Dear Community Member,

We are reaching out to you about the upcoming North Omaha History Harvest, an exciting project centered on collecting, preserving and sharing North Omaha’s rich and proud African American history. The project is the result of an innovative partnership between the UNL History Department, NET (Nebraska Educational Telecommunications) and three important community institutions, Love’s Jazz and Art Center, the Great Plains Black History Museum and the Malcolm X Memorial Foundation. To make the North Omaha History Harvest a success, though, we need your help!

**North Omaha History Harvest**

**Saturday, October 22, 2011**

10am-2pm

*Love’s Jazz & Art Center*

2510 N. 24th Street

(African American firefighters in the early 20th century – courtesy GPBHM)

**Here is a little background:** About a year ago, the History Department at UNL initiated a new program, called "History Harvest" (HH). The HH program acknowledges that Nebraska is a diverse state with a rich and complex history and that everyday people are the main “keepers” of that history, in the things they hold onto and in the stories they have to tell. The HH program seeks to help uncover, archive and share some of the many “hidden” historical treasures located right in our own communities.

**Here is how it works:** Once a year, we go to a different town or neighborhood and hold a History Harvest, inviting local people to bring to us any interesting historical artifacts they might have in their possession. Historical artifacts might include letters, diaries, photographs, pamphlets, records, legal documents, memorabilia from local or national events or campaigns (buttons, fliers, posters, programs, etc.), popular culture objects, artwork, graphic arts, textiles, signage, clothing, or other three-dimensional objects that have some sort of historical significance.

Community members bring their artifact(s) to our site, where a team of professional historians, as well as graduate students and advanced undergraduate History majors, are on hand to talk to them about the ways their artifacts connect with the broader national story of American history; in short, we try to let them know the historical value of their artifacts.

In addition, we make a digital copy of each historical artifact (either photographing it or scanning it) and collect any interesting stories that might go along with it. We do not keep any artifacts and observe a strict protocol when handling materials to ensure their safety and care. The digitized historical artifacts we collect will then form the basis of an expanding web-based public archive of Nebraska history, which will be free and open to teachers, students and the general public.

NET is on hand at each HH to film some of the events for programming on NET radio and television, another great way to share this valuable history with a wide audience.

At each HH stop, we also try to build partnerships with local community organizations that have an interest in or connectivity to local history.

Last year, we held the first HH in Lincoln and set a theme, "railroads." Needless to say, with Nebraska's long railroad history, lots of folks came out and brought a wealth of different materials related to railroad history here in our state and elsewhere. A few months later, we held a second HH in Nebraska City, this one without
a specific theme. Again, there was a nice turn-out from community members and a number of interesting artifacts turned up, including some fascinating Civil War era letters.

We are reaching out to you with the hope that you and your staff might share our enthusiasm for the upcoming History Harvest in North Omaha and decide to participate. Here is how:

- First and foremost, we need your help getting the word out in the community about the North Omaha History Harvest. This project will be successful only to the degree that community members participate. Please tell people in your circles about this project and encourage them to participate! If you have an email list, a website or Facebook page, please consider using those tools to spread the word.

- Similarly, do you know of specific people in the community who have interesting or significant items related to local or national African American history? If so, let them know about the HH and encourage them to participate, or let us know and we will reach out to them. If October 22 does not work for someone, we are willing to arrange an alternative time to look at artifacts.

- We will be conducting some oral history interviews with community members, too, which will also be posted to the HH website. If you know of individuals with exceptionally interesting and/or important local stories to share, please let us know and we will reach out to them.

- Lastly, we want to invite you to participate in the North Omaha HH by bringing in a few of the artifacts associated with your own history. Bring out any materials that help tell the story of African Americans in North Omaha and contribute to this unique public archive.

We want to collect an array of artifacts from a variety of eras that depict as many different aspects of African American life and experience as possible, including the Great Migration, family life, work and black-owned businesses, education, faith and worship, athletics, music and dance, military service, political leadership and activism, journalism and media, art and culture, leisure time, social life, community organizations, etc.

In the end, we hope this celebration of African American history will contribute to the current revitalization of North Omaha by highlighting the myriad ways that local black people have built a strong community, created a vibrant culture and significantly contributed to the life of the city over the years, despite the historical realities of inequality and discrimination. It is a powerful and important history that deserves a much fuller telling and a wider audience.

If you have suggestions or questions, or if it makes sense for us to meet to discuss the HH program further, please contact Dr. Patrick Jones at pjones2@unl.edu or 402-730-2073 to set something up.

Sincerely,

The North Omaha History Harvest Organizing Team

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Robert "Tank" Perry (UNL Junior History Major) 
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