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**Blue Star Theatres Program for Military Families Presents
"Veterans on Stage with Paula Vogel"**

Philadelphia Event Presented by The Wilma Theater Featuring Dramatic Writing from Veterans

New York, NY – Theatre Communications Group (TCG), the national organization for theatre, and Blue Star Families, the country's largest chapter-based military families non-profit organization, are pleased to announce a Blue Star Theatres event in Philadelphia featuring **Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Paula Vogel** on April 8 presented by The Wilma Theater. In partnership between TCG and Blue Star Families, with support from MetLife Foundation, Blue Star Theatres connects a variety of theatre offerings to military personnel and their families across the United States. This initiative recognizes the profound contributions of service families and seeks to build stronger connections between theatres, military families and their communities through unique programming, special discounts and more.

On Tuesday, April 8, a reading of dramatic writing from veterans will be held at 7:30PM (EST) at The Wilma Theater, 265 S Broad St, Philadelphia, PA. This event will include remarks by **Teresa Eyring**, executive director, TCG; **Mark Smith**, executive director, Blue Star Families; and a representative from the Philadelphia VA Medical Center.

"Sharing wartime experiences through dramatic writing can be a powerful healing tool for returning veterans, and it's important for audiences to bear witness to those stories," said **Teresa Eyring**, executive director, TCG. "We're grateful to continue our partnership with Blue Star Families and MetLife Foundation to empower theatres to better engage with and give back to the service members and military families who have given so much."

"One of the things that I've been talking to the veteran writers about and can see on everyone's faces," said playwright Paula Vogel, "is how much joy there is when you hear your words picked up by an actor and see your words become flesh in the room. To me it's an odd paradoxical balancing act—that you can write and talk about the most fearful thing and yet there's a vibrancy and joy when you give it over to actors and they lift it up. It's been profoundly moving."

This event coincides with *Don Juan Comes Home from Iraq*, a production at The Wilma Theater created by esteemed playwright and teacher Paula Vogel in collaboration with veterans from the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Vietnam. Nearly 40 veterans and their spouses contributed to the script's development, with everything from military drills to the music they listened to on deployment finding its way into the production. Developed with Blanka Zizka, artistic director of The Wilma Theater, and a full company of actors and designers, this unique process created a community along with a new play.

Dramatic writing from veterans involved in the creation of this piece will be read aloud by the cast of *Don Juan Comes Home from Iraq* at The Wilma Theater in Philadelphia on April 8. This event for adult

audiences is free and open to the public. Please RSVP by calling The Wilma Theater at 215-546-7824 or email tickets@wilmatheater.org.

Blue Star Theatres builds on the work already occurring at many theatres nationwide, including: playwriting classes to empower creative expression for veterans; community discussions on plays whose themes resonate with military families; free or discounted ticket programs; job postings and casting notices on military bases; and much more. TCG and Blue Star Families connect theatres with local bases and military families, and develop and disseminate best-practices for engaging with deployed personnel, veterans and service families.

“During this time of uncertainty and transition for service members and their families, as we adjust to a post-war period and begin to really see the long term effects for more than twelve years of war, programs like Blue Star Theatres are even more important,” said **Kathy Roth-Douquet**, CEO, Blue Star Families. “Thanks to the generous support of the MetLife Foundation, and the contributions of TCG and the growing number of theatres across the county, military families have even more ways to enjoy time together through the arts in their communities, as participating theatres go above and beyond to offer interactive experiences for service members and their families, creating truly enriching opportunities.”

“MetLife Foundation is pleased to continue our work with Blue Star Families and support the Blue Star Theatres program,” said **Dennis White**, president and CEO, MetLife Foundation. “Opening doors to theatres across the country is a wonderful way for members of our military and their families to share time together and experience the arts in their communities. The Blue Star Theatres program is also a way for MetLife Foundation to say ‘thank you’ to our servicemen and women.”

One hundred and nine TCG Member Theatres have already signed on to participate in Blue Star Theatres. To find the full list, visit: http://www.tcg.org/pdfs/advocacy/BST_alpha_4-1-14.pdf.

For more information about Blue Star Theatres, visit: <http://www.tcg.org/advocacy/bluestar/map.cfm>.

Blue Star Families is an international nonprofit network of military families from all ranks and services, including guard and reserve, dedicated to supporting, connecting, and empowering military families. With our partners, Blue Star Families hosts a robust array of morale and empowerment programs including Books on Bases, Blue Star Museums, Operation Honor Corps, Blue Star Careers, and Operation Appreciation. Blue Star Families also works directly with the Department of Defense and senior members of local, State, and Federal government to bring the most important military family issues to light. Collaborating with fellow nonprofits, community advocates, and public officials, Blue Star Families raises awareness of the challenges and strengths of military family life and works to make military life more sustainable. Our worldwide membership includes military spouses, children, parents, and friends, as well as service members, veterans, and civilians. To learn more about Blue Star Families, visit them at <http://www.bluestarfam.org/>, and on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/BlueStarFamilies>), Twitter (<https://twitter.com/BlueStarFamily>) and Pinterest (<http://www.pinterest.com/bluestarfam/>).

MetLife Foundation was created in 1976 to continue MetLife’s long tradition of corporate contributions and community involvement. Today, the Foundation is dedicated to advancing financial inclusion, committing \$200 million over the next five years to help build a secure future for individuals and communities around the world. MetLife Foundation is affiliated with MetLife, Inc., a leading global provider of insurance, annuities and employee benefit programs. MetLife holds leading market positions in the United States, Japan, Latin America, Asia, Europe and the Middle East. For more information about the Foundation, visit www.metlife.org.

The Wilma Theater was founded in 1973 as the Wilma Project; in 1979, Blanka Zizka and Jiri Zizka of Czechoslovakia forged a creative relationship with the Wilma Project as artists-in-residence. They gained swift acclaim for their bold, innovative productions and assumed artistic leadership, changing the name to The Wilma Theater. After many seasons of producing theatre at various locations, the Wilma opened a new, state-of-the-art 300-seat theater on The Avenue of the Arts in 1996. Under the artistic leadership of

Blanka Zizka, the Wilma has since taken its place in the vanguard of Philadelphia theatre, and serves as a leader and a mentor within its artistic community.

For over 50 years, **Theatre Communications Group** (TCG), the national organization for the American theatre, has existed to strengthen, nurture and promote the professional not-for-profit American theatre. TCG's constituency has grown from a handful of groundbreaking theatres to nearly 700 member theatres and affiliate organizations and more than 12,000 individuals nationwide. TCG offers its members networking and knowledge-building opportunities through conferences, events, research and communications; awards grants, approximately \$2 million per year, to theatre companies and individual artists; advocates on the federal level; and serves as the U.S. Center of the International Theatre Institute, connecting its constituents to the global theatre community. TCG is North America's largest independent publisher of dramatic literature, with 12 Pulitzer Prizes for Best Play on the TCG booklist. It also publishes the award-winning AMERICAN THEATRE magazine and ARTSEARCH®, the essential source for a career in the arts. In all of its endeavors, TCG seeks to increase the organizational efficiency of its member theatres, cultivate and celebrate the artistic talent and achievements of the field and promote a larger public understanding of, and appreciation for, the theatre. www.tcg.org.

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