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**POETRY FOUNDATION AND NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS ANNOUNCE
2009 WINNER OF *POETRY OUT LOUD: NATIONAL RECITATION CONTEST***

Virginia State Champion William Farley wins in national poetry competition

WASHINGTON, DC — Backed by a cheering section of his family and friends, 18-year-old William Farley of Arlington, Virginia captivated both judges and audience with his poetry recitations to gain the title of 2009 *Poetry Out Loud* National Champion. Farley receives a \$20,000 award and his high school, Washington-Lee High School, will receive a \$500 stipend for the purchase of poetry books. The *Poetry Out Loud* National Finals were held last night at the George Washington University Lisner Auditorium in Washington, DC. Farley was among 12 finalists and 53 state champions from around the country who participated in the fourth national poetry recitation contest, sponsored by the National Arts Endowment and the Poetry Foundation.

William Farley's final recitation for the evening was "Danse Russe" by William Carlos Williams, a wry look at a middle aged man's fancies and foibles. When asked if it was hard to inhabit the voice of an older man, he said "not at all. The hardest thing to do was not laugh while I read it." Farley advanced to the National Champion from a field of competition that involved more than 1,500 high schools and 300,000 high school students across the country.

As part of the recognition of excellence and achievement, Farley also will have the opportunity to recite a poem at the rededication of the Lincoln Memorial in May 2009, an event sponsored by the National Park Service in Washington, DC.

The second-place winner was Barbara Gooding of Western Hills High school in Frankfort, Kentucky, who received a \$10,000 award. The Illinois State Champion, Kareem Sayegh of University Laboratory High School in Champaign, Illinois, received the third place prize and a \$5,000 award. In addition, each of the top 12 finalists received a \$1,000 award. The twelve finalists' schools received \$500 each for the purchase of poetry books.

The other 12 finalists include Erik Hollis of Arizona; Kaleena Rose Kovach of Colorado; Madeline E. Roger of Kansas, Will Whitham of Maine; Peter Winfrey of Missouri; Mido Aly of Ohio; Wiyaka His Horse Is Thunder of South Dakota; Stanley Andrew Jackson III of Texas; and Audrey Kiely of Vermont.

Guest judges presided over the competition, including Garrison Keillor, host of the radio show "A Prairie Home Companion," award-winning actress Tyne Daly, journalist Jeffrey Brown, founder of Quest: arts for everyone Tim McCarty, and poets Suji Kwock-Kim, Patricia Smith, and Luis Rodriguez. Singer-songwriter Natalie

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Merchant gave a special performance of poetry-inspired songs. Scott Simon of National Public Radio served as master of ceremonies.

On April 27, 53 high school students – *Poetry Out Loud* champions from every state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands – competed in three semifinal rounds based on geographic region. Twelve students advanced to compete in the National Finals on April 28. Judges evaluated student performances on criteria including physical presence, articulation, evidence of understanding, level of difficulty, and accuracy. Students performed poems from the *Poetry Out Loud* print and online anthologies (www.poetryoutloud.org). The event was the culmination of a pyramid-structure competition that began last September among schools across the country.

The National Finals are the result of efforts by many partners. The NEA and the Poetry Foundation have contributed support for administration of the program, educational materials, and prizes for both the state and National Finals. Each State Arts Agency implemented the program in high schools in each state, often in collaboration with local arts organizations. The *Poetry Out Loud* National Finals was administered by the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation.

Poetry Out Loud seeks to foster the next generation of literary readers by building on the resurgence of poetry as an oral art form, as seen in the slam poetry movement and the popularity of rap music among youth. Through *Poetry Out Loud*, students can master public speaking skills, build self-confidence, and learn about their literary heritage. Now in its fourth year of national competition, *Poetry Out Loud* has inspired thousands of high school students to discover classic and contemporary poetry. To find out how to get involved in the 2010 *Poetry Out Loud* National Recitation Contest, visit www.poetryoutloud.org.

About Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation

Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation supports the richness and diversity of the region's arts resources and promotes wider access to the art and artists of the region, nation and world. To learn more about MAAF, its programs and services, visit www.midatlanticarts.org.

About the Poetry Foundation

The Poetry Foundation, publisher of *Poetry* magazine and one of the largest literary organizations in the world, exists to discover and celebrate the best poetry and to place it before the largest possible audience. The Poetry Foundation seeks to be a leader in shaping a receptive climate for poetry by developing new audiences, creating new avenues for delivery, and encouraging new kinds of poetry through innovative literary prizes and programs. For more information, please visit www.poetryfoundation.org.

About the National Endowment for the Arts

The NEA is a public agency dedicated to supporting excellence in the arts – both new and established – bringing the arts to all Americans, and providing leadership in arts education. Established by Congress in 1965 as an independent agency of the federal government, the Arts Endowment is the largest annual national funder of the arts, bringing great art to all 50 states, including rural areas, inner cities, and military bases. For more information, please visit www.arts.gov.

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