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FERST CENTER FOR THE ARTS NAMES NEW DIRECTOR

GEORGE THOMPSON TO LEAD GEORGIA TECH VENUE

ATLANTA – June 25, 2009 – George Thompson, former conservatory general manager with the American Conservatory Theater (ACT) in San Francisco, has been named director of the Ferst Center for the Arts at Georgia Tech. He is responsible for the overall leadership, administration, coordination and fundraising, along with the successful integration of the Center with the Institute's academic community and the Atlanta arts community.

"The Ferst Center's history of performances is solid and has deep roots," Thompson said. "I want to build upon this history and expand the interaction with the campus and the local community, with the goal of establishing a unique identity for the Center within the Atlanta presenting field."

Raised in Greenwich, Conn., Thompson's career in the performing arts—both as manager and performer—spans three decades, with more than 20 years in senior management positions of nationally recognized arts organizations. Thompson began his career in 1979 as a professional dancer for the American Ballet Theatre. In 1987, he was named business manager and assistant director for Finance and Development for the four-theater complex within the Purchase College Performing Arts Center in Purchase, N.Y.

Thompson served as executive vice president for the Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center in Tampa from 1994–2001, executive director for The Washington Ballet in Washington, D.C., from 2001–2003, senior vice president of Programming and Operations at Omaha Performing Arts from 2003–2005 and joined ACT in 2005. Accomplishments during his tenure include increasing the Tampa Bay center's operating budget to \$27 million from \$7 million and engineering the Washington Ballet's first sold-out season at the Kennedy Center prior to opening, as well as increasing the ballet's annual campaign by 25 percent through the centralization of development efforts.

At ACT, Thompson was responsible for the overall operation and production of 14 shows annually, and led the conservatory staff and board committee through a recent strategic planning process.

“I believe the performing arts and engineering are not as divergent as some might assume,” Thompson said. “Both try to solve problems, and both reflect the needs of the society and time in which they exist.”

National search firm Management Consultants for the Arts Inc. worked with the Institute search committee, chaired by Division of Student Services Vice President William Schafer. While each of the final candidates was very strong, Schafer said, Thompson’s experience, presentation and references placed him at the top of the field.

“The search firm was looking for someone who could help create better connections across our campus,” Schafer said. “Thompson is that person. He excels at working with a large, diverse community, he is skilled at marketing, he has a very strong background in budgeting and strategic planning, and he has received high marks as a supervisor from his former employees. We are excited about where he can take this program.”

Thompson started in the director’s position June 15.

“I began my arts management career on a university campus, and throughout my experience I have found a unique connection between the arts and education,” Thompson said. “Whether that connection introduces the arts to a novice or creates a dialogue with the more seasoned arts patron, this type of interaction is more fertile in an institution of higher learning.”

Located in the heart of the Georgia Tech campus at 349 Ferst Drive NW, the Ferst Center (www.ferstcenter.org) adds to Atlanta’s arts landscape by offering a showcase of some of the most highly acclaimed talent from around the world. In addition to presenting a season of performances that includes music, dance, comedy and theatre, the Ferst Center offers arts education for all ages, presents visual arts exhibits in the Richards and Westbrook Galleries, and hosts campus and community events of all kinds throughout the year.

About the Ferst Center for the Arts

The Ferst Center for the Arts is a part of the Division of Student Affairs at the Georgia Institute of Technology. Named after Georgia Tech alumnus Robert Ferst, the mission of the Ferst Center is to enhance the education of Tech students and to serve as a bridge to the greater Atlanta community by offering a showcase of some of the most highly-acclaimed talent from around the world. Funding is provided in part by contributions from individuals, foundations, corporations, the Georgia Council for the Arts through appropriations of the Georgia General Assembly, and the Fulton County Board of Commissioners under the guidance of the Fulton County Arts Council. Major corporate support is provided by the Coca-Cola Company and the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. For ticket information call 404-894-9600 or visit www.ferstcenter.org.

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