



Media Contact:
Abbey Noble
Marketing and Communications Coordinator
Office: 585-420-2059
Cell: 585-355-6576
anoble@gevatheatre.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 18, 2022



Geva honors David Shakes, Seneca Art & Culture Center at Ganondagan with 2022 Essie Calhoun Diversity in the Arts Awards

Rochester, N.Y. – On Tuesday, April 12, Geva Theatre Center honored actor, director, producer, and historical interpreter David Shakes and the Seneca Art & Cultural Center at Ganondagan with 2022 Essie Calhoun Diversity in the Arts Awards.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the award, named in honor of its first recipient, Essie Calhoun-McDavid, retired Chief Diversity Officer, Director of Community Affairs, and Vice President of Eastman Kodak Company. It is presented annually to a person and/or organization that promotes and encourages diversity in the arts. The 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. Past recipients include Garth Fagan (2012), School of the Arts (2013), Thomas Warfield (2014), Nydia Padilla-Rodriguez (2015), Rachel DeGuzman (2016), Debora McDell-Hernandez (2017), Delores Jackson Radney (2018), and Reenah Golden (2019).

David Shakes, winner of the 2022 Essie Calhoun Award for an individual, has worked in theatre most of his life and was a founding member of the Spirit House Movers and Players Repertory Company that presented plays and poetry readings under the direction of Amiri Baraka. He has been acting, directing, and producing plays in Rochester for 45 years. Mr. Shakes is also known as a historical interpreter who brings iconic figures such as Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, Langston Hughes, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to life. Currently, Mr. Shakes is the artistic director of the North Star Players. He also works with the Genesee Country Village & Museum on various projects,

including observations of Juneteenth and Watch Night. He produced a program for the opening of the museum's Davis Opera House, which included works by Paul Laurence Dunbar and Scott Joplin.

The Seneca Art & Culture Center, winner of the 2022 Essie Calhoun Award for an organization, was inspired by a two-decades-long vision of the recently retired Ganondagan State Historic Site manager, Peter Jemison (Seneca, Heron Clan), who accepted the award on the organization's behalf. The center opened in 2015 with nearly 3,000 square feet of interactive gallery space featuring the story of Ganondagan as well as changing exhibits conveying the history, culture, and living traditions of the Seneca and Haudenosaunee people. The gallery includes 15 exhibits with nearly 300 artistic, archeological, cultural, and historical artifacts, including works from contemporary Haudenosaunee artists, and it features a 10-foot scale model of a Seneca Bark Longhouse. The center also includes an auditorium, gift shop, classrooms, and orientation theater which showcases the Iroquois Creation Story, a live-action film produced by Jemison.

The Essie Calhoun Diversity in the Arts Award is designed by local artist Nancy Gong, one of America's foremost glass artists. 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 around the world. The award is a stunning multicolored pyramid of glass.

About Geva Theatre Center

Geva Theatre Center is a nonprofit, professional theatre company in downtown Rochester, New York, offering world-class productions and extensive additional programming. Founded in 1972, Geva is the most well-attended regional theatre in New York State with one of the 25 largest subscription bases among regional theatres in the country. Geva serves as many as 160,000 patrons annually, including more than 20,000 students.

Geva's 517-seat Wilson Stage and 180-seat Fielding Stage each offer a wide-ranging collection of drama, comedy and musical theatre, from classics to world premieres. The company also offers a broad slate of educational, outreach and literary programming to enrich audiences, students and artists of all ages and disciplines. Since 1995, Geva has been under the artistic direction of Mark Cuddy.

Geva Theatre Center sits on the ancestral and unceded territory of the Onöndowa'ga, or "the people of the Great Hill." In English, they are known as the Seneca people, "the keeper of the western door." They have stewarded this land through generations, and Geva pays respect and gives thanks to their elders, past and present.

Find out more about Geva Theatre Center at [GevaTheatre.org](https://www.GevaTheatre.org) or by connecting with us on social media. Facebook: [facebook.com/gevatheatrecenter](https://www.facebook.com/gevatheatrecenter), Twitter: [@gevatheatre](https://twitter.com/gevatheatre), Instagram: [@gevatheatre](https://www.instagram.com/gevatheatre), LinkedIn: [linkedin.com/company/geva-theatre-center](https://www.linkedin.com/company/geva-theatre-center).

END