

M&T Bank  
Presents

The 8th Annual

# Spark Awards

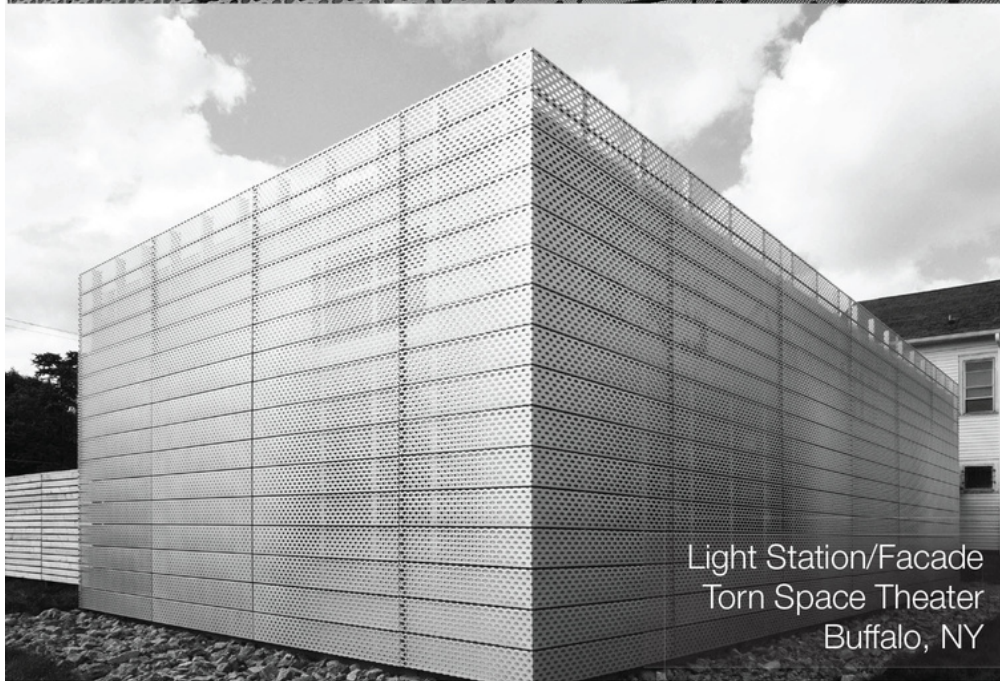
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# Welcome to the 2021 Spark Awards!

The Year We Kept Sparkling....2021

We are very fortunate to be sharing the 2021 Spark Awards with you. For most of you it will be virtually, for the amazing honorees, we were able to safely have them together in person to celebrate all they have accomplished.

Tonight is a night of honor, support, and reflection for each other and the entire arts sector. It never ceases to amaze me, even through our many struggles with the pandemic and social unrest. THE ARTS PREVAIL and always will!

The arts are the reason we are together, even when apart. HONOREES, thank you for everything you have given us. 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!

Jen Swan-Kilpatrick  
Executive Director, Arts Services Inc.



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Greetings one and all! It's wonderful that so many have continually supported the Arts and Cultural community, especially over the previous year and beyond. So many have had all different experiences and struggles in recent times. Yet look how we have come together, engaged, helped, advised, and made ready for a hopeful entertainment comeback. Thanks to virtual opportunities, we have been able to remain connected but nothing compares to personal contact. With Entertainment, you don't just live you thrive!

That all said, on behalf of Arts Services, Inc., our Board of Trustees, and Staff, we send heartfelt gratitude to our Spark Sponsors, Foundations, Grant Funders, and countless WNY supporters. We are fortunate to be celebrating our 10 year Anniversary!

Tonight is about a celebration for nominees and winners, 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



## Our Team



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Kilpatrick  
Executive Director



Mark Banaszak  
Fiscal Associate



Devon Bradley  
Engagement and  
Development  
Manager



Holly Grant  
Grants and  
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Jess Trainor  
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Kaitlyn Anson  
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Tessa Pszonak  
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The 8th Annual

# Spark Awards

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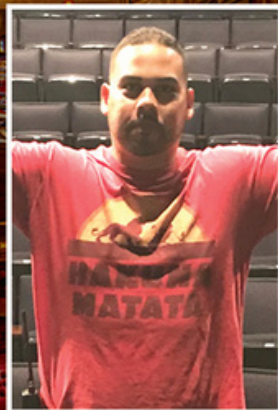
# CONGRATULATIONS **SPARK AWARD** WINNERS



Thembi Duncan



Patrick Fagan



Jose Rodriguez

The success of Shea's Performing Arts Center is a result of many dedicated individuals working with great determination. We congratulate and offer our deepest gratitude to Thembi, Patrick, and Jose for all they have and continue to accomplish for our community.

# Spark Awards

## **2021 Honorees**

### **Arts Integration**

Thembi Duncan, Shea's Performing Arts Center, and the Buffalo Police Department's Body Language Competency Training

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

Defiant Monkey Improv's  
"The Brain of Dr. Delgado"

### **Leading Where You Are**

Nancy Clarke Mariani  
Michael Quinniey  
Jose Rodriguez  
Gaitrie Subryan

### **Rising Star**

Nicole Cooke

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

Cullen Foundation

### **Trailblazer of the Arts**

Aitina Fareed-Cooke

### **Unsung Hero**

Joan Fishburn

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

Chantal Calato  
Jalen A. Law  
Stephen Solook

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

Buffalo Opera Unlimited  
CEPA Gallery  
Locust Street Neighborhood Art Classes

### **Lifetime Achievement**

Patrick Fagan



# CONGRATULATIONS to our 2021 Spark Honorees!



**CEPA GALLERY**  
CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY & VISUAL ARTS CENTER





# Spark Awards

## Arts Integration



### **Thembi Duncan, Shea's Performing Arts Center, and the Buffalo Police Department's Body Language Competency Training**

Shea's Performing Arts Center and the Buffalo Police Department are collaborating to bring body language training workshops for all new police recruit classes. This program has garnered national attention for its innovation and premiere community engagement and has been featured in The New York State Chief's Chronicle March 2021 issue.

The body language workshop, led by Thembi Duncan, Director of Arts Engagement and Education at Shea's Performing Arts Center, was added to the curriculum for new cadets in May of 2019. Duncan leads this module with an actor's approach. Officers were led through theatre exercises and taught lessons on character, emotion, and how being mindful of body language can enhance existing skills for de-escalation techniques.

The program will continue to be a part of every BPD cadet class going forward and will evolve with input from both Shea's and the Buffalo PD. Duncan plans to explore similar programs with other law enforcement agencies in the WNY region, taking a collaborative approach to program design that will include ride-alongs, officer interviews, and community conversations.

# Spark Awards

## DEC Program of the Year



### **Defiant Monkey Improv's "The Brain of Dr. Delgado"**

Defiant Monkey Improv is a two-person improvisational group that creates on-the-spot theatre based on audience suggestions and participation. Performers Karen L. Eichler and Andrew M. Spragge are experienced improvisers, actors, professional development specialists, and teaching artists who love to have as much fun as possible. They are the authors of the books *The 5 Elements of Improv: How to Take Your Improv to the Next Level* and *The One Minute Improviser*.

Their 2020 DEC-funded program *Royalty Free Radio Hour* presents, *In the Dark*. Tonight's episode: "The Brain of Dr. Delgado" began as a live action radio play for seniors. However, due to COVID safety restrictions, they instead partnered with the Niagara Frontier Radio Reading Service, which provides blind and low-sight people of Western New York access to print news through dedicated volunteers who read and broadcast daily papers. While access to the broadcast has traditionally been limited to those who qualify for a special radio, the reading service is now available online to anyone. Their production was also made available through podcast players (Spotify, iTunes, and Stitcher), smartphone players (Seros and Zeno apps), and through Amazon and Google smart speakers.

# Spark Awards

## Leading Where You Are



### Nancy Clarke Mariani

Nancy Clarke Mariani is an exhibiting member of the Buffalo Society of Artists (BSA) and is a member and President of the Fine Arts League of Buffalo (FALB). She is also a signature member of the Pastel Society of America (PSA) since 2012 and was one of the founding members of the Pastel Society of Western New York (PSWNY).

She has served on the board of the Lancaster Opera House since 2015 and have been its President since 2018.

Nancy has taught Art at Lancaster High School for the past thirty-one years and has been the Art Department Chairperson K-12 for the past twenty-two years. She is the advisor of the Art Honor Society / National Art Honor Society at Lancaster High School. The Art Honor Society has performed the Living Masterpieces in school and at the Albright Knox Art Gallery for "Art Alive" from 1996 to 2016 and, although it will be on a smaller scale, they will be doing a Drive-Up Living Masterpieces on Friday, May 21, 2021 after school.

Nancy has had the honor of exhibiting her artwork in several International Exhibitions, in Gramercy Park, Manhattan, NY, National Exhibitions, Buffalo and Rochester exhibitions. She works with many mediums but found her "nitch" in chalk pastels, using realism techniques, painting human subject compositions.

# *Spark Awards*

## **Leading Where You Are**



### **Michael Quinniey**

Born in Buffalo, New York, Michael Quinniey attended Northeastern University where he double majored in Business Administration and Broadcast Management at Missouri College. In June of 2017 he graduated from the University at Buffalo School of Management CEL (Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership).

Michael worked as an employee of WKBW-TV for over 25 years and has done freelance work with the Buffalo Bills, Buffalo Sabres as well as with ESPN, MSG, and the Fox Network. Serving as a union steward for 17 years Michael was the chief union steward for NABET/CWA local #25 for 12 years.

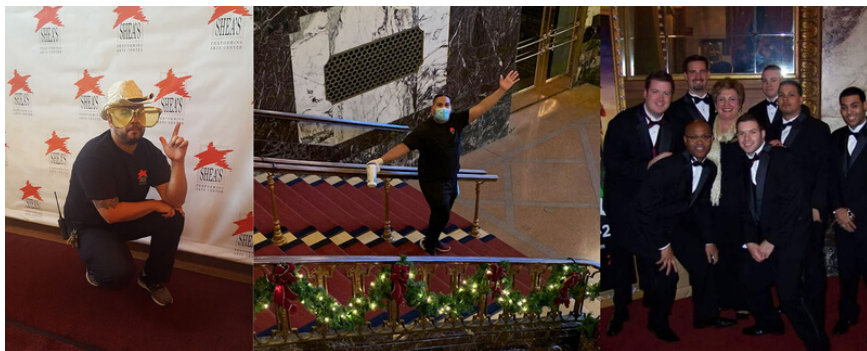
In 1998, Michael co-founded the Western New York Minority Media Professionals Inc. a non-profit organization committed to educating / mentoring and informing the public through the use of multi-media. Michael served as co-creator and executive producer for 3 TV programs, a business show called the Western New York Magazine (now called UPFRONT TV) and 2 student produced entertainment programs called Late Nite Noise and OFFICIAL HEAT that aired on WKBW-TV for 10 years.

Michael is the restoration chair of the Historic Sattler "Broadway" Theatre, built in 1914 located at 512 Broadway near Mortimer. He has been instrumental in founding Upfront Business Magazine, The Queen City Black Film Festival, and The Great Day in Jazz Buffalo Event.



# Spark Awards

## Leading Where You Are



### Jose Rodriguez

Jose Rodriguez is the team supervisor for the environmental services department at Shea's Performing Arts Center. In this position, he manages and handles the ins and outs of making sure his staff and the building are ready for events, such as Broadway shows, concerts, wedding, and fundraising events. Jose graduated from McKinley High School in 2003 and started working at Shea's right after.

In his free time, Jose enjoys watching sports - primarily basketball or baseball - and spending time with his children.

He credits his mother for receiving her strong work ethic. She worked two jobs raising three kids by herself and he wanted to do the same for his family to give them whatever they need. She inspired him to always give 100% to whatever he does.

Jose is starting his 18th year at Shea's and is looking forward to building the future.

# Spark Awards

## Leading Where You Are



### Gaitrie Subryan

Gaitrie Subryan is an Educator, Performer, Choreographer, Teaching Artist, and Yoga Instructor. She founded Buffalo's first Bollywood dance classes, Devi Bollywood Performing Arts in 2013. She is a company member for The Sa Dance Company, under the artistic vision of the world-renowned choreographer Payal Kadakia. Gaitrie's training with Indian dance consists of Kathak, Bharatanatyam, Garba, Bhangra, and Semi-Classical dance.

Gaitrie's work has evolved through her continuous dedication to learning Indian Classical dance which has given her a very unique style of choreography. She is currently studying Kathak dance through Leela Institute of Kathak and with renowned Kathak choreographer and teacher Jayeeta Dutt.

Gaitrie's passion for movement can also be seen in her practice of Yoga. She is a certified Kids yoga instructor through Kidding Around Yoga and an adult Yoga instructor. She received her RYT 200 certification through East Meets West Yoga studios in 2016.

Gaitrie's mission is to continue to offer a platform for individuals from all backgrounds to experience Indian dance and culture.

# Spark Awards

## Rising Star



### Nicole Cooke

Nicole Cooke is the Executive Director at the WNY Book Arts Center, an arts education & cultural nonprofit dedicated to printing and book related arts. Prior to leading the organization, Nicole had been a Book Arts volunteer for several years including as a member of its Board of Directors, where she was identified to be part of a planned leadership succession in 2019.

Prior to joining the team at Book Arts, Cooke worked her way up to Communications & Development Manager at Valu Home Centers. It was for her work at Valu that she was honored with a '30 Under 30' award by Buffalo Business First in 2017.

Cooke is passionate about artistic engagement and professional development; experimentation with process-based media; educating WNY's diverse populace; and promoting the democratic sharing of ideas and information. Cooke serves on the board of directors for the WNY chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals, and has been serving on their Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA) committee.

In addition to her commitment to Book Arts, Cooke is an 8-time (soon to be 9!) participant in the Ride for Roswell, supporting Roswell Park Cancer Institute with over 380 miles ridden and \$20,000 raised in memory of her late grandfather. She lives in the City of Buffalo with her partner Mike West, and their two cats Biscuit and Porkchop.

# Spark Awards

**Supporter of the Cultural Sector**



## **Cullen Foundation**

Cullen Foundation serves the residents of Erie County by providing funding and support that significantly enhances the education of students in grades pre-K through 12 and advances theatre and the performing arts. In 2020, they granted \$1,123,690 out among 39 performing arts grantees in Erie and Niagara counties.

*"The Cullen Foundation threw their support behind Buffalo String Works when we were just a fledgling organization. Their early investment made it possible for us to grow BSW to the point where we now serve nearly 100 students across the city of Buffalo. Despite this daunting year, the Cullen Foundation continues to support our student performances and they are helping us kick off a strategic planning process that will take us through 2024. We are grateful to the staff and trustees of Cullen!"*

Yuki Numata Resnick, Executive Director  
Buffalo String Works



# Spark Awards

## Trailblazer of the Arts



### Aitina Fareed-Cooke

Aitina Fareed-Cooke was told at a young age that she would be a “failure to thrive” as a result of her biological mother’s addiction to drugs. At 14 months old her and her 2 siblings were placed into foster care and diagnosed as “Emotionally Handicapped.” When Aitina was three years old her and her siblings lost their mother due to a drug overdose. Though the odds were against her she managed to strive due to her adoptive mother’s efforts in keeping her involved in extracurricular activities, community arts programs which introduced her to photography, film, and creative writing. Aitina continues utilizing her camera or “my weapon of mass creativity” and her love of writing music and poetry as a type of “Art Activism” igniting thought and change within her community.

Aitina received her Associates degree in Arts & Humanities at Erie Community College (2009), Bachelor Arts degree in English (2012) and Masters in Science & Education with a focus in Educational Technology (2016) at Buffalo State. Aitina has worked within various non-profit organizations for over 15 years throughout the city of Buffalo NY where she has developed, managed and implemented countless high-quality creative arts programs. Her unique and innovative ideas have assisted countless youth and young adults in fostering opportunities for growth in creative thinking and problem solving, self esteem, self expression, social awareness, and peer collaboration.

# Spark Awards

## Unsung Hero



### Joan Fishburn

Originally from Philadelphia, Joan Fishburn began playing violin in 3rd grade. In high school she added the playing of the trombone in bands to her musical life. From there, she went to Penn State to pursue a degree in music education.

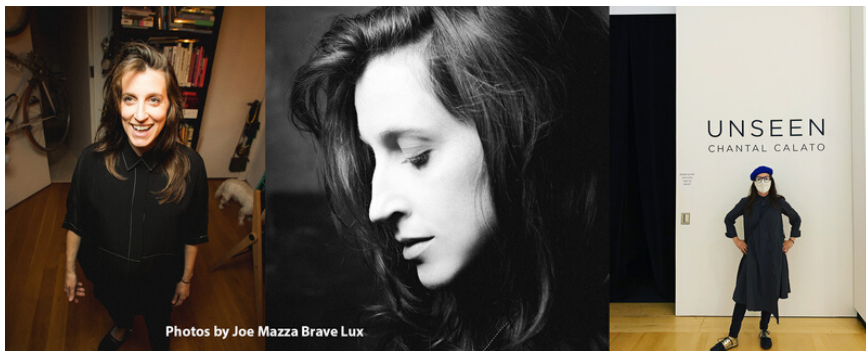
In 1959, Joan moved to Buffalo with her family and immediately joined the all-volunteer Amherst Symphony Orchestra. There she made a number of connections and found opportunities for service, creativity, relationships, and personal growth.

While still playing with the ASO, Joan also served as President of ASO's Women's/Friends Committee and President of the Amherst Symphony Association's board. Under her leadership, many programs were initiated and expanded. Joan was instrumental in scheduling ASO members into area schools for educational presentations and for providing transportation and seating for residents of retirement homes to attend all ASO Concerts. Through these relationships, she was able to bring hundreds of young people to participate in their concerts and be featured in pre-concert productions.

Joan Fishburn's 60 plus-year tenure with the ASO has created innumerable memories and friendships, and made a lasting and impactful impression on the community.

# Spark Awards

## Artist of the Year Finalist



### Chantal Calato

Chantal Calato grew up in Niagara Falls, NY where it is normal to see growing landfills next to your school and grocery store. She spent her childhood a stone's throw from the infamously toxic Love Canal. It took traveling to many places and living around the world to undo a lifetime of thinking that living amongst waste is completely normal, and to realize that not every community lives with this burden. The industrial history of Niagara Falls has left a lasting scar on the land, its people, and her, and has been a major focus in her art for a long time.

Niagara Falls has been Chantal's muse for so long because the depth of history that has impacted the world is fascinating and vast, offering limitless possibilities for an artist to explore. She let the "why" of a piece dictate how she creates something, ultimately resulting in a multidisciplinary practice with a sharp focus. In 2015 when her 41-year-old brother Joe became sick with multiple myeloma, Chantal decided she needed to create something that addressed the continuing toxic problems near Love Canal.

Her most recent installation, "UNSEEN", explores the mutilation of our environment, and in turn ourselves. The work is deeply personal and looks at the lives of people close to her who have been directly impacted by continued environmental atrocities around the Niagara region.

# Spark Awards

## Artist of the Year Finalist



### Jalen A. Law

Born in Buffalo, NY, Jalen A. Law's first sketches were circles at the age of two. By the age of five, he was creating his own comic books and children stories, selling them to kids in elementary school for Lunchables and extra computer time. He is a graduate from the University of Buffalo, and for the past eight years he has been live-painting and displaying his work in international exhibitions. The theme of Jalen's artwork involves visually powerful images that attempt to force the viewer think about uncomfortable issues without deflecting their own feelings.

In addition to creating his own art, Jalen created a nonprofit organization called Buffalo's Own that provides emerging artists with opportunities to grow creatively and expand into larger art markets. During the pandemic, they created a unique way to support hungry people in the WNY area: They organized a fundraiser to feed families who are dealing with food insecurity while highlighting the stories of WNY's essential workers, who risked their lives in the line of duty. The virtual exhibit, titled "On the Front Lines," illuminated the experiences of 15 essential workers from various industries.

Currently, he is working on a research-based art program called the Emotional Intelligence Program to equip students with social and emotional tools that will assist them inside and outside of the classroom.



# Spark Awards

## Artist of the Year Finalist



### Stephen Solook

“Outstanding” percussionist Stephen Solook (Robert Bush, SoundDiego) is a new music specialist who regularly performs as an orchestral and world musician. Looking to connect the past with the future, he highlights the possibilities of sound, beyond traditional notation. As a performer, Steve can be found performing as an extra percussionist with the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, Slee Sinfonietta at University at Buffalo, or Masti Ensemble. His duo Aurora Borealis, with soprano Tiffany Du Mouchelle, is noted for their dedication to expanding the repertoire for their instrumentation by exploring the dynamic relationship of voice and percussion, their performance history, and the acoustic possibilities of each instrument.

Solook’s interests in collaboration and heritage have led him to collaborate with artists of diverse backgrounds and mediums. Through the NGO Cultures in Harmony, he collaborated with cultural conservationists in Papua New Guinea, folk musicians and dancers in Cameroon, Egyptian musicians supporting youth advocacy in Alexandria, and as an educator for Programa de Orquestas y Coros Juveniles in Mexico City. As a dance accompanist he was an integral part in the revival of Jose Limón Dance Company’s Lament for Ignacio Sánchez Mejías.

As an educator, he is committed to making sure every student finds their own voice. In addition, Steve dedicates his research to developing pedagogical practices that aid students with learning disabilities in reading music notation.

# Spark Awards

## Organization of the Year Finalist



### Buffalo Opera Unlimited

Founded in 1985 by artistic director Tim Kennedy, Buffalo Opera Unlimited (BOU) is dedicated to producing professional opera and a variety of other musical forms with an emphasis on regional artists. BOU is also committed to making opera more accessible to a broader audience and to providing education to develop future audiences.

Their 2020 season was also BOU's 35th anniversary year. With the shut down and subsequent challenges of producing opera in the middle of a pandemic, they had to get creative to continue sharing their work and reaching their patrons. BOU's "On Stage with Buffalo Opera Unlimited" is a partnership with WNED-TV and features programs with traditional opera selections from their 35 years.

Their partnership with WNED allowed BOU to employ local performers who were out of work due to the pandemic while reaching new audiences from across the region. The programs were seen by over 21,000 households in WNY and 20,000 individuals in Ontario. Because of licensing restrictions, only the performances with arias from operas in the public domain can be available on the website. Looking ahead, BOU is planning to once again work with WNED to perform a complete opera later this year – *Susannah*, by Carlisle Floyd.

# Spark Awards

## Organization of the Year Finalist



### CEPA Gallery

Established in 1974, the Center for Exploratory and Perceptual Arts' (CEPA) mission is to foster the exploration of photography and contemporary visual art to nurture creativity and encourage active learning. CEPA curates significant exhibitions of world-renowned art by diverse, underrepresented artists; provides creation, exhibition, and teaching opportunities for artists at all stages of their careers; and, perhaps most importantly, educates WNY's diverse populace with award-winning programming that is community-driven and outcomes-based.

In 2020-2021, CEPA Gallery launched several projects that promoted advocacy through art, supporting the rising social justice movement spreading throughout the country.

CEPA's Photography Works program, a series of 20 bus shelter ads featuring the photography of their students. Their first exhibit after reopening in July 2020 was by emerging local artist Tito Ruiz entitled "Hope, Rebellion & Justice," which featured striking portraits, emotional action shots, and powerful street photography celebrating the intersectional fight for justice taking place right here in WNY. They also they launched a public exhibition in the form of billboards called "Black Matters." The 12 billboards featured original artwork by Stacey Robinson with positive messages, such as #BlackHealthMatters.

# Spark Awards

## Organization of the Year Finalist



### Locust Street Neighborhood Art Classes

Since 1959, Locust Street Neighborhood Art Classes has made it their priority to ensure that everyone has access to engage in the visual arts, especially youth, low-income and minority individuals. It has provided free, all-inclusive, high quality art classes for anyone interested in the visual arts, from age 4 to senior adults for over 60 years in drawing, painting, photography, ceramics, and animation.

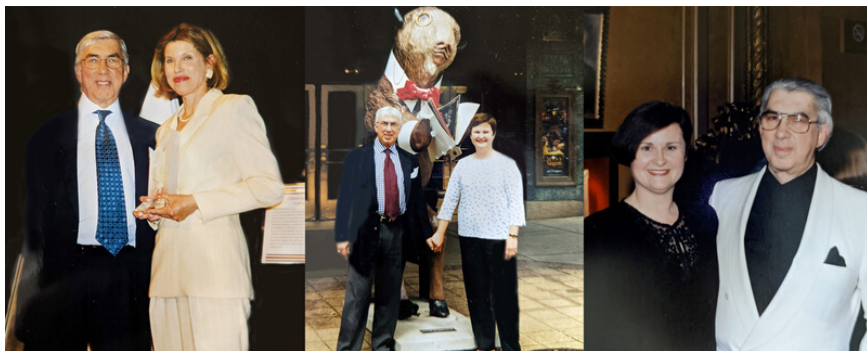
Located in Buffalo's historic Fruitbelt neighborhood, LSA celebrated its 60th year last year. They are strong advocates for their students and have proudly partnered with other Frontline Arts Buffalo organizations to lobby for more awareness and arts funding for their community. Locust Street Art has experienced a profound rebirth in recent years. Attendance has reached new heights (even during a pandemic) and programming continues to expand and evolve to fit the needs of the community.

When the pandemic hit in mid-March 2020, Locust Street shifted all of its programming online. They offered free online classes and a new weekly YouTube series featuring various DIY art projects. Knowing many of their students rely on LSA for materials and supplies as well as instruction, they secured funding to cover the costs of distributing free art kits throughout the community. Throughout the past year, LSA has remained committed to its staff of teaching artists, using emergency funds received to initiate new projects and maintain pay.



# Spark Awards

## Lifetime Achievement



### Patrick Fagan

Patrick Fagan is a well-respected leader in the arts and entertainment field. As president of Shea's Performing Arts Center, he successfully led the growth and renaissance of this venerable institution, transforming it into one of the premier stops on the Broadway touring circuit. During his tenure, Shea's was converted from a rental house into a nationally recognized presenting arts center, drawing 300,000 patrons in his last season, 2001/02. The centerpiece of his 16-year tenure was the construction of a \$15 million state-of-the-art stagehouse that was completed in April 1999. It was dedicated with a successful four-week engagement of *Andrew Lloyd Webber's The Phantom of the Opera*.

He was on the faculties of The University at Buffalo, Trocaire College, and Erie Community College. He lectured on business management, theatre management, history, and arts administration.

Patrick was the theatre reviewer for WKBW, Channel 7, from 1992-1999. He was a member of The Broadway League. He served on several committees and was a Tony voter from 1992-2003.

Patrick holds an MA in Comparative Government from The Catholic University of America and a BSBA from Saint Joseph University (Philadelphia). The former Dunkirk native resides in Williamsville with his wife, soul mate, and best friend, Janice Walek.

# *Congratulations!* **Joan Fishburn**

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Joan is grateful to have music in her life, bringing with it lasting friendships, learning and serving.



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# *Congratulations, Spark Awards Honorees!*



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## ***Taking care of each other***

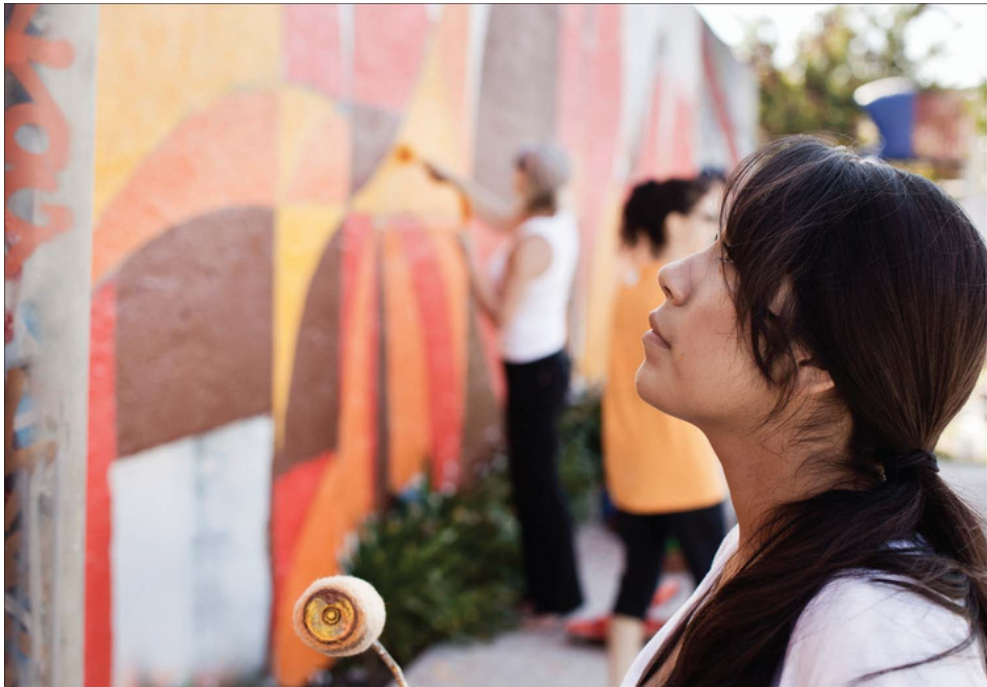
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