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7TH ANNUAL

# *Spark Awards*

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# Welcome to the Spark Awards THE 2020 VIRTUAL EDITION!

## 2020 WAS A YEAR....

We welcome you to our virtual edition of the Spark Awards – a new space and place for ALL OF US! However, that will never stop ASI from recognizing and appreciating those in our arts community who make Western New York a great place to live.

2020 has been the year that, YET AGAIN, affirmed to me that the arts transform our lives and communities. The Spark Awards is that time of year when we celebrate the work and achievements of so many. 2019 proved to be a powerful year for arts and culture - from neighborhoods using the arts to make this a great place to live, to arts transcending educational boundaries, to transformative arts experiences and tourism destinations – a Spark of Creativity is all that it takes to light the way.

Think of how much creativity, support and artistic impact WNY has had since last year... OUTSTANDING! It never ceases to amaze me, even through our many struggles with the pandemic and social unrest. THE ARTS PREVAIL and always will!

YOU are the reason we are together, even if it's from the privacy of our own homes. YOU ignite arts and culture in Western New York. Thank you for everything you have given to our vibrant arts sector. ASI commends your hard work – without you and all of our arts supporters, Arts Services would not exist – so tonight (and ALL YEAR ROUND) is your night – THANK YOU!

The Spark Awards – providing a much needed light through the darkness.



Jen Swan-Kilpatrick  
Executive Director, Arts Services Inc.

## Good evening and welcome to the 7th Annual Spark Awards!

On behalf of our Board of Directors, Staff, and all who support Arts Services Inc., our heartfelt appreciation. We couldn't do it without the dedication and commitment of benefactors, sponsors, and each and every one of you. As you well know, we are faced with a time of intense physical separation. As a collective, however, we are a most creative and resilient force. That said, look at all the wonderful ways Art/Culture has thrived, in the age of virtual reality. Our nominees and winners are prime examples of the brilliance of the industry. Bravo to you and all who keep the spirit of entertainment alive and well. Showcasing our rich distinctive heritage, and furthering our diversity, equity, and inclusive intent. All while transporting our hearts and minds to places that inspire us, to fulfill our dreams. Be well and keep the faith!!



Broderick Cason  
Chairman, Spark Awards



## About ASI

Where the arts meet business!

Arts Services Inc. (ASI) provides professional development, grants, resources, and advocacy to cultural organizations and artists in Western New York, while also providing public programming to increase access to the arts for everyone.

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Arts Access Program  
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Kaitlyn Anson  
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**Timothy DiGiulio**



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# Spark Awards

## **2020 Spark Awards Honorees**

### **Arts Integration**

The Children's Guild Foundation Autism Spectrum  
Disorder Center at Oishei Children's Hospital

### **DEC Program of the Year**

Lewiston Council on the Arts'  
Iroquois Market

### **Lifetime Achievement**

Vincent O'Neill,  
Irish Classical Theatre Co.

### **Rising Star**

West Falls Center for the Arts

### **Supporter of the Cultural Sector**

Joel Feroletto,  
Buffalo Common Council, Delaware District

### **Trailblazer of the Arts**

Michele Agosto, Buffalo Public Schools

### **Unsung Hero**

Beth Pedersen,  
Buffalo Society of Artists

### **Artist of the Year Finalists**

JoAnn Falletta  
Chris J. Handley  
Edreys Wajed

### **Organization of the Year Finalists**

1891 Fredonia Opera House  
O'Connell & Company  
Unique Theatre Company

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Learn more: [arts-access.org](http://arts-access.org).

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# CONGRATULATIONS to our 2020 Spark Honorees!



# **The Children's Guild Foundation Autism Spectrum Disorder Center at Oishei Children's Hospital *Arts Integration***



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JOHN R. OISHEI

Children's Hospital

The Children's Guild Foundation Autism Spectrum Disorder Center at Oishei Children's Hospital provides multidisciplinary evaluation, diagnosis, care and support for families with autism spectrum disorders. In addition to the medical work done by the Center, the resources and programs for families with autism, sensory challenges or developmental disabilities are an integral part of its plan to support the community.

By collaborating with entities such as the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, Theatre of Youth; Explore & More Children's Museum; the Aquarium of Niagara; Community Music School; Squeaky Wheel and Rock Autism; the Center has been able to develop sensory friendly; inclusive and affordable programs for our families to experience culture and create art in a comfortable and supportive environment.

Some of the programs include Au-Some Evenings at Explore & More Children's, Au-Some Aquarium in Niagara Falls; BPO Kids Exceptional Kids; and Sensory Friendly Performances at Theatre of Youth. At all of the events, tickets are free or deeply discounted to encourage our families to try new things. Recently, the Center has been focused on developing programming specifically for teens on the spectrum in the areas of music, film, acting and animation which give them new ways to express themselves and build confidence.

## **Lewiston Council the Arts'** **Iroquois Market** ***DEC Program of the Year***



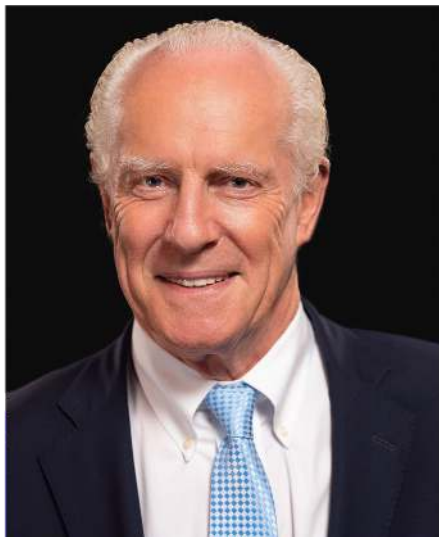
The Lewiston Council on the Arts is dedicated to improving the quality of life for everyone by nurturing a thriving environment for arts and cultural activities, promoting opportunities for artists, encouraging public participation in the arts, and actively advocating for the arts.

In 2019, it received an ASI DEC grant to produce an Iroquois Market, which was held in conjunction with the 54th annual Lewiston Art Festival. The Hennepin Park Gazebo area was transformed into the Iroquois Market, where the rich history, customs, and culture of Native American traditions were highlighted and celebrated. Lewiston Council on the Arts partnered with the Tuscarora Nation to recruit Native artisans and performers from both sides of the Canadian/U.S. border, including drummers, musicians, and dancers. Free, hands-on activities were also offered at the market.

They are dedicating this award in memory of Francene Patterson.

## **Vincent O'Neill**

### ***Lifetime Achievement***



Co-Founder and former Artistic Director of ICTC starting in 1990, Vincent has acted and directed internationally, and also in nearly all of WNY's theatres. Born in Dublin, Ireland, he studied at University College Dublin and at Trinity College. He studied Acting at the prestigious Abbey Theatre School in Dublin and Mime under the great French mime-artist, Marcel Marceau, at his International Academy in Paris.

As a member of the Abbey Theatre Company, he toured to the Edinburgh Festival, London, Paris, Hong Kong, Moscow and St. Petersburg. Films include: *Manna from Heaven*; *Tesseract*; *Queen City*; *Gamechangers*; *Laff in the Dark*; and *The American Side*. His one-man show based on the life and works of James Joyce, *Joycity*, debuted as part of Dublin's International Theatre Festival, and was then presented in Australia, Japan, off-Broadway, and throughout the USA.

He has won ARTIE Awards in the categories of Outstanding Actor; Outstanding Director, Outstanding Production, Outstanding Artistic Playwright, and Career Achievement. Vincent is also former Chair and currently Director of Theatre Performance in the Department of Theatre and Dance at the State University of New York at Buffalo.



# **The West Falls Center for the Arts** ***Rising Star***



The West Falls Center for the Arts is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization providing visual, performing, music, culinary and healing arts programming to a diverse rural population.

Our ongoing programs include an Americana Acoustic Series with local youth performers opening for national talent, a free blues mentoring series for young musicians, Southtowns youth rock band led by Doug Yeomans, the prestigious Southtowns Youth Jazz Orchestra led by Mark Filsinger, and the new Buffalo Jazz Orchestra, with young musicians performing alongside accomplished professionals.

We provide free community holiday meals, music clinics and masterclasses, culinary, art and music programming to benefit veterans and their families. We have received two DEC grants from Arts Services Inc. for a community mural project and for a harmonica class for veterans. Next year we will be adding ukulele and guitar to the veteran's program.

Through a grant from both the Garman Foundation and the Wilson Foundation, we opened a "Memory Cafe", using music to provide socialization opportunities for caregivers and their loved ones with dementia and Alzheimers.

**Joel Feroletto**  
**Buffalo Common Councilmember**  
***Supporter of the Cultural Sector***



Buffalo native Joel Feroletto, a Canisius College and University at Buffalo Law graduate, is an attorney at Feroletto Law and serves on the Buffalo Common Council representing the Delaware District. He also volunteers as a Board member for the Bairs Foundation and Save the Michaels Organization.

Since being elected to the Council in 2015, Councilmember Feroletto has worked diligently alongside community organizations and artists to champion public art around Buffalo. He began the “Hertel Walls” project in collaboration with the Albright Knox and several local and international artists in an effort to enhance Hertel Ave. In 2019 he co-founded the Hertel Alley Art Fest and with help from the 15 participating artists, transforming the alley into a conglomeration of color and expression.

In recognition of Councilmember Feroletto’s continuous efforts to better our community, he received the 2015 Sarah G. Metzger Award for his contributions to further human rights. In 2019, Councilmember Feroletto received the Amherst Chamber of Commerce Community Revitalization Award for co-founding the Hertel Walls public art project. The Feroletto family also received the Good Government Club Achievement Award in 2019, which recognizes the contributions of Italian-Americans in public service.

## **Michele Agosto** *Trailblazer of the Arts*



Michele Agosto is the Director of Arts for the Buffalo City School District. She has served the children of Buffalo since 1994, with 10 of those years as a middle school art teacher in the Black Rock area.

Born to Puerto Rican parents and raised in Washington Heights, Michele enjoyed a very happy, vibrant, and diverse upbringing. It was her family who fortified the notion that success was possible in the arts. Michele is an alumnus of Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School for Music and the Arts in NYC. She received a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Photography, at School of Visual Art, a Master of Science in Teaching /Art Education at Rochester Institute of Technology, and a Master in Educational Administration with an advanced certification at University at Buffalo.

Michele serves on several boards. She is Vice President of the Hispanic Heritage Council of WNY and is a member of Frank Lloyd Wright's Darwin Martin House and Neglia Ballet Conservatory. She's also a member of BPO Diversity Council, Roswell Park Art Advisory Committee, Theater of Youth Education Committee and Buffalo Arts Studio Education Committee. She's a Buffalo Society of Artists exhibiting member, co-founder of Los Artistas del Barrio, and co-hosted the bilingual/bicultural radio show, Sin Fronteras WNY.

Michele has exhibited her art throughout the Buffalo/Niagara region and has received several recognitions. Currently is showing at Castellani Art Museum's 20/20 Vision: Women Artists in Western NY. She presents nationally on arts education/social justice topics and is a selected member of the NYS Department of Education's Blue Ribbon Commission for the Arts.

Michele is a devoted mother to her two boys and thanks her husband for his continued belief in her.

## **Beth Pedersen** *Unsung Hero*



In her decades-spanning practice, Beth Pedersen has explored nature and environmental issues of the day through many materials and mediums. These themes have been present since the early 1980's in oil paintings and various print-making processes created both abstractly and representationally.

New York City's art world and the ripple effect at SUNY New Paltz College had a powerful influence on the once realist painter turned "ab-ex" painter having studied with Ilya Bolotowsky and George Wardlaw.

During the 1970's watercolor, pastel and pencil drawings were the media of choice while raising a family. Those years were spent examining the present landscape with memories of the Hudson River valley just north of NYC and of the farmlands in central New Jersey. The conflict of those bucolic memories verses the environmental issues we face today gives purpose to this artist.

Life experiences were enhanced during moves from NYC to Oklahoma and upstate New York in the Schenectady/Albany area. A final move to Western N.Y. provided the opportunity to acquire an MFA at the University at Buffalo where abstract prints and paintings examining man's earthly relationships continued to expand. Beth has exhibited extensively regionally and internationally.

In the 2000's, Beth continues to flip back and forth between representation and abstraction and is currently printing encaustic monotypes as well as three-dimensional encaustic sculptures on recycled materials in her Clarence studio. She continues to be a community arts advocate working on films preserving the voices of other visual artists and mentoring high school students pursuing the field of visual arts.

# **JoAnn Falletta**

## ***Artist of the Year Finalist***



Photo by Heather\_Bellini

JoAnn Falletta is internationally celebrated as a vibrant ambassador for music, an inspiring artistic leader, and a champion of American symphonic music. Upon her appointment as Music Director of the Buffalo Philharmonic, Falletta became the first woman to lead a major American ensemble. She has since been credited with bringing the Philharmonic to a new level of national and international prominence. The orchestra has become one of the leading recording orchestras for Naxos and returned twice to Carnegie Hall in 2004 and again in 2013.

In 2018, the BPO made their first international tour in three decades, to perform at Warsaw's prestigious Beethoven Easter Festival where Falletta made history as the first American woman to conduct an orchestra at the Festival. She and the BPO have been honored with numerous ASCAP awards, including the top award for Adventurous Programming. Other accomplishments include the establishment of the orchestra's Beau Fleuve label, the founding of the JoAnn Falletta International Guitar Concerto Competition in partnership with WNED, and the national and international broadcast of concerts on NPR's Performance Today, SymphonyCast, and the European Broadcasting Union.

With a discography of 112 titles, JoAnn is a leading recording artist for Naxos. Her discs have won three GRAMMY® Awards and received eleven nominations. Ms. Falletta is the artistic advisor to the Hawaii Symphony and has held the positions of principal conductor of the Ulster Orchestra, principal guest conductor of the Phoenix Symphony, music director of the Long Beach Symphony Orchestra, associate conductor of the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, and music director of the Denver Chamber Orchestra.

## **Chris J. Handley** ***Artist of the Year Finalist***



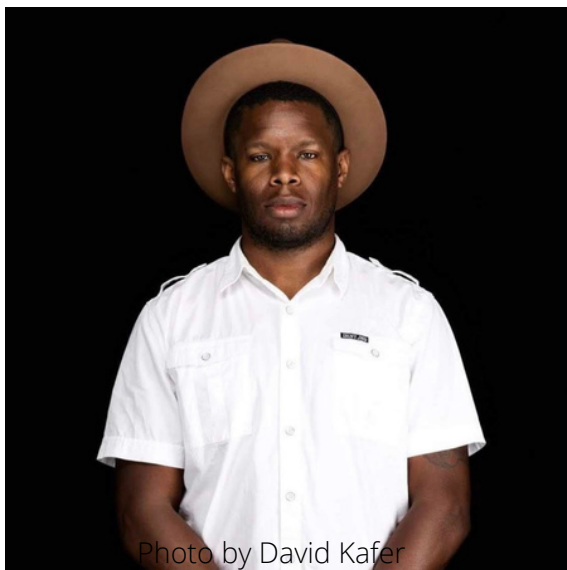
Chris J. Handley is Executive Director of Buffalo's Alleyway Theatre, where he founded the Theatre School of WNY. He has worked in theater for over 20 years in Buffalo, New York City, and across the country as an actor, teacher, director, and producer. He is Vice President of the Theatre District Association, sits on the Actors' Equity Liaison Committee, is a 2019 Cullen Foundation Fellow, and is on faculty at SUNY Fredonia.

As an actor, his work locally has been wide ranging on many area stages including Alleyway, MusicalFare, Shakespeare in Delaware Park, 710 Main, Jewish Repertory Theatre, and the Lancaster Opera House. Just this season, he played roles as varied as Buddy (Elf the Musical), Bruce (Fun Home), Trinculo (The Tempest), and Matt (Talley's Folly). He recently staged the world premiere musical The King's Legacy at Bristol Valley Theatre, and spent over two years as a Mississippi Riverboat entertainer.

As an independent teaching artist, he has developed various workshops on the craft, taught privately, and spent three years teaching BFA and BA theatre students Acting and Voice & Speech. Mr. Handley holds an MFA in Acting from Indiana University, and a BFA in Musical Theatre from SUNY Fredonia.



## **Edreys Wajed** ***Artist of the Year Finalist***



Edreys Wajed is an enthusiastic and inspiring walking enterprise of all things creative. The Buffalo native boasts a long resume of creative talents and achievements from visual art, to jewelry designer and entrepreneur. From having run his own stationery boutique and art gallery shared with his equally talented wife, Alexa; touring as hip hop artist, to being a second generation jewelry designer, his diversity is exceptional.

Edreys is recognized for his contribution as one of 4 artists for The Freedom Wall mural, commissioned by the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 2017. Creatively evolving, his latest works made an incredible impression and impact in May/July 2019, in a sold-out solo show and exhibit at Argus Gallery, Bflo., NY. His paintings are now also respectively in both the Burchfield-Penney Arts Center and The Roswell Park Art Heals Gallery permanent art collections.

## **1891 Fredonia Opera House** ***Arts Organization of the Year Finalist***



Photo by Gregory C. Ford

The 1891 Fredonia Opera House has been enhancing the cultural landscape of Chautauqua County since its grand reopening in November 1994; and in 2019 – its 25th year – it celebrated its growth from a performance space for local arts groups to a full-fledged venue presenting national and international artists with a new name and logo: 1891 Fredonia Opera House Performing Arts Center.

The name change reflects the breadth and variety of its current programming while paying tribute to its history. Programs that include: live music, theatre and dance; an independent Cinema Series; live high definition satellite broadcasts of opera productions from NYC's Metropolitan Opera, theatre from London's National Theatre, and ballet from Moscow's Bolshoi Ballet; an annual three-day Bach & Beyond Baroque Music Festival; and the Art & Architecture On Screen series of programs focusing on masterpieces and their museum custodians; among others. All total, the venue has presented more than 2,890 programs since its reopening 25 years ago!

Chautauqua County is fortunate to have what many consider a thriving arts community. Against a broad cultural background, the 1891 Fredonia Opera House Performing Arts Center has created a niche for itself as a year-round presenter of varied and quality entertainment!

# **O'Connell & Company** **Arts Organization of the Year Finalist**



Now celebrating its 25th season, O'Connell & Company has enriched thousands of Western New York lives by producing a variety of musicals, plays, popular classics, regional premieres, and original works with a special focus on gender parity in the arts.

Founded in 1995 by award-winning actress Mary Kate O'Connell, past performances have included: an all-female production of "1776 The Musical", a regional premiere of "The New Mel Brooks Musical: Young Frankenstein", "Little Shop of Horrors", "Baby", "Nunsense", "I Do! I Do!", "Six Dance Lessons In Six Weeks", "Musical of Musicals-The Musical", "Buffalo ZINGS, Hot, Tedium & Wild!", and O'Connell & Company original, "DIVA by DIVA: A Celebration of Women!", WNY's longest-running production currently in its 20th Season.

The Theatre School at O'Connell & Company will formally launch in the Spring of 2020 and will produce year-round workshops, camps, classes and more for youth, adults, and seniors of all levels and experience. O'Connell & Company Productions is a non-profit professional performing arts organization dedicated to entertaining through education, empowerment, and by creating an inclusive community of professional and rising artists. The company is newly located in The Ken-Ton Elmwood Commons at 3200 Elmwood Avenue, Tonawanda, NY.

## **Unique Theatre Company** ***Arts Organization of the Year Finalist***



Unique Theatre Company offers a safe place for people of all ability to have a true theatre experience. They offer the entire spectrum of the theatre from assisting with script writing and storytelling all the way to the end of the show. Costume design and set design are taught and experienced to all who would like to try. They have found that many people dream of acting or writing or simply being behind or on stage but are afraid to try. This is most particular for people with disability.

All of Unique Theatre Company's plays are original works and most written by people with disability. The theatre provides the writers a chance to see their stories being played on stage. Late in 2019, they began a chorus group with the same mission in mind: offering those who would like to sing a chance to experience being in a chorus. Uniquely Arranged held their first chorus on stage in December singing Holiday songs. It was a huge success and they were invited to sing at the GiGi's Playhouse grand opening in March of 2020.

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# Spark Awards

## Past Spark Award Honorees

### **Advocate for the Cultural Sector**

WNED/WBFO (2017)

Destination Niagara USA (formerly Niagara Tourism & Convention Corporation) (2016)

Paul Hogan (2015)

Lynn Marinelli (2014)

### **Arts Integration**

Sam Savarino (2019)

Learning Disabilities Association of WNY (2018)

Roswell Park Cancer Institute (2017)

Elgin Wolfe & Tri-Main Development (2016)

Dr. Timothy Murphy & the University at Buffalo Clinical & Translational Research Center (2015)

### **Cultural Ambassador**

Tom Toles, The Washington Post (2016)

Tom Calderone, President VH1 (2015)

### **DEC Program of the Year (Selected by ASI)**

Annette Daniels Taylor for "Heritage Walk: Buffalo's Underground Railroad" (2019)

Lockport Public Arts Council: Sweet Chalk Festival (2018)

University District Community Development Association in collaboration with

Nicholas Conrad Miller for "Bailey Fights Blight" Mural Program (2017)

710 Main Theatre and Buffalo Laboratory Theatre for "The Mystery of the Silver Chalice" (2016)

Opportunities Unlimited of Niagara Fine Arts Program (2015)

Karen Sirgey w/ Niagara Wheatfield High School (2014)

### **Legacy Award**

Robert G. Wilmers (2018)

M. Jacquie Lodico (2017)

Burton Notarius (2014)

### **Lifetime Achievement**

Craig Centrie (2019)

Thomas Burrows, UB Center for the Arts (2018)

Anthony C. Conte, Shea's Performing Arts Center (2017)

Saul Elkin (2016)

Jonathan Rogers (2015)

Molly Bethel, Locust Street Art (2014)

### **Rising Star**

Aimee Levesque (2019)

Buffalo String Works (2018)

Jon Lehrer (2017)

University Heights Arts Association (2016)

Danceability (2015)

Infinity Visual & Performing Arts Center (2014)

7TH ANNUAL

# Spark Awards

Past Spark Award Honorees Continued

## **Supporter of the Cultural Sector**

John McKendry (2019)  
John & Carolyn Yurtchuk (2018)  
M&T Bank (2017)  
Buffalo Spree Magazine (2016)  
Rigidized Metals (Silo City) (2015)  
Fund for the Arts (2014)

## **Trailblazer of the Arts**

Rob Lynch (2019)  
Michael J. Beam (2018)

## **Unsung Hero**

Clyde Terry (2019)  
Friends of the Japanese Gardens (2018)  
Rita Argen Auerbach (2017)  
Sue Fay Allen & Carl Klingenschmitt, Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra (2016)  
Gerald Mead (2015)  
Dick & Carmen Gilman, 1891 Fredonia Opera House (2014)

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Past Spark Award Honorees Continued

## **Artist of the Year**

### **Winners**

Muhammad Zaman (2019)  
Fotini Galanes (2018)  
Drea d’Nur (2017)  
Adam Zyglis (2016)  
David Michael Miller (2015)  
Shasti O’Leary Soudant (2014)

### **Finalists**

Julia Bottoms (2019)  
Caitlin Cass (2019)  
Gary Earl Ross (2018)  
Keith Harrington (2018)  
David Moog (2017)  
Gary Sczerbaniewicz (2017)  
Zuri Elise Appleby (2016)  
Chuck Tingley (2016)  
Sarah Fonzi (2015)  
Ntare Ali Gault (2015)  
Mikel Wintermantel (2014)  
MarCe Zerrate (2014)

## **Arts Organization of the Year**

### **Winners**

Buffalo Sugar City (2019)  
Buffalo Arts Studio (2018)  
Kenan Center (2017)  
Just Buffalo Literary Center (2016)  
Niagara Arts & Cultural Center (2015)  
Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra (2014)

### **Finalists**

National Comedy Center (2019)  
Road Less Traveled Productions (2019)  
Niagara Falls National Heritage Area (2018)  
Resource: Art (2018)  
1891 Fredonia Opera House (2017)  
Springville Center for the Arts (2017)  
Buffalo Choral Arts Society (2016)  
Theodore Roosevelt Inaugural National Historic Site (2016)  
Albright-Knox Art Gallery (2015)  
Lucille Ball Desi Arnaz Center for Comedy (2015)  
Squeaky Wheel Film & Media Arts Center (2014)  
Torn Space Theater (2014)

**Congratulations**

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# Congratulations

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## Honorees & Finalists



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## Finding inspiration is important.

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