



**Written Testimony in Support of FY 2011 Appropriations for
The National Endowment for the Arts**
Submitted by Jeff Daniels, Actor, Director, Founder of the Purple Rose Theatre
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
“Arts Build Communities”
April 13, 2010

My name is Jeff Daniels and I am a product of the American Theatre. Raised in Michigan, I began in high school musicals, went on to Community Theatre, Summer Stock, and College. At the age of 21, I moved to New York where I performed On and Off Broadway, before moving on to Hollywood. Sixty movies later, I am happy to say I am back on Broadway. Being on stage again feels like coming home.

Without the American Theatre, I would not have had a career. I would not have been good enough to be cast in films such *Terms of Endearment*, *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, *Gettysburg*, and yes, *Dumb and Dumber*. Without the American Theatre, I would not have become the actor I was supposed to be.

Because of my gratitude for what the American Theatre has done for me, I bought an abandoned warehouse in my hometown of Chelsea, Michigan. There, in what some consider the “middle of nowhere”, I had a dream of creating a professional theatre company that produced new American Plays. When word got out about what I was doing, many in my own community thought I was an idiot and in classic, Midwestern directness, they told me so. “Jeff, you’re an idiot,” they said, “It’ll never work.” And: “If we want to see good theatre, we’ll fly to New York.” And my favorite: “You have to understand, to people like us, Art is somebody who lives north of town.”

Well, now Art has some company.

In the twenty year history of the Purple Rose Theatre, over half a million people have come to our little town, bought a ticket, and watched one of our plays. Hundreds of actors, writers, designers, directors, crew members, and staff have cashed a Purple Rose paycheck. Careers have begun in our building. Lives have been changed. Dreams have come true.

Now, I’ll be honest. I knew there were very talented theatre people in our part of the country and if I taught them what I’d learned, in time, the Purple Rose would have a national reputation not because of me, but because of the quality of our artistic product. What I didn’t see coming, was the economic impact the Purple Rose would have on my hometown. When I opened our doors in 1991, if there were 25 businesses in town, half

were empty or just getting by. Soon, a town with two stoplights was suddenly getting 40,000 new people a year walking down Main Street and everyone of them had a wallet or a purse. Very quickly, restaurants replaced empty storefronts. Next came coffee shops, art galleries, markets, jewelry shops. Seemingly overnight, two hotels sprang up at our exit out by the highway. Old Victorian homes turned into Bed & Breakfasts whose bookings catered to people with tickets to the Purple Rose. Owners of established businesses told me how they now stayed open at night because of all the foot traffic. Realtors used the Purple Rose to sell homes. Corporations included us in attracting out of state hires. Even the local funeral director thanked me for two funerals he picked up from people who happened to be in town to see a play. I didn't ask. Our average ticket price is just under \$23 - making a play at Purple Rose affordable for as many people as possible; the one and only reason we are a not-for-profit - theatre-goers were coming from all over. They parked their car at our meters. They ate our food. Drank in our bars and taverns. Tipped our waitresses. They shopped in our stores, bought gas in our gas stations, and on their way home, they left behind a thriving economy. Many have come back again and again, sustaining that early trend and turning it into the status quo. Because of the Arts, my sleepy little hometown is now a destination.

Where I live, the Arts are for everyone and everyone is for the Arts. Where I live, the Arts are a fundamental American asset, an essential element to our community's success. Where I live, Art is now more than a guy who lives north of town. It is, for many, the realization of the American Dream.

The National Endowment for the Arts helps organizations like mine create jobs, stimulate economies, and transform communities. With gratitude, I thank you for what you've done. With respect, I urge you to continue to do that and more.