For Immediate Release (August 7, 2015):

TWO RARE, ORIGINAL “MUNCHKIN COSTUMES” FROM *THE WIZARD OF OZ* MOTION PICTURE ADDED TO THE HOLDINGS OF WAMEGO’S OZ MUSEUM ------------------

“LITTLE FIDDLER” AND “SOLDIER” JACKETS WORN IN THE JUDY GARLAND MOVIE CLASSIC TO BE UNVEILED AND EXHIBITED DURING THE ANNUAL *OZTOBERFEST* WEEKEND, SEPTEMBER 25th-27th

(Wamego, KS) Some extraordinary pieces of motion picture history have found their way over the rainbow and back to Kansas.

Two colorful felt jackets worn in Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer’s 1939 film, *The Wizard of Oz*, are being added to the thousands of items held and displayed by The OZ Museum in Wamego. The rare wardrobe pieces were purchased last December during the “TCM (Turner Classic Movies) Presents… There’s No Place Like Hollywood” auction at New York’s Bonhams galleries and will be unveiled and exhibited for the first time as the highlight of Wamego’s annual *OZtoberFest* weekend, September 25-27th.

Designed in 1938 by legendary couturier/costumer Gilbert Adrian, the orange and cream “little fiddler” coat and the green, yellow, and beige “soldier” jacket were created for Munchkin cast members to wear during the sequence in which Judy Garland (as “Dorothy Gale from Kansas”) is first welcomed to The Land of Oz. Approximately 124 “little people” – as they liked to be termed – worked as Munchkins in the *Oz* movie. A couple of dozen appeared as soldiers, escorting Garland to an audience with their city officials; five others “played” as violinists who musically accompanied the girl to their border with a rendition of “You’re Off to See the Wizard.”

The two Munchkin costumes will debut during an invitational reception and “reveal gala” in The Columbian Theatre Gallery on Friday, September 25th. At that time, Myrna Swensen (widow of *Oz* “Munchkin Soldier” Clarence Swensen) will unveil the two pieces, assisted by preeminent Oz/Garland historian John Fricke. Fricke also will emcee *OZtoberFest* events from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday, September 26th and 27th at The OZ Museum, where the classic outfits go on display to the public for the first time.

During the Friday evening festivities, Swensen and Fricke will unveil two additional costumes, as well, respectively worn in recent years by Swensen’s husband and Munchkin “flowerpot hat” dancer Margaret Pellegrini. These replicas of their original Munchkin wardrobe were prepared for them for appearances at nationwide Oz festivals in the 1990s and 2000s; both were popular *OZtoberFest* attendees across some of those years. (Pellegrini died in 2013, Swensen in 2009. His costume is a gift to The OZ Museum from his wife and their family; Pellegrini’s is drawn from the holdings of Johnpaul Cafiero, whose family’s 25,000-item Oz collection rotates through The OZ Museum as the core of its ongoing exhibition.)

Another presentation will precede the Swensen/Fricke Friday ceremonies, as Columbian Theatre Foundation board member Corey Reeves shares the rendering of the new façade for The OZ Museum itself. The $150,000 building project is now in its fund-raising stages, and the September 25th event is planned as a promotional effort to encourage and enlist financial interest and support from local businesses, contributors, and entrepreneurs. The Columbian Theatre Foundation is the umbrella organization for both the theatre and The OZ Museum.

Given the intervening seventy-six years and the ongoing fame and mystique of *Oz*, surviving costumes from the movie are both extremely difficult to find and rabidly collected. News of Wamego’s acquisitions was kept under wraps until this week, and both pieces already have undergone restoration and preservation precautions at the hands of a professional conservator.

Each of the original Munchkin costumes won at the Bonhams auction bears a sewn-in name tag. The “fiddler” cloak was designed for “Eugine [sic] David,” the soldier jacket for “Lewis Croft.” Both men long since have been confirmed as active participants in the *Oz* film; Eugene’s brother, Eulie, was also a little person and appeared as a Munchkin solider. It is thought that both of the Davids died sometime in the 1970s; Croft passed away in 2008.

[NOTE: Both 1939 *Oz* costumes will be on exhibition for *OZtoberFest* weekend. Thereafter, they will alternate on a six-month basis and *only one at a time* will be displayed in The OZ Museum.]

Admittance to The OZ Museum is $10 per person for adults; $8 per person for children (12 and under), and for students and military personnel with I.D. In addition to visiting the museum’s ongoing, extensive archive of some 2500 ever-changing items, attendees of *OZtoberFest* on Saturday, September 26 and Sunday, September 27th, are welcome to enjoy Oz-related presentations by Swensen, Cafiero, and Fricke, featuring unique Oz video clips and photographs.

*The Wizard of Oz* first premiered in August 1939 and has since become a cornerstone of American popular culture. As early as 1970, it was estimated that more people had seen *Oz* in theatres and on television than any other entertainment in history. Now, thanks to home video and additional network and cable telecasts, *The Wizard of Oz* is more familiar to more people than any other motion picture.

Only one of the little people who appeared as Munchkins in the film is still alive: Jerry Maren, the “Lollipop Guild” member who presented Dorothy with a giant sucker, lives in retirement in Southern California at age 95. (A half-dozen of the women who, as professional child dancers, “filled in” the Munchkinland Plaza in the movie also are alive, although they now are normally-sized adults.)

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For further information about The OZ Museum and *OZtoberFest*, please call or write Bob Potemski, Development Manager, The Columbian Theatre Foundation, Inc.:

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