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**BRENT ASKARI,
PLAYWRIGHT OF LAST SEASON'S *HARD CELL*,
AWARDED PRESTIGIOUS SMITH PRIZE**

The National New Play Network has awarded the Smith Prize for Political Theatre to Askari for his new play, The Refugees

Rochester, N.Y., July 9, 2019 – Geva Theatre Center congratulates **Brent Askari**, the playwright of last season's *Hard Cell*, who has been named by the National New Play Network as the recipient of the prestigious Smith Prize for Political Theatre for his new play, *The Refugees*. The Smith Prize was established in 2006 by Timothy Jay Smith and a group of socially conscious donors to encourage emerging playwrights to tackle the pressing issues of our times. The \$5,000 prize is awarded annually as a commission and is chosen from proposals from NNPN-affiliated early career writers. Commissioned plays address questions such as: *Who are we as Americans? What are we becoming? What are our national and global responsibilities, and what do they mean in our lives?*

In his new play, *The Refugees* (working title), Askari seeks to challenge the idea of what an immigrant is or isn't for a contemporary audience by following the experience of an American WASP family who, after a cataclysmic disaster in their homeland, are forced to seek refuge in a foreign nation.

Last season, Geva produced the world premiere of Askari's *Hard Cell* in January 2019. The play was well received with critics proclaiming it "a whacky mile-a-minute comedy" (*BroadwayWorld*) and "a Blast!" (*Beyond the Nest*). Additionally, *Beyond the Nest* commented: "Great comedy is produced when you take quirky individuals out of their everyday context and put them in intense situations that exaggerate their eccentricities. Playwright Brent Askari has done this brilliantly with his play of mistaken – really, assumed – identities, and in a scenario that threatens to explode, in more ways than one."

Brent Askari is a Persian-American writer and actor whose plays include *American Underground* (Runner-up winner Bonnie and Terry Burman New Play Award, to be produced at Barrington Stage Company in October); *Hard Cell* (developed at PlayPenn Conference in 2017 with its world premiere at Geva); *White Party* (Semi-finalist for O'Neill Conference, Finalist Bay Area Playwrights Festival); *Digby's Home* (Semi-finalist O'Neill Conference, produced at Mad Horse Theatre); *Cocktails and Travails* (winner of Neil Simon Festival National New Play Contest and produced at the Theater Project); *Bending Reeds* (Semi-Finalist Bay Area Playwrights Festival, Blank Stage Living Room Series); *Dirty Deeds Downeast* (Finalist, B Street Theater New Comedies Festival). In addition, Brent has had plays produced or developed by Ensemble Studio Theatre LA, Vital Theatre, The Boston Theatre Marathon, New American Theatre, The Drilling Company, Swarthmore College, Eastern Connecticut State University, and the College of Southern Nevada. Brent has also been a finalist for the Actor's Theatre of Louisville's Heideman Award and the Reva Shiner Comedy Award. He was part of HBO's New Writer's Project and has written screenplays for several companies include Paramount Pictures, Marvel Films, MTV and Reveille Entertainment. He is an ensemble member of Mad Horse Theatre Company.

GEVA THEATRE CENTER

Founded in 1972, Geva Theatre Center is a not-for-profit theatre company dedicated to creating and producing professional theatre productions, programs and services of a national standard. As Rochester's flagship professional theatre, Geva 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 20,000 students.

Geva operates two venues – the 516-seat Elaine P. Wilson Stage and the 180-seat Ron & Donna Fielding Stage. As one of the country's leading theatre companies and a member of the national League of Resident Theatres, Geva produces a varied contemporary repertoire from musicals to world premieres celebrating the rich tapestry of our diverse community. The theatre draws upon the talents of some of the country's top actors, directors, designers and writers who are shaping the American Theatre scene.

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.

For more information: GevaTheatre.org

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