

# US

## The Unusual Suspects

theatre company

### Press Announcement

*For Immediate Release*

## THE UNUSUAL SUSPECTS NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED AT WHITE HOUSE

### Mrs. Laura Bush Presents *Coming Up Taller Award* to L.A. Area Non-Profit Using Theatre to Help At-Risk Youth

**WASHINGTON D.C. January 28, 2008** -- The Unusual Suspects Theatre Company, a Culver City-based non-profit that provides theater workshops for incarcerated and foster youth, today accepted the prestigious 2007 *Coming Up Taller Award* from First Lady Laura Bush at the White House.



As one of only 15 arts and humanities programs nationwide to receive the award from the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, The Unusual Suspects was represented by its founder, actress Laura Leigh Hughes and Jose Ramirez, 19, of Compton, an orphan and former gang member who was incarcerated as a teen.

Jose told the First Lady that his life changed when he participated in The Unusual Suspects program where he learned not only to write plays and act, but also how to build trust, resolve conflicts without violence, set goals, and work as a team member. Today, he has completed high school and is attending community college. "If it weren't for The Unusual Suspects, I know I'd be dead or in prison right now," he said.

### More About The Award

The Unusual Suspects Theatre Company produces about a dozen separate productions each year throughout Southern California. Each production is comprised of an intensive 12-week workshop, where The Unusual Suspects brings together theater and film professionals to develop participants' acting techniques and help them collaboratively write and produce an original play. "Since the plays are often based on the participants' experiences, they provide a vehicle to examine and resolve issues - and change lives," said Executive Director Sally Fairman.

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**Photo Caption:** *US* founder, actress Laura Leigh Hughes and Jose Ramirez, 19, of Compton, an orphan and former gang member who was incarcerated as a teen, with The First Lady and the Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, Dana Gioia.

**Photo credits:** Steve Purcell



The *Coming Up Taller Awards* recognize and support outstanding community arts and humanities programs that celebrate the creativity of America's young people, and provide them with new learning opportunities and a chance to contribute to their communities. The awards also highlight the contributions that historians, scholars, librarians and visual and performing arts make to families and communities by mentoring children. More than 250 nominations were received by the program in 2007.

"Arts and humanities activities have a wonderful way of enabling young people to discover their unique talents and interests while forging a path to success in school and life," said Adair Margo, Chair of the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities. "The Unusual Suspects Theatre Company is especially notable for its success breaking the vicious cycle of crime or drugs by intervening with a fun and functional activity for at-risk youth."

The President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities bridges the interests of federal agencies and the private sector, supports special projects that increase participation, and helps incorporate the humanities and the arts into White House objectives.

The National Endowment for the Arts is a public agency dedicated to supporting excellence in the arts, both new and established; bringing the arts to all Americans; and providing leadership in arts education. Because democracy demands wisdom, the National Endowment for the Humanities serves and strengthens our Republic by promoting excellence in the humanities and conveying the lessons of history to all Americans. The Institute of Museum and Library Services is an independent federal grant making agency dedicated to creating and sustaining a nation of learners.

## About The Unusual Suspects Theatre Company

The Unusual Suspects Theatre Company (**US**) has been empowering teens to make positive choices for over 15 years. **US** promotes the healthy transformation of incarcerated and other under-served youth through participation in theatre arts. Through our programming, youth write an original play as an ensemble and perform for a public audience. Our programs cultivate pride, racial tolerance and social consciousness.

## For More Information Please Visit:

The Unusual Suspects: [www.theunusualsuspects.org](http://www.theunusualsuspects.org)

Coming Up Taller: [www.cominguptaller.org](http://www.cominguptaller.org)

President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities: [www.pcah.gov](http://www.pcah.gov)