



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**ARTS & BUSINESS COUNCIL TO HONOR OSCAR® AWARD WINNING DIRECTOR  
JONATHAN DEMME WITH AVATAR AWARD FOR ARTISTIC EXCELLENCE**

**PHILADELPHIA, PA** – April 18, 2006 – The **Arts & Business Council of Greater Philadelphia** today announced that the *2006 Avatar Award for Artistic Excellence* will be awarded to Academy Award®-winning film director Jonathan Demme at the **Arts & Business Council 2006 Awards Luncheon on Thursday, May 11, 2006** in the **Grand Ballroom at the Pennsylvania Convention Center**. **The Honorable Edward G. Rendell**, Governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, will present the award to Mr. Demme.

The Council's *Avatar Award for Artistic Excellence* honors an artist who has worked or lived in the Greater Philadelphia Region, embodies excellence in artistic achievement, has achieved worldwide acclaim and serves as an inspiration to the creative community, business leaders and the entire region. This prestigious award is sponsored by **Saul Ewing LLP**.

As both director and producer, Demme has 19 films to his credit, including two filmed in Philadelphia – *Beloved* and *Philadelphia*, for which Tom Hanks won a Best Actor Oscar® in 1993. To date, Demme's films have been nominated for 20 Academy Awards®, three of which he won in 1991 for *The Silence of the Lambs*, including Best Picture, Best Director and Best Screenplay Adaptation. In addition, Demme was twice named Best Director by the New York Film Critics, for *Melvin and Howard* and *The Silence of the Lambs*.

Demme also directed many other notable films including *The Manchurian Candidate*, *The Agronomist*, *The Truth About Charlie*, *Married to the Mob*, *Something Wild* and *Swimming to Cambodia*. Additional producing credits include *Devil in a Blue Dress*, *Household Saints*, *That Thing You Do!*, *Ulee's Gold* and *Adaptation*. Since 1988, Demme has produced and/or directed a number of documentaries, as well as feature film projects, including many focused on Haiti, including *The Agronomist*, a documentary on the Haitian radio journalist Jean Dominique who was assassinated in April 2000 on the steps of his radio station. He also produced the Academy Award®-nominated biography *Mandela* and *One Foot on a Banana Peel*, *The Other Foot in the Grave* about living with AIDS. His current film in release is *Neil Young*, *Heart of Gold*, an intimate musical portrait of the legendary singer/songwriter.

Although not a native Philadelphian, Demme has frequently made Philadelphia his "other" home. Because of his fondness for the Philadelphia region, he enrolled his children in Center City schools while filming in the region. His ongoing civic involvement in the city earned him *The Heart of Philadelphia Award* in 1990s. He also served on the board of the *Marian Anderson Award*, chairing the Selection Committee responsible for bringing Gregory Peck, Harry Belafonte, Elizabeth Taylor and Oprah Winfrey to our region.

"Mr. Demme exemplifies excellence in every aspect of his work and through his commitment to honoring and portraying the artistic excellence of others around the globe," said Governor Rendell. "By choosing Philadelphia for his work and home over the years, he has made a significant, positive impact on the cultural vitality of the Greater Philadelphia Region."

A reception for honorees, invited guests and media will begin prior to the luncheon at 11:00 am in the Grand Ballroom at the Pennsylvania Convention Center, followed by the awards luncheon and festivities at Noon. **Media interested in attending the invitation-only pre-luncheon reception** should contact Kelly Connor at 856.223.9567 or via email at [Kelly@connorpr.com](mailto:Kelly@connorpr.com).

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Celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> year, the Council will also honor extraordinary achievements between arts and business during the past year that have demonstrated a mutual benefit to both sectors, as well as inspiring examples of volunteerism by business people from across our culturally vibrant region. This year's luncheon, which is expected to draw more than 1,600 attendees, is expected to include leaders from the world of *art, film, music, dance, theater, history, media and business*, among others. The Arts & Business Council Awards Luncheon is the only fundraising event held by the Council each year and all proceeds from the event go directly to supporting its programs and services in the coming year.

"We are thrilled to award Jonathan Demme with the 2006 Avatar Award," said Karen B. Davis, president and chief executive officer at the Arts & Business Council of Greater Philadelphia. "Our honorees truly represent that extraordinary achievements are possible when arts and business work together."

**About the Arts & Business Council of Greater Philadelphia**

The Arts & Business Council of Greater Philadelphia, an affiliate of the **Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce** and a chapter of the **national Arts & Business Council of Americans for the Arts**, is the region's only nonprofit organization dedicated to cultivating mutually beneficial relationships between business and the arts and cultural institutions located in Southeastern Pennsylvania, Southern New Jersey and Northern Delaware. Since its inception in 1981, the Arts & Business Council has partnered with the business sector to generate more than \$20 million in contributed goods and services for the region's arts and cultural institutions and has trained and placed more than 2,000 business professionals in a variety of leadership roles within arts organizations. For more information, visit [www.artsandbusinessphila.org](http://www.artsandbusinessphila.org) or call 215.790.3620.

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