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METROPOLITAN
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

November 13, 2011

Dear Governor's Arts Awards Selection Committee:

I remember it like it was yesterday. A woman from Benin came to my office over 10 years ago to promote a group of dancers who were coming to Nebraska from her native home in West Africa. She sought sponsors for performances and was using a home video to demonstrate their artistic excellence. The video left me in doubt, but we decided to sponsor a performance at Metropolitan Community College.

The result was one of the most amazing performances of traditional art, music and dance that we had the privilege of hosting for a campus and community audience. The impact caused Metropolitan Community College executive staff to add a performance to the annual graduation, providing access to traditional West African music and dance for a larger audience in the Civic Auditorium. It was the most motivating and exciting graduation in my memory, a phenomenal honor for the graduates.

To my great delight, I soon learned that Charles Ahovissi, one of the performers, had decided to make his home in Omaha. This created an amazing opportunity to have authentic, West African dance and cultural experiences throughout the year.

Since his initial visit to Omaha, Charles Ahovissi has performed one or more times annually at Metropolitan Community College. He also impacted collaborations that the college had with NAESA: Association of International Educators when regional conferences were held in Eastern Nebraska. His performances to international educators from up to 13 different states gave Nebraska the reputation of having superior international artists.

Charles not only performs with excellence. He is an amazing teacher who encourages participation from a diverse audience. He motivates small or large audiences. Charles Ahovissi has changed the arts scene in Nebraska. His vision is always greater than the present, designing new and innovative programs to impact young and old in our community.

I am honored to have worked with Mr. Charles Ahovissi for many years. He is professional on and off-stage. His service to Nebraska make him a deserving candidate for the Heritage Award as a part of the Governor's Arts Awards.

Sincerely,

Barbara J. Velázquez
Coordinator of International/Intercultural Education