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**STARLIGHT THEATRE ANNOUNCES  
2009 STAR AWARD HONOREE**

*Tom Bowser of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of KC to be recognized May 16*

**KANSAS CITY, Mo.** – Starlight Theatre officials are pleased to announce that Tom Bowser will be honored with the organization’s 2009 Star Award. The Star Award, bestowed annually on an individual who has made significant contributions to Starlight and the greater Kansas City community, will be presented Saturday night, May 16, at the annual Starlight Theatre Benefit Gala.

Bowser serves as president and chief executive officer of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas City, the area’s largest health insurer with nearly 1 million members. Under Bowser’s direction since 2001, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas City has been a major contributor to local arts and culture endeavors and organizations, in addition to numerous wellness and health enrichment efforts communitywide. According to company literature, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas City invested \$3 million in 400 charitable and community causes and programs in 2008.

Specifically at Starlight, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas City has been the title sponsor of the Blue Star Awards program since its inception in 2003. Recognized as Starlight’s version of the Tony Awards for local high school musical theatre programs, each

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year Blue Star recognizes the achievements of thousands of talented young performers. During the 2008-09 school year, 44 metropolitan area high schools producing 48 musicals are participating. The culmination of the program is the annual Blue Star Awards ceremony on the Starlight stage; this year's event is scheduled for Thursday night, May 21.

"Tom's wife, Judy, is a retired high school vocal music teacher, so the Blue Star program has special meaning to her as well," said Greg Graves, chairman of the Starlight Theatre Board of Directors.

In addition to the Blue Star Awards, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas City was a generous contributor to Starlight's recently completed Future Generations Campaign and annually is a significant benefactor of the Starlight benefit gala. John W. Kennedy, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas City executive vice president and chief operating officer, currently serves as first vice chair on the Starlight board.

At the mid-March 2009 Partnership Awards luncheon sponsored by the Arts Council of Metropolitan Kansas City, Bowser took the stage to accept top honors in the large business category for Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas City's 2008 ArtsKC Fund employee giving campaign.

"Tom Bowser and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas City have contributed greatly to the success of Starlight Theatre and the arts throughout our city," Graves said. "He epitomizes the spirit of giving and collaboration that this award is meant to honor. In fact, his commitment to excellence at work, in his personal life and on behalf of Starlight Theatre has been an important inspiration for me."

A 35+-year employee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield System, Bowser serves as chairman of the board of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, the highest elected office for the national Blue System, representing 102 million members and annual revenues of \$300 billion.

Bowser's résumé of civic service is extensive as well. He is past chairman of the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce and Kansas City Area Development Council and currently serves as a board member on the Civic Council of Greater Kansas City. He also is involved in several boards related to his alma mater, the University of Kansas.

Bowser will receive the Star Award at the 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Starlight Theatre Benefit Gala on May 16. The black-tie event raises needed funds for Starlight operations, programming,

education and outreach. The gala includes an outdoor cocktail reception, dinner and entertainment on the Cohen Community Stage and an after-party with a live band and dancing.

Co-chairing the 2009 Starlight gala are Kansas City Power & Light president Bill Downey and his wife, Liz. The event's multi-year presenting sponsors include Sprint, Muriel McBrien Kauffman Foundation, KCP&L, RED Development, Burns & McDonnell, Parris Communications and Helzberg Diamonds.

Table sponsorships and benefactor levels of \$1,000 to \$50,000 for the 2009 gala are available. Individual tickets can be purchased for \$250 per person.

For more information about tickets to the 2009 Starlight gala or to inquire about single- or multi-year sponsorship, contact Kate Forristall, Starlight development director, at 816.997.1129 or [kate.forristall@kcstarlight.com](mailto:kate.forristall@kcstarlight.com).

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### **Starlight Theatre**

Presenting Broadway entertainment since 1951, the non-profit Starlight Theatre Association is Kansas City's oldest and largest performing arts organization. The Association operates programs and maintains the largest stage in the United States, as well as the 16-acre Starlight Theatre complex. While assuming all annual operating costs for the complex, the Association also raises funds for capital improvements and a variety of programs, including national Broadway musical performances, concerts, community outreach and education. Since 2000, the Association has contributed more than \$25 million of privately funded improvements to the Kansas City, Mo.-owned Starlight Theatre. Each Broadway season, Starlight donates more than 11,000 tickets to its performances to regional non-profit organizations serving the disadvantaged.

In 2008, Starlight Theatre was selected as the "Favorite Performing Arts Venue or Organization" in the Kansas City Convention & Visitors Association's Visitors' Choice Awards program. Starlight also received a Gold Award for "Best Performing Arts Venue" and Bronze Award for "Best Theater" in *Ingram's* 2008 Best of Business Kansas City Awards. The theatre seats approximately 8,000 and is located in Swope Park.