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Oct. 30, 2020

ACGK Announces 2020 Community Arts Awards Recipients

KALAMAZOO, Mich.—The Arts Council of Greater Kalamazoo (ACGK) announces the recipients of the 2020 Community Arts Awards. Since 1985, the ACGK has honored local artists, arts organizations, and supporters through the Community Arts Awards.

“The 2020 Community Arts Awards recipients represent our broad and diverse artistic community that is comprised of talented and inspirational artists, arts educators, and arts organizations. We look forward to celebrating their achievements and contributions at our annual Community Arts Awards presentation,” said ACGK Executive Director, Kristen Chesak.

The 2020 Community Arts Awards presentation will be held at the Arts Council's Annual Meeting, Tuesday, December 1, 2020 at 5:30 pm at the Wellspring Theater.

Community Medal of Arts

Andrew Koehler – is currently the music director of the Kalamazoo Philharmonia, which he leads as part of his position as an associate professor of music at Kalamazoo College. Koehler also holds concurrent posts as music director of the Kalamazoo Junior Symphony Orchestra and as the cover conductor and frequent guest conductor of the West Michigan Symphony Orchestra. He is active as a guest conductor close to home and throughout the world.

Sandra Bremer – has a career that spans over 40 years as an accomplished actress, choreographer, and director. A native of Portage, Mich., Bremer got her start in community theatre in Kalamazoo before being on cast as part of four different national tours. She later spent almost 15 years as a resident company member of the renowned Derby Dinner Playhouse in Louisville, Ky. Bremer returned to Kalamazoo in 2010 and has continued to direct and choreograph for the Kalamazoo Civic Theatre and Farmers Alley Theatre and has also been involved with the Civic Youth Theatre and its summer theatre program. Bremer is a Theatre Teaching Artist for Education for the Arts, working in the Aesthetic Education program, the PACE program, and the Alternative Arts Initiative program.

Dr. Thomas G. Evans – is the Director of Bands and Professor of Music at Kalamazoo College where he conducts and oversees all aspects of the band program including the Symphonic Band, Jazz Band, and Pep Band. In addition to conducting, he teaches courses in Music History, Music Education, Jazz, Trombone and Euphonium. He became the conductor of the Kalamazoo Concert Band in 2002, a widely regarded community band of nearly 100 musicians. At Kalamazoo College his lecture topics include Jazz Explorations. Dr. Evans is known for his innovative programming as well as his collaborations with numerous local and international artists.

Adam F. Carter Young Artist Award

Shelby Alexander – has been an active member of the Kalamazoo Civic Youth Theatre for several years as both an actor and technician and has stage managed several shows. She was the first youth playwright for the 10th annual TK New Playfest and was a semifinalist for the Young Playwright's Festival hosted by Blank Space Theatre. An avid writer, Alexander has participated in a variety of workshops and lessons at Michigan State, Harvard, Carnegie Melon, and Crawlspace Eviction Improv Comedy group. Currently a senior at Comstock High School and the Kalamazoo Area Math and Science Center, Alexander plans on attending college to study both computer science and theatre arts. She is passionate about creating new technologies that brings theatre directly into homes in formats other than streaming services.

Business Arts Award

Fortitude Graphics Design – From imagination to reality—that is the motivation behind Fortitude Graphic Design & Printing founder Sean Hollins. This theme has been the focus of his creative contributions to the arts for more than 25 years. His work with local printers has allowed him to use his skills as an artist to bring unique graphic design services to their companies. Hollins has designed award-winning logos and websites for credit unions, small businesses, churches, athletes, and politicians. Hollins' true passion is working with wordsmiths, helping dozens of local authors create books and covers that are the culmination of the author's hard work.

Patron Award

Joy and Tim Light – This year marks the 10th anniversary of the opening of the Joy Light Gallery of Asian Art at the Kalamazoo Institute of Art (KIA). It was the Lights' vision and passion to provide the community with the opportunity to create a dedicated space for displaying the arts of East Asia. Their generosity extends beyond the creation of a gallery to include funding for exhibitions and acquisitions fund to purchase works that epitomize the best of East Asian art. Throughout the years, their philanthropy and voice has allowed the KIA to offer our community, the region, and visitors from beyond Michigan a more enriching understanding of the history of art and cultures beyond the western world. Their vision has provided an environment that showcases exhibitions and works that offer a space for social commentary and reflects both tradition and change.

Epic Award

Crescendo Academy of Music – Now over 30 years old, Crescendo Academy of Music (CAM) has evolved from a violin program to an educational and musical mainstay of our community. The academy provides opportunities for performances in a variety of local venues, lessons in music theory and composition, chamber ensembles, Mando for Kids, and Music Together®, a nationally recognized early childhood music program. As music education becomes less available, CAM strives to make music accessible to all through need-based scholarships and an instrument loan program. CAM is committed to creating a supportive environment for all levels, through program growth, reaching underserved populations (income, race, age, ability), improving quality of life for program participants, fostering a lifelong love of music, and successful public performances for students taking private lessons, as well as participants in classes and ensembles.

Gayle Hoogstraten Arts Leadership Award

Arts Educator

Michelle Stempien – The Kalamazoo Institute of Arts' (KIA) director of museum education, Stempien has built a docent corps for the KIA that has reached groups from preschool to senior citizens and is responsible for bringing in thousands of children and adults to enjoy the exhibits at the KIA. Stempien also expanded the High School Area Show that has awarded a half-million dollars in scholarships over the past few years as well as the Young Artists show for K-8 grade students which typically brings in 3,000 attendees on its opening day. Stempien has developed a variety of programming and workshops, including “Unreeled,” “Art Break,” and “Art Detective” and has worked with groups such as Kalamazoo Public Schools, local law enforcement agencies, the Homer Stryker Medical School, and individuals with memory and vision loss.

Sonya Bernard-Hollins – took her love of travel and writing to create a unique learning experience for girls through the Merze Tate Travel Club in 2008. Today, the organization is an official nonprofit, the Merze Tate Explorers, providing girls the experiences of travel and career exploration. Over the years, the group has visited Canada, Paris, France, Versailles, Venice, Florence, Rome, and Hawaii. Individually, students have traveled the world through study abroad and with families. The name of the program pays homage to Merze Tate (1905-96) a teacher and world explorer who learned five languages and worked as a writer and photographer for the U.S. State Department. She was the first African-American to graduate from Oxford University in England in 1935 and was a 1927 graduate of Western Michigan University.

Arts Administrator

Kama Mitchell – is a healer, mama, yogi, doula, and dancer. As a birth doula and postpartum doula she has spent most of her life claiming and sharing body awareness. She co-founded and is co-executive director of the nonprofit Rootead, which supports women of color, especially mothers. Rootead Enrichment Center offers healing arts and birthwork programs that are diverse, inclusive, anti-racist, and trauma informed. In order to be equitable, all services offered through the Enrichment Center are available at low-to-no cost. A practitioner and teacher of Para Yoga, Mitchell has also had numerous trainings with many master dance teachers of the African Diaspora. She encourages women to own their bodies and their birth experience. Mitchell is a strong activist in birth justice, racial equality, and mental health awareness.

About the Awards

Community Medal of Arts

The CMA recognizes an artist who is a leader in their field, has a significant body of creative activity, has received local and/or national acclaim, and has impacted on our community through art. This award encompasses all art forms, including but not limited to visual, musical, theatrical, literary, performing, multi-media, architecture, or design.

Adam F. Carter Young Artist Award

The Adam F. Carter Young Artist Award is designed to recognize and encourage the next generation of artists in our community. The winner is a student who has had an impact both in their field of study and in our community and is nominated by their arts teacher, director, or a community member. This award is generously supported by the Mary and Brooks Godfrey Family.

Business Arts Award

The Business Arts Award is presented to honor businesses in Kalamazoo County for their leadership commitment and vision in developing exemplary alliances with the arts and arts organizations. The award recognizes a business for creating outstanding initiatives with the arts and arts organization, furthering the educational development of youth, enhancing the economic vitality of the community, and enriching the quality of life in our community.

Patron Award

The Patron Award acknowledges an individual or couple who have significantly contributed to the arts as patrons. Through their patronage, they have made a sustained and/or transformational impact in this community through their support of the arts.

Epic Award

The Epic Award recognizes a nonprofit organization or program within Kalamazoo County that is of high artistic quality and serves to enhance life in our community through the arts. The award pays special attention to both long-standing programs and organizations that have played a consistent role in the community and new organizations and programs that meet a previously unmet community need or focus area.

Gayle Hoogstraten Arts Leadership Awards

The Arts Leader is an arts educator or arts administrator. The nominee is a recognized leader in the arts and/or the education community with an impact beyond his/her job description, a strong impact on the community through art, and positive and productive relationships in the community outside of his/her institution.

For more information on the Community Arts Awards, including information on each of the recipients and the Arts Council of Greater Kalamazoo, please visit: kalamazooarts.org/2020-community-arts-awards.

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