

Theodore C. Cooper Award for Distinguished Volunteer Service

Jerrold French



Jerry French has a long and deep commitment to the fine arts community in Kalamazoo. He has lived here his entire life, nearly 88 years. Bill Maxey, who nominated Mr. French says, "I have known him for 20 years and have researched his arts volunteer work as thoroughly as I can, but I imagine there may well have been earlier involvements than I have uncovered". Adding, "I know from personal experience, and from what others have reported to me in the course of my research, that Jerry does not offer his volunteer services lightly nor does he join an organization unless he knows he has the time, the interest and the talent to be an active participant".

Mr. French's volunteer commitments include:

- WMU Department of Dance
- WMU Partners in Dance
- Wellspring/Cori Terry and Dancers
- WMU Theater Guild (a community support group for the Dept of Theater)
- Farmers Alley Board Theater
- Fontana Chamber Arts
- Richmond Center for the Arts

Among his many accomplishments, Jerry established an annual scholarship fund to be administered by the Western Michigan University Department of Dance, to support a student each year. The current department chair notes that Jerry has been an active participant in the program for more than the 20 years that she has been on faculty. The School of Dance has benefitted for decades from Jerry's personal and financial participation in its program. Jerry was also a founding board member of Partners in Dance, a community support organization for the Department of Dance at WMU, founded in 2002. He continues as an active member of this board.

Says Maxey, "As a demonstration of his relentless advocacy for the arts in our community, I am a member of a small monthly lunch group made up of arts community volunteers. Each month, we go around the table with each of us commenting on the activities, past and future, of our favorite organizations. Most of us usually have no more than 2 or 3 activities to report or comment on. Jerry is different. Each month he brings a stack of material - flyers, brochures, posters, newspaper articles and

such - to better acquaint the rest of the group with the enormous variety of arts activities which take place in our community. Each of us in this small lunch group is an advocate for 2 or 3 organizations. Jerry does so much more ... he is an advocate for Kalamazoo area fine arts in all of its many dimensions.”