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ACGK Announces 2022 Community Arts Awards Recipients

KALAMAZOO, Mich.—The Arts Council of Greater Kalamazoo (ACGK) announces the recipients of the 2022 Community Arts Awards. Since 1985, the ACGK has honored local artists, arts organizations, and supporters through the Community Arts Awards.

The 2022 Community Arts Awards presentation will be held Wednesday, Dec. 7, 2022, at 5:30 p.m. at the Gull Lake Center for the Fine Arts located at 7753 N 34th St Richland MI, 49083. RSVP for the 2022 Community Arts Awards presentation event online at <https://secure.kalamazooarts.org/caa>.

Community Medal of Arts Award

Bertha Barbee-McNeal and Cal Gill-Street

The road to Motown from Kalamazoo is through the Velvelettes. Since they were students at Kalamazoo Public Schools and Western Michigan University (WMU), Bertha Barbee-McNeal and Caldin (Cal) Street, two members of the Velvelettes have put Kalamazoo on the Motown map. For decades they have represented Kalamazoo around the state, country, and the world. The history of Motown is well known, but the impact of the Velvelettes especially in our local community is legendary. The only all-original Motown group from the sixties and one of few “girl groups” to still perform today, the Velvelettes set Motown on fire with their stylized vocal harmonies as part of Berry Gordy’s legendary record company. The musical group began in 1962 at WMU with Bertha Barbee-McNeal and Cal Gill-Street as the founding members.

Bertha Barbee-McNeal

Bertha retired as a Choir Director from Kalamazoo Public Schools after an illustrious 27-year career influencing hundreds of students. She is currently the Artistic Director and piano teacher at the Helen L. Fox Gospel Music Center housed at the Douglass Community Association.

Caldin Gill-Street

Cal was involved for over 30 years with the NAACP and sang with the Master Choir for over 20 years at the Mt. Zion Baptist Church. She worked as a Human Resource Specialist for the Upjohn Company/Pharmacia (Pfizer) and as an administrative assistant at Western Michigan University.

Bertha and Cal also served as Co-Chairs of the NAACP ACT-SO Competition in Kalamazoo for over twelve years. ACT-SO (Afro-Academic, Cultural, Technological and Scientific Olympics) is a national annual competition for high school students. In this program, students work with community-based volunteers for a year to develop their skills and prepare for a competition for scholarships and other awards. The dynamic duo worked in the schools to recruit students to participate in the program and helped them to prepare for the events. They both continue to visit K-12 schools and colleges to share their experiences with Motown.

John Speeter

Creating partnerships, organizing events, fundraising, and volunteering both his time and talents, is what John Speeter has spent a lifetime doing through traditional country blues. He was one of the founding members of the Great Lakes Acoustic Music Organization (GLAMA), a founding performing member of the Schlitz Creek Bluegrass Band, the Somewhere in Time

Band, The Sleepy Hollow String Band, Mudslide the Bluesman, as well as a longtime member of the K'zoo Folklife Organization (KFO) where he served as President for many years.

John has been the inspiration and driving force behind many musical events over the years. He developed a partnership with the City of Portage and organized a 3-year musical event called the "Celery Flats Music Festival". This free event helped raise donations for the "Friends of Celery Flats" committee. He also initiated another free concert called the "Folklife Music Festival", at the City of Portage Overlander Band Shell. And finally, the "Loaves and Fishes" benefit concert has been a KFO sponsored event for over 30 years. Mr. Speeter has been involved as a performer, emcee, sound technician and stage manager in support of this event.

An accomplished cartoonist and illustrator, John has offered his services to many non-profits on a no charge basis, designing posters, brochures, logos, and promotional items. His cartoons have appeared in many local, regional, and national publications. Examples include his cartoon strip "Wheaties" that was published by the Wheatland Music Association in their newsletter. His cartoon calendars have been distributed free of charge in the Kalamazoo area. He co-authored and illustrated a series of motivational books entitled "Looking Forward to Monday Morning" in partnership with well-known lecturer and author Dr. Diane Hodges. His most recent book "How to Fish and Do It Well" has also been distributed on a national basis.

Business Arts Award

Jerico

Krystal and Jeb Gast envisioned the creative collective that has become Jerico when they first purchased the building in 2014. The building itself has a 100-year history of makers in its walls, including Charles Ford from Ford Motors (some of the first auto bodies were constructed in the building in 1898), and Star Brass Works (a Gibson Mandoline-Guitar Supplier). Through Jerico, Krystal and Jeb sought to surround themselves with creatives, entrepreneurs, makers and artists to establish a vibrant and collaborative community of folks in Kalamazoo. There is no limit to the type of work residents of Jerico bring to the table. Each resident works within their private or collective studios in one of their three historic buildings at the industrial edge of the Edison neighborhood, Kalamazoo's largest neighborhood. For the public, they offer access to a workshop space that facilitates collaboration between Jerico residents and the local community. Jerico is the home of the Alyson Cameron Studio, Argenta Park, Autumn Barry Rock Shop, Black Thread Studio, Camille Lydia Photography, the Dapper Hammer, Elemental Media, Fido Motors, Home Energy Solutions, Hot Metal Artist LCC, Isobel & Ernest, Kalamazoo Backyard Yogis, Kal-Tone Musical Instrument Co, Kim Shaw Studio, La Luna Recording and Sound Studio, Metric Motorworks, Piano Quest, Seedling Studio, Start Here Coffee, Stuffed Brain Studio, Trager Pellet Grills, Trent Rex Tattoos, Weavers Unlimited, Yes Electric, and Ylva/Ulf Elhammer tattoo studio. They are truly the epitome of a successful business/art partnership.

Epic Award

Crawlspace Comedy Theatre

Crawlspace Comedy Theatre is the only professional improvisation theatre company in southwest Michigan. Founded in 2003, several different teams of actors have provided improv entertainment to thousands of people in numerous venues over the years. Their permanent new home is on the ground level of the former First Baptist Church at 315 W. Michigan in downtown Kalamazoo. Crawlspace's high-energy comedy is effectively helping to preserve one of the community's oldest buildings.

The theatre space is also a needed host for other performing artists in the area. Its jazz series has welcomed nationally renowned artists to Kalamazoo for unforgettable nights of music. Theatre companies such as Dormouse, Queer Theatre Kalamazoo, and Bare Backstage Productions have produced shows on the stage and welcome more opportunities to do so. In addition to weekend improv comedy shows, Crawlspace Theatre has an extensive and long-standing educational component, started in 2016, which has served hundreds of adults and youth through classes and camps. It's been nearly 20 years that Crawlspace Theatre has been entertaining Kalamazoo. Over that time, they have found new ways to explore the world through their unique art form that keeps folks coming back for more. They are now expanding that offering with

more performance teams, more classes, more camps, and more collaborations with other local artists to help deepen understanding in our community and how it can be its very best.

Gayle Hoogstraten Arts Leadership Award - Educator

Kim Shaw

Kim teaches art at Kalamazoo Valley Community College, is a teaching artist in visual art, dance, and theatre with Education for the Arts/KRESA, and facilitates various independent programs in Kalamazoo. She has a rich history of offering both private individual art lessons as well as community group workshops. While the format and medium of each experience may be different (private vs. group, illustration vs. painting, etc.), the common theme that runs through every educational opportunity she leads is therapeutic creative safety. Kim's reputation around the community precedes her. She is widely known for the environment of creative safety she creates and protects. Her ability to look beyond the skill of her students to see the experience they are bringing and meet them exactly where they are without fear, intimidation, or self-consciousness, is a gift to anyone who has experienced her teaching. In every opportunity she creates, Kim is cognizant of making art accessible and representative of our vast, beautiful, diverse community.

Bridget Fox

Bridget is a full-time art instructor at MRC Artworks. MRC's mission is to encourage and support individuals living with disabilities. Thus, all the projects need to be customized to fit the individual artist's abilities. This can be a difficult and time-consuming task, which she has been dedicated to. Her goal is to help each artist find their artistic voice, which in turn sends her students' self-esteem and sense of self-worth skyrocketing. She has formed positive connections with Kalamazoo businesses. She also organized field trips to the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts, Lunchtime Live, and area artist studio tours. Her dedication to her students and their growth is palpable. She shows great compassion towards artist and genuinely cares about their development and engagement in the arts. Her dedication is a great example of how art can be transcendent and reach a variety of artists with different abilities and backgrounds.

Dr. Gerald Case-Blanch

Dr. Case-Blanchard is a musical force in the greater Battle Creek community, directing three residential choirs – the Branch County Community Chorus, Concentus Vocal Ensemble, and the Kellogg Singers – as well as the combined Choral Union and a yearly Opera/Musical Workshop production. This is in addition to coordinating the Kellogg Community College concert and jazz bands and teaching dozens of individual and group music and choir classes. Dr. Case-Blanchard consistently partners with the community to expand the reach of the arts. His choirs have collaborated with notable organizations including the Battle Creek Symphony, the Kalamazoo Sacred Music Festival, and the Monroe Community Chorale and Symphony Orchestra, among others, and his Kellogg Singers have opened for Grammy Award-winning musical groups including Take 6 and Sweet Honey in the Rock. He also regularly works with large area high school groups, often working with hundreds of students at a time to prepare them for upcoming concerts, such as the annual Prado Benefit Concert held each fall in Battle Creek. His choirs have toured nationally and internationally, performing concerts in the U.S. in Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. In the summer of 2012, he led the choirs on their inaugural European concert tour, presenting concerts in Cork, Dublin, and Malahide in Ireland. The choir returned to Europe in the summer of 2014, to perform concerts in towns and cities along the Amalfi Coast of Italy.

Gayle Hoogstraten Arts Leadership Award - Administrator

Stephanie Hinman

Stephanie accepted the role of Executive Director of the State Theatre in 2014. Her family had owned the property since the 1980s. Under Stephanie's leadership, the State Theatre has undergone renovations, upgrades, and a complete overhaul of its programming. Stephanie immersed herself in learning about industry standards and best practices in the arts, even though she already had an extensive background in business, construction, and non-profits. Since the very beginning of her tenure, she has pushed her team to provide diverse events that embrace not only national talent but give a space for local talent to be showcased. During COVID, State on the Street became an outdoor place for patrons to gather, while enjoying local talent. Stephanie's business and administrative decisions are rooted in her passion and commitment to serving the community she lives in, and this shows in the experiences that the State Theatre offers to both patrons and artists alike.

Theodore C. Cooper Award for Distinguished Volunteer Service

Sydney Bastos

Sydney "Syd" Bastos is the heart and drive of the arts scene in Vicksburg and its surrounding villages. If you calculated what Syd has contributed over the last five years, it would be at least \$200,000 worth of labor, but the benefit of her time and talent is much greater than this dollar amount. Her energy and passion built the Vicksburg Cultural Arts Center (VCAC) from a small part of the Downtown Development Authority in Vicksburg to a thriving 501(c)3 with a full-time director. She has been serving as Board Chair for the past three years, putting in 1600 hours in 2021 and on the way to even more in 2022. These don't count the hours she spends as an ambassador to the arts and as a supporter of local creatives. At nearly every community arts event, whether it's a food truck rally, the farmer's market, a karaoke night, or a gallery opening, Syd is there with her notebook or phone, bee lining to new artists or folks she hasn't met to learn their story, their connection to the arts, and how they might like to be involved in the VCAC. She has envisioned and brought to life a coffeehouse concert series; "Arts in the Burg" - an art camp for children who can't access camps in Kalamazoo; cultural arts exploration programs for teens; programming for "Wednesday Winners" - a club for adults with disabilities; a special exhibition of AP art students' works; community art projects at the Harvest Festival and Christmas in the Village; and themed explorations of different cultures like Venezuela, Lithuania, Japan, and Italy. She also adopted the local writing competition created by the Schoolcraft Library, The Tournament of Writers, and found ways to increase its reach to hundreds of participants ranging from ages 5 to 95. As a volunteer, she goes far beyond just suggesting "someone ought to do XYZ", by taking the drive and initiative to see new projects come to fruition. Thanks to her infectious enthusiasm, we have a thriving, inclusive arts scene in Vicksburg and southern Kalamazoo County.

About the Awards

Community Medal of Arts Award

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.

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.

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 Award

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.

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Editor's note: The Community Arts Awards logo and Arts Council logo are attached for your use.