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March 1, 2011

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VITA Office Receives Welcome Upgrade Actors' Equity Foundation, AFTRA Foundation and SAG Foundation Contribute to NY Site Renovation

NEW YORK AND LOS ANGELES (March 1, 2011) - Following a thorough renovation made possible by contributions from the **Actors' Equity Foundation, AFTRA Foundation** and **Screen Actors Guild Foundation**, New York's VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) office re-opened on Friday, Feb. 4. After more than 30 years in the current space at Actors' Equity Association headquarters, the refreshed and upgraded office now provides a comfortable, safe and confidential environment for the all-volunteer VITA staff and the performing artists they serve with free, year-round, critical assistance in preparing tax returns.

Actors' Equity Foundation, AFTRA Foundation and SAG Foundation have each contributed \$13,000 toward renovating the site at 165 West 46th St., New York, NY, 10036, a space that has been continuously provided to VITA free of charge by Actors' Equity.

In addition, the SAG Foundation will contribute \$3,000 yearly toward ongoing operating expenses. A grant from the Edith Meiser Foundation helps to cover additional costs.

"After more than 30 years in its current space, VITA was determined to get some new furniture, replace torn carpeting and dingy ceiling tiles, upgrade electrics and get a fresh coat of paint before February's 35th anniversary," said **Sandra Karas**, Director of the VITA program and Secretary-Treasurer of Actors' Equity Association. "The new colors, service plaques and framed photos of the founders and volunteers have made it a real 'home' to the volunteers as well."

"The AFTRA Foundation is committed to supporting AFTRA's professional performers, recording artists and broadcasters in both the craft and business of their chosen careers," said AFTRA Foundation Board Member and AFTRA National and New York Local Board Member **Janette Gautier**. "Over the years, many AFTRA members have come to depend on the tax services provided by VITA and we express our deepest gratitude to their all-volunteer staff for their incredible work on behalf of our members. The AFTRA Foundation is very pleased to continue our support of this program."

"The SAG Foundation is proud to support such an incredible program," said SAG Foundation Board Member, SAG National Board Member and New York Division Vice President **Rebecca Damon**. "VITA provides a great benefit to performers and we are grateful for the many volunteers who work hard on behalf of the members. If you haven't taken advantage of this program, it is well worth checking out."

Among those attending the Feb. 4 ribbon-cutting along with Karas, Damon and Gautier were Actors' Equity Foundation President and Actors' Equity Association Eastern Regional Vice-President Emeritus **Arne Gundersen**; Actors Fund Director of Planned Giving and Secretary of the Edith Meiser Foundation **Wallace Munro**; and Actors' Equity Association Executive Director **Mary McColl**. Executives, staff and board members from Screen Actors Guild, Actors' Equity Association and AFTRA and members from the three foundation boards were also present.

About Actors' Equity Foundation

The Actors' Equity Foundation's mission is to encourage pride in the history, charitable traditions, and standard of excellence of the American professional Actor and to educate the public by celebrating the Actors' artistry, work ethic and humanitarian ideals.

About the AFTRA Foundation

Founded by the AFTRA National Board of Directors in 1997 as a separate legal entity from the union, the AFTRA Foundation is a charitable and educational organization funded through tax-deductible voluntary contributions, grants and bequests—not AFTRA member dues—to support projects outside the scope of normal activities at AFTRA, including charitable endeavors, special conferences, studies, seminars and other events. For more information, visit <http://www.aftra.com/AFTRAFoundation.htm>.

About the Screen Actors Guild Foundation

Founded in 1985, the Screen Actors Guild Foundation is an educational, humanitarian and philanthropic 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Governed and funded independently of SAG, the SAG Foundation offers substantive services to Guild members, free of charge, in its mission to assist, educate and inspire actors toward their fullest potential in career, life and community. For more information, please visit www.sagfoundation.org or call (323) 549-6708.

About VITA

The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program of Equity, AFTRA & SAG just opened the

doors on its 35th season of providing free tax preparation service to members of these performing arts unions. A program sponsored by the Internal Revenue Service, VITA found support those many years ago when three individuals - all members of all 3 unions - asked the IRS to train them to do tax returns for their fellow members. Actors' Equity Association donated the space, technical and office support and AFTRA and SAG donated funds and the program has grown from those early efforts into a national, year-round service that performing artists, especially struggling ones, have come to depend upon. Staffed solely by volunteers, VITA continues to amaze even its most active non-paid helpers. More than 2000 members are assisted each year with more than 5000 returns prepared and filed.

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Attached Photo: At the Feb. 4, 2011 VITA office ribbon-cutting ceremony (pictured L-R): Rebecca Damon, Sandra Karas, Arne Gundersen and Janette Gautier. (Photo: David Lotz)

