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## **NEA Chairman Landesman announces Challenge America Fast-Track grants**

*Magic City Smooth Jazz one of only 162 grantees nationwide*

(Birmingham, AL)—As National Endowment for the Arts Chairman Rocco Landesman has noted, “Art works everywhere,” which is why the NEA’s Challenge America Fast-Track (CAFT) program supports projects from primarily small and mid-sized arts organizations that extend the reach of the arts to underserved audiences—those whose opportunities to experience the arts are limited by geography, ethnicity, economics, or disability. Magic City Smooth Jazz was selected to receive one of the 162 grants of \$10,000 awarded to organizations in 46 states, plus the District of Columbia and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Magic City Smooth Jazz is a first-time grantee of NEA’s CAFT grant.

Jazz in the Park® is an effort to increase cultural activities in neighborhoods and communities in the Greater Birmingham area by presenting a series of FREE summer performances in various parks and provide a platform on which area jazz artists can showcase their talents and unique artistic style of contemporary, straight-ahead, and Latin jazz.

“Taken together, these Challenge America Fast-Track grants provide an extraordinary sampling of the work that arts organizations do to reach underserved communities,” said Chairman Landesman. “With these grants, we are helping to ensure that art works for all Americans.”

“We are honored to have our concert series recognized nationally by NEA. This grant will support our efforts to bring FREE jazz performances to neighborhood parks in the Greater Birmingham area next year”, says Bernard Lockhart, executive director of Magic City Smooth Jazz.

The program is called Fast-Track because of its expedited review timeline. Magic City Smooth Jazz was notified approximately six months after applying. Also, with 375 eligible applications submitted from across the country, there was significant competition for funding for these grants. Magic City Smooth Jazz’s grant award is evidence of the artistic excellence and artistic merit of Jazz in the Park®.

Please see the [complete listing of projects](#) recommended for Challenge America Fast-Track grant support.

*Magic City Smooth Jazz is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization located in Birmingham, AL. Our mission is to expose a culturally diverse audience to various styles of jazz. Since its establishment in 2008, the organization has presented numerous music education workshops and national jazz performers including Gregg Karukas (2006), Eric Marienthal (2009), 2011 Grammy-Award winner Esperanza Spalding (2009), and several Alabama area jazz musicians. In 2010, founded Jazz in the Park® in Birmingham and managed 2011 Taste of 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue Jazz festival.*

*The National Endowment for the Arts was established by Congress in 1965 as an independent agency of the federal government. To date, the NEA has awarded more than \$4 billion to support artistic excellence, creativity, and innovation for the benefit of individuals and communities. The NEA extends its work through partnerships with state arts agencies, local leaders, other federal agencies, and the philanthropic sector. To join the discussion on how art works, visit the NEA at [www.arts.gov](http://www.arts.gov).*

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