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**SHIRLEY SHERROD AND MEREDITH McGEE
AT CIVIL RIGHTS MUSEUM**

Leading voices in the movement for equality and social justice—from the 1960s and present day—will take center stage at the International Civil Rights Center & Museum in downtown Greensboro, North Carolina, on Thursday, October 31, 2013 at 7:30 pm. The event, presented by the Rural Development Leadership Network (RDLN) in partnership with the Museum, will feature Shirley Sherrod, an organizer and community development worker based in Albany, Georgia, and Meredith McGee of Jackson, Mississippi, niece of James Meredith, who integrated the University of Mississippi in 1963. The speakers will read excerpts from their books, engage in dialogue with the audience, and sign copies for those in attendance. The event is free and open to the public.

Ms. Sherrod's memoir, *The Courage to Hope*, was published by Simon & Schuster in 2012. Ms. McGee's biography of her uncle, *James Meredith: Warrior and the America that Created Him*, was published by Praeger this year. Ms. McGee is also co-author of *Married to Sin*, a narrative of one family's secrets, redemption, and personal achievement, and author of *Odyssey*, a new book of poems and other writings, published by Meredith Etc, a company she started. Both women are graduates of the Rural Development Leadership Network's field project and study program, through which they spearheaded field projects in their communities and earned master's degrees via RDLN's innovative arrangement with Antioch University Midwest. Moreover, Ms. Sherrod also serves a member of RDLN's Board of Directors. RDLN, a national, multicultural social change organization, based in New York, is currently holding a National Network Assembly at Camp Caraway in Sophia.

Starry Krueger, president of RDLN, has commented, "We are proud to present this event in cooperation with the Museum because of our shared commitment to social justice for all people." Bamidele Demerson, executive director of the Museum said, "We are delighted to host this program, which relates so strongly with our mission." The International Civil Rights Center & Museum—a historic landmark, exhibiting and collecting institution, and educational service organization—promotes an understanding of the quest for equality, justice and freedom in the United States and across the world.

Sherrod gained national attention in July 2011 when she was forced to resign as Georgia Director of Rural Development for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. A detractor circulated a video clip purportedly showing Sherrod recounting that she had treated a white farm family with racial bias, when in fact she had worked diligently to save this family's farm. After receiving apologies from the Secretary of Agriculture and the President of the United States, Sherrod is back on the ground helping poor communities in Georgia with economic development and leadership development projects. Her husband, the civil rights leader Rev. Charles Sherrod, was the first Field Secretary of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in Albany, Georgia. Along with others, they established New Communities, which eventually received an award of more than twelve million dollars as part of the Minority Farmers lawsuit. The group used part of the money to purchase a former plantation that operated on the labor of an enslaved work force. This site will function as a hub for work in the sphere of racial healing. It will also serve as a training center and demonstration farm to preserve and revitalize African American agriculture in one of the poorest parts of Georgia.

RDLN was founded in 1983. Participants from eleven states are gathered at the RDLN Assembly, whose theme is "Fifty Years Later We Still Have Dreams!" Shirley McClain of Holly Springs, RDLN Issues Coordinator and former executive director of the North Carolina Hunger Network, is one of the Assembly's North Carolina hosts. Other RDLN Leaders in the state include: Theresa Isley of Siler City who works with the Family Violence & Rape Crisis Services; Evelyn Conley, a member of the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma, currently living in Sylva with her husband Robert Conley, author of *The Cherokee Nation* and many novels set in Indian country; and Martha Beatty of Raeford, executive director of Community Outreach Advocate.

The International Civil Rights Center & Museum opened its doors in 2010. The core experience of the Museum is *The Battlegrounds*, an engaging 16-gallery journey through American civil rights history that includes audio-video narratives, photographs, artifacts, vintage newsreel footage, video reenactments, and interactive components that document the local 1960 F.W. Woolworth lunch counter sit-in protests against racial segregation and other efforts in the nonviolent struggle for social change.

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Meredith C. McGee is the author of *James Meredith: Warrior and the America that Created Him*, a biography of her uncle, Civil Rights icon, James H. Meredith. She is also the co-author of *Married to Sin*, a memoir about one rural family's secrets, redemption, and personal achievement, and the author of *Odyssey*, a collection of her poems and other writings. McGee was born in Los Angeles, California, and raised in Jackson, Mississippi. She has worked on the staff of the Mississippi Association of Cooperatives, a nonprofit organization that serves farmers, their families and communities and Southern Echo. A professional writer for Typing Solutions Résumés & Etc., McGee also serves as the acquisitions editor of Meredith Etc. She founded Heirs United Investment Club, co-founded Mose Dantzler, holds membership in the Clinton Ink Slingers and Women for Progress. McGee,

fellow with the Rural Development Leadership Network since 1998, earned her master's degree from Antioch University Midwest through an innovative program with RDLN.



Shirley Sherrod was born in Baker County, Georgia during Jim Crow times. Her plan to leave the South following graduation from high school changed. During the senior year, her father was killed by a white man who was never brought to justice. Shirley vowed then to stay in the South and work for change. Soon after, she met future husband, Charles Sherrod, the first field secretary of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

With other community people, the Sherrods co-founded a communal farm project called, New Communities, Inc., which included the largest contiguous tract of black-owned land in the country. Governor Lester Maddox blocked subsequent federal funds from coming into the state, and eventually the land was lost. New Communities recently received a substantial award through the Minority Farmers lawsuit, enabling the group to buy a former plantation as a center for racial healing and the preservation and advancement of African-American agriculture in

the area.

Ms. Sherrod graduated from Albany State University and earned a master's degree from Antioch University through the Rural Development Leadership Network. She is a member of the Board of Directors of RDLN. As an RDLN Leader, she was sponsored by the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, and her RDLN Field Project was her early work to establish a resource center for small farmers in Southwest Georgia. She continued to work for the Federation, and she also became Georgia Lead for the Southern Rural Black Women's Southern Initiative (SRBWI).

In July 2009, Ms. Sherrod was appointed Georgia Director of Rural Development for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. She was forced to resign a year later when a distorted video tape was circulated accusing her of discriminating against a white farm family. It was soon revealed that she had actually worked diligently to save the white family's farm. Her exemplary history was recognized. In fact, she has been in demand as a speaker and advisor ever since.

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