



News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Liberty Tree Initiative Kicks Off Campus Program

McCormick Foundation grant supports First Amendment Education

At a time when only 3 percent of Americans can name the five freedoms of the First Amendment and a surprising number support government limits on freedom of expression, a new initiative is being launched to help raise awareness of these fundamental freedoms on America's college campuses.

The Liberty Tree Initiative, funded by a \$100,000 grant from the McCormick Foundation, is designed to build awareness by bringing thought-provoking First Amendment programs and speakers to campuses nationwide.

"The Liberty Tree Initiative is a remarkable partnership that taps into the energy of the First Amendment and the insights of experts, academic leaders, artists, musicians and journalists across this country," said Ken Paulson, editor of USA Today and one of the driving forces behind the initiative.

"The Liberty Tree Initiative is a wonderful opportunity to focus on the virtues of First Amendment freedoms," said Clark Bell, the McCormick Foundation's Journalism Program Director. "We are honored to support these festivals of freedom on college campuses and their communities."

These programs will continue the tradition of constructive and collegial conversations about freedom started by America's earliest patriots under an elm tree near the Boston Common in 1665. The program hopes to see a Liberty Tree, like the one in Boston, planted on participating college campuses as a symbol of the importance of the First Amendment to an educated public.

Paulson added that "there's no better place to explore and celebrate the First Amendment than America's campuses, and no better time than now."

The McCormick Foundation's grant will be used to fund programs and conferences on the core principles protecting freedom of speech, press, religion, assembly and petition protected by the First Amendment.

The initiative was founded in partnership with the American Society of Newspaper Editors, and with help and support from the Knight Foundation, the McCormick Foundation and the First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University. The Center's perennial studies, available at firstamendmentcenter.org, reveal a fundamental lack of First Amendment education and diminishing support for free expression in this country.

"We were honored to host the first campus Liberty Tree program and help educate our students and the wider university community about the awesome rights and responsibilities embedded in the First Amendment," said Dr. Richard Campbell, director of the journalism program at Miami University, in Oxford Ohio, which hosted the inaugural Liberty Tree program in April of 2008. "We look forward to revisiting the First Amendment every April on our campus and hope other universities will join the effort."

"We're thrilled to be able to bring outstanding speakers and First Amendment programs to college campuses and grateful to the McCormick Foundation for making this exciting program possible," said Sandra Chance, the campus coordinator for the Liberty Tree Initiative and executive director of the Brechner Center for Freedom of Information at the University of Florida.

Colleges and universities interested in applying for a \$5,000 grant can learn more about the program by contacting Chance at schance@jou.ufl.edu or by calling 352-392-2273.



The McCormick Foundation is a nonprofit organization committed to strengthening our free, democratic society by investing in children, communities and country. Through its five grantmaking programs, Cantigny Park and Golf, and three world-class museums, the Foundation helps build a more active and engaged citizenry. It was established as a charitable trust in 1955, upon the death of Colonel Robert R. McCormick, the longtime editor and publisher of the Chicago Tribune. The McCormick Foundation is one of the nation's largest charities, with \$1.2 billion in assets. For more information, please visit www.McCormickFoundation.org.

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