FAU Libraries Host “John and Abigail Adams, Dramatically Speaking,” a Performance about the Former Presidential Couple

BOCA RATON, FL (January 14, 2011) – Florida Atlantic University Libraries will host “John and Abigail Adams, Dramatically Speaking,” a program about the second U.S. president and first lady, performed by William and Sue Wills, on Monday, January 24, at 1:30 p.m., at the Wimberly Library on FAU’s Boca Raton campus. The Wills have presented more than 4,000 presidential programs across the country.

The Winter Park entertainers will explore the Adams’ lives and sacrifices in a program that looks at historic speeches, and revealing letters and diaries they wrote while separated during the American Revolutionary era. They will dress in period costumes and assume the demeanor and dialect of the Adams during the theatrical presentation.

“The extensive letters the Adams’ left behind certainly make them different from some of the other first couples who were always together and therefore left no paper trail or who actually destroyed their personal letters,” said William Wills.

FAU Libraries are sponsoring the performance in conjunction with “John Adams Unbound,” a traveling exhibition that explores the personal library of Adams. As a companion exhibition, the library is featuring more than 100 rare books and pamphlets from its Marvin & Sybil Weiner Spirit of America Collection and two other programs. The first program is a lecture by FAU professor Anna Lawrence, Ph.D., who will present “John and Abigail Adams: Love and Marriage in the New Nation,” on Thursday, January 20, at 2 p.m. The other lecture is by FAU Professor Kristen Block, Ph.D., titled “Giving Meaning to the Revolution: Celebrations and Counter-Celebrations in the first 50 Years of America’s Nationhood,” on Monday, January 31, at 2 p.m. Both exhibitions and the programs are free and open to the public.

William and Sue Wills’ performance comes 41 years after their 15-day whirlwind courtship in which Wills revealed to his bride-to-be that he would like to become president.
“There was the thought of possibly becoming a lawyer, entering public service and yes, becoming president would have been a dream,’’ he said. “I actually had shaken the hands of two men who would become presidents – John Kennedy and Richard Nixon.”

Wills kept his promise 32 times over. Through the family’s theater company, he does presentations of 32 presidents and his wife appears at his side as first lady.

Prior to doing the presidential programs, the Wills founded and ran a theater company for 20 years in Ocean City, Md. In 1991, William Wills created and taught a course titled “Presidents and Their First Ladies, dramatically speaking,” for the University of Maryland Eastern Shore Elderhostel. For the next six years, he researched and wrote performance pieces, and the couple presented them as dramatically read dialogues in a classroom setting.

After the Wills closed their theater company in 1978 in Ocean City, they began touring with their presidential programs. Now, in their 15th year, their stages include small libraries, presidential museums, retirement communities and theaters. “I am still excited to read and research because I am always learning new insights and so much of the past is taking place all over again,” said William Wills.

The “John Adams Unbound” traveling exhibition was organized by the Boston Public Library and the America Library Association, and made possible by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities: great ideas brought to life. The exhibition is based upon the gallery exhibition of the same name mounted by the Boston Public Library in 2006, the first public display of Adams’s complete 3,500-book collection.

For additional information, contact Sara Landset at 561-297-3921 or slandset@fau.edu or visit http://www.library.fau.edu/news/flyers/adams_flyer.pdf.

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