considering Houston is suffering from an oil-related recession.

But he added that he was confident Houstonians would dip further into their pockets to ensure the five organizations' success.

Texas justice pushes merit judge selection

AUSTIN (AP) — Texas Supreme Court Chief Justice John Hill says he will step up his campaign to overhaul the state's process of selecting judges, despite the refusal of the State Bar's directors to take a stand and opposition from the governor.

Texas now elects its judges, but Hill and others want a system they call "merit selection."

At a news conference Friday, Gov. Mark White said he favors allowing voters to continue to select judges.

However, Hill said he has the support of Lt. Gov. Bill Hobby and Speaker Gib Lewis, who earlier this summer proposed that he head a special committee to produce a "Texas plan" for choosing judges.

Hill said he approved the State Bar board's decision to poll the state's lawyers to find out what they think about the method.

"I would expect it (merit selection) to carry overwhelmingly," Hill said.

Other Supreme Court justices and the president of the State Bar, William Whitehurst of Austin, have not taken a stand on the issue.

Hill said his committee would start consideration of a plan under which a 15-member commission would submit three nominees for a judicial vacancy to the governor, who would choose one to appoint.

After the judge has served two years, he would be subject to approval by voters, but would run without an opponent. Voter approval would mean a new six-year term. Voter disapproval would result in the appointment of a new judge.

Dallas reports outbreak of rare venereal disease

DALLAS (AP) — Health officials say there has been an outbreak of a rare, curable, sexually transmitted disease usually associated with the tropics.

Dallas County Health Department officials say there have been 175 cases of chancroid reported since May, mostly in the city of Dallas. Usually, only two or three cases of the venereal disease are reported each year in Dallas County, Dr. James Randolph Farris said Monday.

Health officials were astonished at the number of cases diagnosed, Farris said.

"When we were up to about 20 cases, we went ahead and contacted the medical society and the hospitals," he said.

Bob Williams, senior public health adviser for the sexually transmitted diseases control division of the Texas Department of Health, said no other Texas city has reported an unusual number of chancroid cases.

Farris said chancroid can be cured with antibiotics. The disease is characterized by painful genital ulcers. Men are 10 times more likely than women to contract the disease.

Chancroid may look like herpes or syphilis, and the only way to confirm the disease is by growing a culture of the bacteria, Farris said.

Outbreaks usually last between 1 1/2 years and two years, he said.

Officials with the Texas Department of Health and U.S. Centers for Disease Control are helping to establish a tracking system to try and find the source, Farris said.

Senator: Agency needed to keep Texas coast clean

AUSTIN (AP) — A state senator representing Texas' largest coastal district said Tuesday that lawmakers need to put a single state agency in charge of keeping beaches clean.

Sen. Carlos Truan, D-Corpus Christi, said the 1987 Legislature should create a state agency that would be "responsible for the coast" or give "one of the existing agencies... direct responsibility in this area."

Truan was joined at a news conference by Sen. Carl Parker, D-Port Arthur, in support of a statewide beach cleanup Saturday.

The three-hour cleanup by volunteers is sponsored by the Center for Environmental Education, a non-profit marine conservation organization.

"At a time when it is obvious that oil is declining as a great resource... we need to tap other resources," Parker said.

"And the most readily available resource to be tapped is the natural beauty of Texas," he said.

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