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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Geva Theatre Center honors

***Debora McDell-Hernandez***

for her contribution to diversity in the  
community and in the arts.

***Geva presented Ms. McDell-Hernandez with the 2017 Essie Calhoun Diversity  
in the Arts Award at a performance of Guess Who's Coming to Dinner.***

**Rochester, N.Y., February 22, 2017 – Debora McDell-Hernandez** was honored with the **2017 Essie Calhoun Diversity in the Arts Award** at a performance of *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* at Geva Theatre Center on **Tuesday, February 21.**

Geva Theatre Center created the award in 2011, which was named in honor of Essie Calhoun-McDavid, Retired Chief Diversity Officer, Director of Community Affairs, Vice President of Eastman Kodak Company and Chair of the 2011 United Way of Greater Rochester Campaign. Ms. Calhoun-McDavid was the first recipient of this award, given annually to a person or organization that promotes and encourages diversity in the arts. Past recipients of this award include Garth Fagan (2012), School of the Arts (2013), Thomas Warfield (2014), Nydia Padilla-Rodriguez (2015) and Rachel DeGuzman (2016).

Debora McDell-Hernandez is a Rochester native with over 20 years of professional and volunteer experience supporting initiatives in education, arts and human services. She is the recipient of the 2017 University of Rochester Presidential Diversity Award and the 2014 Latinos de Corazón Community Unification Award. She holds an M.S. in Human Development with a concentration in Family Studies and a B.S. in International Studies. She is also a 2015 graduate of the Leadership Coaching Certification Program (LCCP), a six month program sponsored by University of Rochester's Warner School and McArdle Burkhardt. The program enriches leadership skills and offers creative insight on team building. Higher education and community volunteerism

equipped Ms. McDell-Hernandez with an enhanced understanding of the impact that race, culture, age, gender, and socioeconomics can have on individual perspectives.

Ms. McDell-Hernandez began her career at MAG in 2001 as Membership Manager and implemented strategies to increase member acquisition and retention and encourage increased giving among members. Later, she was hired for a new position in MAG's Education Department, Coordinator of Community Programs & Outreach and developed programs to extend MAG's mission of connecting people to art through programming, collaborations and cultural diversity initiatives.

She currently serves as Curator of Engagement at MAG. As Curator of Engagement she assists with the creation of innovative programs to deepen the participation of diverse audiences in museum activities and increase the community's appreciation of art. She manages programs that appeal to existing, underrepresented and underserved audiences. Examples of programs include Family Days, MAGconnect, Hidden Passions and artist talks. She also develops affinity programs that appeal to Millennials and GenXers to attract new audiences and generate revenue.

Before working at the Memorial Art Gallery, Ms. McDell-Hernandez worked at Chase Manhattan Bank for nine years. While at Chase she worked in Corporate Communications where she enhanced the image of the corporation through initiatives in philanthropy, volunteerism, employee recognition, and customer entertainment. Later, she worked in Retail Sales where she expanded banking relationships through the sale of personal products and services to existing corporate customers and their base of employees. During her years working at Chase, she volunteered at MAG on the Preview Party Task Force and Corporate Champion committee. She also volunteered regularly at MAG's annual Clothesline Festival with Chase colleagues.

She has volunteered for many organizations over the last two decades. Some of the organizations include *Democrat and Chronicle's* board of contributors, ARTWalk, William Warfield Scholarship Fund, Do the Right Thing Program, FOODLINK, and International Sister Cities of Rochester. A former board member for Borinquen Dance Theater, she now serves as an advisor and has been on their fundraising committee for the last seven years. McDell-Hernandez currently serves on U of R/Strong Staff Diversity and Inclusion Committee; Arts and Cultural Council of Greater Rochester's Diversity Committee; and is an honorary board member of the Asian Pacific-Islander American Association.

The **Essie Calhoun Diversity in the Arts Award** recognizes that art allows for the expression of truths and beliefs and helps us gain an understanding of one another and our world. It further acknowledges that a mixture of cultures stimulates creativity, the sharing of ideas, and the building of a common collective future, which has always been close to Ms. Calhoun's heart.

Geva's Artistic Director **Mark Cuddy** remarked, "This unique award personifies its namesake, Essie Calhoun-McDavid. Each year we are honored to present it to someone who has made a significant contribution in our community to engaging diverse participants in the arts, and Debora has done that. Her work at the Memorial Art Gallery is outstanding, and we are proud to present this award to someone in the visual arts for the first time."

The Essie Calhoun Diversity in the Arts Award is designed by local artist **Nancy Gong**, one of America's foremost glass artists. Ms. Gong combines the traditional techniques of stained glass craftsmen and stone carvers with her own style of creating texture and painting to craft pieces which are coveted by collectors from all over the world. The Essie Calhoun Diversity in the Arts Award is a stunning multicolored pyramid of glass.

**Attached Photos:** 1. Essie Calhoun-McDavid, Debora McDell-Hernandez, Artistic Director Mark Cuddy.  
2. Seated: Essie Calhoun-McDavid, Debora McDell-Hernandez, Standing: Past recipients Nydia Padilla-Rodriguez and Rachel DeGuzman, Artist Nancy Gong and Mark Cuddy. Photos by imaginé photography.

**For further information, please contact:  
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#### **GEVA THEATRE CENTER**

Founded in 1972, Geva Theatre Center is a not-for-profit, professional theatre company dedicated to creating and producing professional theatre productions, programs and services of a national standard. As Rochester's leading professional theatre, Geva Theatre Center is the most attended regional theatre in New York State, and one of the 25 most subscribed in the country, serving up to 160,000 patrons annually, including more than 16,000 students.

The 522-seat Elaine P. Wilson Stage is home to a wide variety of performances, from musicals to American and world classics. The 180-seat Ron & Donna Fielding Stage is home to Geva's own series of contemporary drama, comedy and musical theatre; Geva Comedy Improv; Geva's New Play Reading Series and the Hornets' Nest - an innovative play-reading series facilitating community-wide discussion on controversial topics. In addition, the Nextstage hosts visiting companies of both local and international renown.

Geva Theatre Center offers a wide variety of educational, outreach and literary programs, nurturing audiences and artists alike. Since 1995, the organization has been under the artistic direction of Mark Cuddy.

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