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May 2009: Focus on Philanthropy

For JGA's May 2009 podcast, Ted Grossnickle, Chairman and CEO of Johnson Grossnickle & Associates, sat down with Peggy Monson, Vice President of Advancement at Heartland Truly Moving Pictures, to discuss how nonprofits make tough budget cuts in the economic crisis.

While working with Peggy and Heartland, Ted noticed Heartland's courageous and notable budgetary decisions. During a time when it seems that everyone is cutting back, Heartland has done so with a focus on their mission. We decided to share Peggy's advice with you.

Ted Grossnickle: Welcome to the first in a series of podcasts offered by Johnson Grossnickle & Associates to offer insights and resources on strategic fundraising and philanthropy. My name is Ted Grossnickle, and I am chairman and CEO of JGA, and today I'm talking with Peggy Monson, Vice President for Advancement at Heartland Truly Moving Pictures. As always, it is great to see you Peggy, and thanks for taking time to talk with us today.

Peggy Monson: Thank you for having me, it's my pleasure.

Ted: Peggy, could you start by just briefly telling our listeners, first of all, about Heartland Truly Moving Pictures.

Peggy: Heartland Truly Moving Pictures recognizes and honors film makers whose work explores the human journey by expressing hope and respect for the positive values of life. Our flagship event is the Heartland Film Festival. That takes place every fall, and really we started with the film festival back in 1991. To date, we have awarded over \$2 million to support film makers.

Ted: And you do a terrific job. But, like many organizations, in this very tough environment, this very tough economy, Heartland has had to take a hard look at its resources, and has had to make choices. Can you tell us a little bit about how Heartland has been going through this period, and how it responded?

Peggy: First of all, we do have a five-year strategic plan, so we're really in the middle of that. What we've had to do is take a look at that strategic plan. We made some real, mid-course adjustments to that plan, based upon our experience in the current environment. We've had to trim expenses, look at our budget, and we have made some tough decisions, but good decisions that we feel support the changes that we've made

in our strategic plan. During this process, we have stayed very close to those folks who support us, donors, volunteers and also with JGA. We certainly view our relationship with JGA as, not a cost, but really an investment in our future. We believe we are sort of walking together in this environment, and together are looking at the tough times. We've really been able to meet these challenges with confidence.

Ted: Well, thank you. That's sort of the way we feel about it too. We're walking the path together. It strikes me as more than appropriate that in a tough economy like this, Heartland of all places would perhaps have some encouraging words to share with our listeners as they go through changes of their own. Is there any advice or counsel you would offer as a person who has been there?

Peggy: I guess what gets me through the day is I believe that Heartland's mission is more important now than ever. Whatever organization you're with, if you believe in what you're doing, and you believe you're making a difference in people's lives, it's more important now than ever. That will carry you through this tough time, and probably at the end of the day, because of that focus, you will be stronger and better for having done that.

Ted: I think you're absolutely right. Thanks so much for sharing your thoughts today, Peggy.

Peggy: Thank you, Ted. It's a pleasure.

Ted: Thanks for listening in today, and please join us for our next JGA podcast in July.