

Playhouse and library get grant for 'Big Read'

by **Susan Dumont-Bengston**
Ridgefield Library

The Ridgefield Playhouse in partnership with the Ridgefield Library has received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to host The Big Read in Ridgefield, an initiative of the endowment designed to restore reading to the center of American culture.

The Playhouse is one of 75 not-for-profits — including arts and cultural organizations, libraries, and universities — to receive a grant to host a Big Read project between September 2010 and June 2011.

The Big Read in Ridgefield will focus on *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck this fall, giving the community the opportunity to come together to read, discuss and celebrate this book, which was one of 31 selections from U.S. and world literature.

To encourage town-wide participation in The Big Read, Books on the Common will have copies of *The Grapes of Wrath* available at a discounted price, and Ridgefield Library will add copies to its collection in both bound and audio formats.

The Playhouse and Ridgefield Library are



Allison Stockel, executive director of The Ridgefield Playhouse (left), and Chris Nolan, director of the Ridgefield Library, are collaborating to bring The Big Read to the community with a grant that will be used to execute townwide activities including book discussions, lectures, movie screenings and performing arts events.

working with Ridgefield public schools to help incorporate *The Grapes of Wrath* into the curricula of appropriate grades and subjects. Educational support materials will be available through The Playhouse and Ridgefield Library.

A Web site and brochure dedicated to The Big Read are being developed through the playhouse-library col-

laboration to help communicate all the related activities and special events involving many of the arts organizations in Ridgefield.

Since the 2006 pilot program with 10 participating organizations, the NEA has given more than 800 grants to support local Big Read projects.

"The Ridgefield Playhouse is excited to partner with the

Ridgefield Library on The Big Read and to be chosen by the National Endowment for the Arts," said Allison Stockel, playhouse executive director. "The related activities are a great addition to our 10th anniversary season, and we look forward to bringing the whole town together to celebrate John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*."

Chris Nolan, director of the library, said, "The Ridgefield Library has earned kudos for the successful presentation of major literary and cultural initiatives that engage the whole community, including our One Book, One Town read of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* a few years ago. Having recently focused on James Joyce, Shakespeare and Ridgefield authors past and present, we are excited to be turning our attention to John Steinbeck and *The Grapes of Wrath*. A great novel of America's past, it also has strong relevance in today's society on so many levels."

The National Endowment for the Arts 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. For more information, visit arts.gov.