



For Immediate Release

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**Florentine Films/Hott Productions Inc., America's River Communities, Inc. and
WVIZ/PBS ideastream® Present**

The Return Of The Cuyahoga **Airing Nationally on PBS Stations on Friday, April 18th at 10PM**

THE RETURN OF THE CUYAHOGA is a fascinating look at the life, death and rebirth of one of America's most polluted rivers. Best known as "the river that burned," the Cuyahoga is, in fact, an emblematic waterway. Its history is the history of the American frontier, the rise of industry, and the scourge of pollution. In 1969, when the river caught on fire, the blaze ignited a political movement that restored the Cuyahoga and its communities, and lit the way for America's environmental movement. **THE RETURN OF THE CUYAHOGA** will air nationally on PBS on Friday, April 18th at 10PM (check local listings.)

The Cuyahoga caught fire as far back as 1883. In 1914, a river fire threatened downtown Cleveland, until a providential shift in the wind turned it away. In 1918, a river fire spread to a shipyard and killed seven men. The Cuyahoga burned again in 1936, 1948, 1949 and 1952. Then on June 22, 1969, the polluted Cuyahoga, slick with oil and full of debris, caught on fire. The river didn't just burn in Cleveland — it burned in the nation's imagination. Along with the rise of other social movements in the late sixties, the country was beginning to take note of our damaged environment. The 1969 Cuyahoga fire accelerated this awareness, preceding the first Earth Day by ten months, and leading the way for the passage of sweeping new laws, such as the Clean Water Act and Clean Air Act, and the creation of Environmental Protection Agencies at the federal and state levels. The Cuyahoga is America's clearest example of a river that came back to life when the communities along it came clean.

"This is a truly national story," says filmmaker Larry Hott. "Rivers in industrial cities across the country were catching fire due to the build up of oil, waste and debris. The Rouge River in Michigan, the Schuylkill in Philadelphia, and the Chicago River all burned as often and as drastically as the Cuyahoga."

About the Cuyahoga River

When the United States was a new nation, the Cuyahoga marked the western frontier: beyond it, all was unclaimed land — American Indian Territory. But by 1870, the river was on a frontier of a different kind: the industrial frontier. On the river's banks rose America's definition of progress at the time — booming factories — whose byproducts emptied right into the Cuyahoga. As it flowed through Akron and Cleveland, the river became a foul-smelling channel of sludge, with an oily surface that ignited with such regularity that river fires were treated as commonplace events by the locals.

After many fires, the river burned again in 1969 just as a third kind of frontier swept across the nation: the modern environmental movement. And the Cuyahoga River became a landmark on this frontier too, a poster child for those trying to undo the destruction wrought by the rampant industrialization of America.

“This is a good news story, something we don’t often hear about the environment nowadays,” says Hott. “The river was a mess forty years ago but it’s getting better now due to the efforts of a coalition of organizations and businesses. For the Cuyahoga, and perhaps other rivers in America, there’s reason to hope.”

The Cuyahoga’s story is a particularly apt example for future environmental efforts, because the river can’t just be “set aside” as a pristine wilderness park — it runs right through Cleveland, after all. And, like most American rivers, the Cuyahoga has to serve widely varying needs — aesthetic and economic, practical and natural, human and animal. The challenge sounds impossible: how to maintain industrial uses of the river, encourage recreation and entertainment, and still preserve the nature in and around the river.

“Ultimately, the story of the Cuyahoga is a story of the relationship between nature and human nature,” says Executive Producer Len Materman, who runs America’s River Communities, Inc. “Just as the Cuyahoga’s fire illuminated the need for us to address the condition of our rivers, the actions of Cuyahoga communities to make their region more livable can light the way for all Americans.”

Diane Garey and Lawrence R. Hott of Florentine Films/Hott Productions produced and directed **THE RETURN OF THE CUYAHOGA**. The pair has received numerous honors including an Emmy, the Peabody Award, two Academy Award nominations and in January 2008, a duPont-Columbia Journalism Award.

Funding for **THE RETURN OF THE CUYAHOGA** provided by Peter B. Lewis, The Cleveland Foundation, McDonald Hopkins LLC, The Lubrizol Foundation, The Abington Foundation, The GAR Foundation, The George Gund Foundation, The Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District, The Akron Community Foundation, The Ohio Humanities Council and the Davey Tree Company.

Credits

Produced and directed by Lawrence R. Hott and Diane Garey, written by Ken Chowder. Executive Producer Len Materman. Co- Executive Producer Ted Esborn. A co-production of Florentine Films/Hott Productions, Inc., America's River Communities, Inc. and WVIZ/PBS ideastream.

Filmmaker Bios

LAWRENCE R. HOTT (Director and Producer) has been producing documentary films since 1978, when he left the practice of law to join Florentine Films, Inc. His honors include an Emmy, two Academy Award nominations, a George Foster Peabody Award, the duPont-Columbia Journalism Award, the Erik Barnouw Award, five American Film Festival Blue Ribbons and 14 CINE Golden Eagles as well as screenings at the Telluride Film Festival and first-place awards from the San Francisco, Chicago, National Educational, and New England film festivals.

Hott was a Fulbright fellow in film and television in the United Kingdom in 1994. He received the Humanities Achievement Award from the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities in 1995, a Massachusetts Cultural Council/Boston Film and Video Foundation Fellowship in 2001 and the Rosalynn Carter Fellowship for Mental Health Journalism in 2001. Since 2002 Hott has completed seven films for PBS broadcast including: the one-hour *Imagining Robert: My Brother, Madness and Survival*; the two-hour *The Harriman Alaska Expedition Retraced*; the one-hour *Ohio: 200 Years*; the one-hour *Niagara Falls* for WNED-TV, Buffalo and PBS; the two-hour *Through Deaf Eyes* for WETA-TV, Washington, D.C., and the one-hour *John James Audubon: Drawn from Nature*, for PBS's *American Masters*.

DIANE GAREY (Producer)

Diane Garey has had a distinguished career as a documentary and feature editor and producer. She edited and co-produced *Wild By Law* in 1992 and in 1997, she edited *Divided Highways*, winner of an Emmy Award for Outstanding Historical Programming.

In 1996 and 1997, Garey produced and edited her first feature, *The Boyhood of John Muir*, winner of the Gold Hugo at the Chicago Television Festival and the Gold Award from Parents' Choice. Her two-part series *The People's Plague: Tuberculosis in America* aired nationally on PBS. *P.O.V.* broadcast her award-winning short *Tell Me Something I Can't Forget* in 1993. She also edited *American Experience's Knute Rockne and His Fighting Irish* that same year. Garey's most widely distributed film is the one-hour *Sentimental Women Need Not Apply: A History of the American Nurse*, which is in use in most nursing and medical schools in the country and was also broadcast on PBS.

Her recent writing and editing credits include *Ohio: 200 Years*; *Imagining Robert*; and *The Harriman Alaska Expedition Retraced*. She recently edited and co-produced *Niagara Falls* for WNED-TV, Buffalo, *Through Deaf Eyes* for WETA-TV, and *John James Audubon: Drawn from*

Nature for PBS's *American Masters* series. Diane Garey shares ownership of Florentine Films/Hott Productions, Inc. with her husband Larry Hott. The couple received the Humanities Achievement Award from the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities in 1995.

About Florentine Films / Hott Productions

Lawrence Hott and Diane Garey started working together on films in 1978 as members of the Florentine Films consortium. In 1981 they formed Florentine Films/Hott Productions Inc. Since then they have received an Emmy, two Academy Award nominations, five American Film Festival Blue Ribbons, fourteen CINE Golden Eagles, a George Foster Peabody Award, the Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Award, the Erik Barnouw Award and over one hundred national and international awards. Their work has been screened at a variety of major film festivals, including the New York Film Festival, Telluride, and Women in the Director's Chair.

About America's River Communities, Inc.

America's River Communities, Inc. (ARC), a nonprofit 501(c)3, was founded in early 2000 by the leaders of community-based nonprofits from California, North Carolina, Massachusetts, Ohio, and Texas who participated in a Clinton Administration White House Task Force related to rivers. ARC initiates collaborations within communities that engage their residents in efforts to protect natural resources, promote economic prosperity, and preserve culture and history. ARC fulfills its mission by acting as a creator and convener. As they did with **THE RETURN OF THE CUYAHOGA** film and education program, ARC's Board works in concert with local partners to develop projects that address a community need, and then solicits the insights of those closest to the issue and assembles the best team of people and organizations available to successfully complete the effort.

About WVIZ/PBS ideastream®

WVIZ/PBS, Northeast Ohio's public television station, is part of **ideastream**, a non-profit organization that applies the power of multiple media to education, culture and citizenship. In addition to WVIZ/PBS, ideastream includes 90.3 WCPN, WVIZ/DT (high definition), education and public service cable channels, broadband interactive video distance learning, and the Internet. ideastream creates several hours a day of award winning programming for distribution on these streams receiving in the last year a regional Emmy, multiple Associated Press, Society of Professional Journalists and Public Broadcasting awards including Best Newscast and Program of the Year in Ohio.

