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For Immediate Release

Hartford Public Library's Big Read Celebrates Steinbeck's "The Grapes of Wrath"

"The Grapes of Wrath," John Steinbeck's novel about struggling tenant farmers in the Great Depression, is Hartford Public Library's choice for The Big Read.

Films, a photography exhibition, book discussions, bread baking classes, food preservation workshops, and composting classes, are part of the celebration of Pulitzer Prize-winning book published in 1939.

The Big Read is a program of the National Endowment for the Arts designed to revitalize the role of literature in American culture and to encourage citizens to read for pleasure and enlightenment. Hartford Public Library is one of 75 not-for-profit organizations to receive a grant to host a Big Read project.

Lecture

The events kick off Wednesday, March 23, 6 pm, as Paul LaRocca, an associate professor of humanities at Goodwin College, looks at Steinbeck's book through the art and music of the time, social realism in painting and drama and the political messages in folk songs and classical music. He will use illustrations and audio excerpts in his keynote presentation.

Exhibition

CT Farmers, photographs by Jack McConnell on view through May 25, outside Hartford History Center, 3rd Floor, Hartford Public Library, 500 Main St. Free.

Jack McConnell has photographed more than 75 Connecticut farms, documenting farmers caring for their animals, maintaining machine tools, and planting and harvesting crops.

Many of McConnell's black-and-white portraits are evocative of Dorothea Lange's documentary photos, shot for the Farm Security Administration, which put a human face on sharecroppers and displaced migrant workers.

McConnell will speak about his photography and Connecticut's family farms in The Big Read closing ceremony, Wednesday, May 25, 5 to 7 pm, in the Hartford History Center, on the third floor of the downtown library.

Jack McConnell Photo: Paul Trube of Beltane Farms in Lebanon carrying a baby goat on his shoulders.

Films

“DIRT! The Movie, Wednesday, April 6, 5:30 pm, Center for Contemporary Culture.

Free

“Jamie Lee Curtis narrates this film about human beings and their relationship to soil. This film is used to stimulate discussion about the politics, economics and social policies of wise stewardship of dirt.

“The Grapes of Wrath,” Wednesday, April 13, 5:30 pm, Center for Contemporary Culture. Free

John Ford won an Oscar for his direction of this 1940 film based on John Steinbeck's novel. Henry Fonda plays son Tom Joad, who gets out of jail and finds his family farm is lost to foreclosure. They leave Oklahoma for a better life in California and find themselves surrounded by thousands in the same plight. Jane Darwell won an Oscar for her portrayal of Ma Joad.

“Food Chains,” Wednesday, April 20, 5:30 pm, Center for Contemporary Culture. Free

“Food Chains” looks at farmworkers, who are routinely abused, robbed of wages and forced to work under subhuman conditions. The film documents cases of beatings, sexual harassment or enslavement, all within the borders of the United States. “Food Chains” shows the human cost of supplying food to supermarkets in this \$4 trillion-a-year business. Presented with The Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy.

“The Dust Bowl,” Saturday, April 23, 11 am to 3 pm (with intermission), Center for Contemporary Culture. Free

Ken Burns' four-hour film, aired on PBS, tells the story of the crop failures during the 1930s in the Plains states through interviews with 30 survivors, narration, comments by historians, photographs, and footage from the period.

Food Workshops

Bread Baking Class, Tuesday, April 5, 5 pm, Second floor Kitchen, Hartford Public Library. Also Thursday, April 21, 5 pm. Free. Registration required here: <http://bit.ly/1QV7obf>

Kitchen at Billings Forge will offer bread baking classes. Participants in these free workshops will learn the basics of bread baking, will discuss food insecurity during the Great Depression and today, and will go home with freshly baked bread.

Food Preservation Workshops: Saturday April 16, 11 am, Second floor kitchen, Hartford Public Library; Thursday, April 21, 5:30 pm, Albany Branch, 1250 Albany Ave; Tuesday, April 26, 5:30 pm, Goodwin Branch, 460 New Britain Ave.; Thursday, April 28, 5:30 pm, Camp Field Branch, 30 Campfield Ave.; Register: jmainville@hplct.org or 860-695-6322. Free. No materials required.

Hartford Public Library and the Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy present free classes in food preservation techniques. Workshops will cover various topics of food preservation, including canning, freezing, fermentation, and drying. Participants will learn the basics of food preservation and will receive fresh produce, canning jars and instructional resources to take home. Classes are limited to 12 participants.

Gardening

Composting 101 Workshops: Monday, May 9, 5:30 pm, Mark Twain Branch, 55 Forest St.; Wednesday, May 11, 5:30 pm, Ropkins Branch, 1750 Main St.; Monday, May 16, 5:30 pm, Park Branch, 744 Park St.; Wednesday, May 18, 5:30 pm, Ground Floor Classroom, Downtown Branch, 500 Main St.. Register: jmainville@hplct.org or 860-695-6322. Free. No materials required.

Hartford Public Library and the Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy present free classes in composting techniques. Composting is a great way to reduce food waste and to improve the structure of your soil. These composting workshops are taught by volunteers from UConn's Master Composting Program and will cover topics including best practices for outdoor composting and indoor composting with worms. Classes are limited to 12 participants.

Closing Ceremony for The Big Read, Wednesday, May 25, 5 to 6:30 pm, Hartford History Center, Hartford Public Library, 500 Main St. Free

HartBeat Ensemble will perform a scene inspired by “The Grapes of Wrath.”
Photographer Jack McConnell will talk about the family farms and farmers he has documented since 2013. There will be information tables staffed by area groups related to farming and agriculture.