



Media Contact:
Makalah Sizer
msizer@gevatheatre.org
Victoria Cairl
victoria@table7strategy.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
3/9/23

GEVA THEATRE'S 2023 ESSIE CALHOUN DIVERSITY IN THE ARTS AWARD

Save the date for the Essie Calhoun Diversity in the Arts Awards, April 11

Rochester, N.Y. — Geva Theatre's annual Essie Calhoun Diversity in the Arts Award will take place on Tuesday, April 11 following the performance of *And So We Walked*. This year's "Essie" Award recipients include Dangerous Signs, Dr. David Anderson (Sankofa), Shawn Dunwoody, and Tonia Loran-Galban (Akwesasne Mohawk, Bear Clan).

"We are fortunate that so many brilliant people are working diligently and creatively to promote greater diversity in arts and culture in our region," says Rachel DeGuzman – Geva's Director of Engagement. "In 2023 we decided to expand the number of Essie Calhoun Diversity in the Arts Awards presented from two to four, so that each season we can celebrate recipients representing multiple generations and more facets of diversity in arts and culture."

The Essie Calhoun Diversity in the Arts Award recognizes that art allows for expression of truth and beliefs, and helps us gain an understanding of one another and the world. It is presented annually by Geva Theatre to individuals and organizations who embody these values in their work.

The Essie Calhoun Diversity in the Arts Awards began in 2011 and 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.

She was the first recipient of the award which has been given annually to people or organizations that promote and encourage diversity in the arts. Other past recipients include The Center for Youth's Strings for Success, Rachel Y. DeGuzman, Garth Fagan, Reenah

Golden, Delores Jackson Radney, Debora McDell-Hernandez, Nydia Padilla-Rodriguez, School of the Arts, Thomas Warfield, David Shakes, and the Seneca Art & Culture Center at Ganondagan.

The “Essie” Award statue was created by glass artist Nancy Gong. The 2023 Essie Calhoun Diversity in the Arts Award ceremony and reception are, in part, made possible by the support of its sponsor, Volvo Cars Rochester.

Learn more about our award recipients

DANGEROUS SIGNS embodies Gandhi's encouragement to be the change you would like to see in the world. They are a Deaf/hearing performance group that represents global community building by using our common language of theater to present the beauty of American Sign Language, spoken word, music, and theatrical art combining Deaf, hearing and ethnic cultures to show the world they would wish it to be.

Dangerous Signs is recognized locally and has won several "Best of Rochester" awards performing for audiences of all ages. They were recruited and advanced through *America's Got Talent* and on *Law & Order's* "Silencer" episode and are often seen in New York City hosted by IRT Theater. They hope to continue to use theater as an agent for positive change in the world.

DAVID A. ANDERSON, Ph.D. – Dr. Anderson recently retired as Visiting Community Scholar, Nazareth College of Rochester (New York), where he contributed to the effort to broaden the connection between the Rochester and Nazareth communities.

He crafts living history enactments, recalling the experiences of African American Union soldiers, collectively known as United States Colored Troops. Anderson is Senior Fellow, United States Colored Troops Institute for Local History and Family Research. He has been chief organizer of Rochester's annual tribute to the United States Colored Troops where the focus is on the 16 Black Civil War soldiers known to be buried in Rochester's municipal cemeteries.

Anderson, as Sankofa, has been an interpreter of African and African folktales and a featured storyteller at Rochester area schools, colleges and other settings in 24 states, and, in 1993, Ghana, West Africa.

In Rochester, since 1995, David Anderson has been featured as Frederick Douglass in interpretation of that freedom fighter's more than 22 years residence in Rochester. In 2018 Anderson was appointed to the federal commission established to honor the 200th anniversary of Douglass's birth. On February 14, 2023 he was recognized by the Douglass family at the Frederick Douglass Family Initiatives' celebration of Douglass' birthday.

He is a co-founder of AKWAABA: the Heritage Associates, Inc., interpreter of Rochester's African American cultural heritage and the Black Storytelling League of Rochester. In 2000 he co-directed the 18th Annual National Black Storytelling Festival and Conference and was

recipient of the National Association of Black Storyteller's Zora Neal Hurston Award. Annually, for more than 25 years, he has convened the celebration of Kwanzaa in Rochester.

Over the years organizations such as The Farmington Quaker Meeting House, Teen Empowerment, the Rochester Association of Black Journalists, the Urban League of Rochester and Action for a Better Community have recognized David's contributions to the community. He was also awarded the New York State Liberty Medal.

In 1975, he earned a Ph.D. in Educational administration from The Union Institute and University, Cincinnati, Ohio. David received the Bachelor of Science in Photography Degree from Rochester Institute of Technology. His Master of Arts degree was earned at Syracuse University.

David was an enlisted man in the Air Force which included service during the Korean War.

SHAWN DUNWOODY is a multidisciplinary award-winning artist, educator, and community activist based in Rochester, New York.

As an artist, Dunwoody has created a wide range of public art installations throughout the country, many of which focus on issues of social justice and community empowerment. He has worked with numerous municipal agencies, communities, institutions, private businesses, and more, delivering permanent visual interventions, temporary installations, workshops, lectures, development plans, and public policy recommendations.

In addition to his artistic work, Dunwoody is deeply committed to community building and social justice activism. He has served as a mentor and teacher for regional youth programs and has worked with a variety of community organizations to promote economic development and social equity across the nation.

Dunwoody's work has been recognized with numerous awards and accolades, that have led him to be documented, recorded, published, and broadcast on many outlets including The Atlantic, Wall Street Journal, PBS, Forbes, NBC, The Washington Post, and The New York Times.

TONIA LORAN-GALBAN (Akwesasne Mohawk, Bear Clan) was Senior Native Interpretive guide at Ganondagan State Historic Site, in Victor NY from 1991-2022. She is an accredited interpreter through NAI, the National Association of Interpretation. In her 31 years there she planted and maintained their three gardens, researched the 17th century Haudenosaunee bark longhouse material culture and studied relevant literature and stories as well she trained staff, trail guides and gallery docents. Not ending with retirement; she continues to volunteer as a gallery docent and train new staff.

She partners with her husband Michael Galban, Ganondagan state Historic Sites' Curator/manager creating 17th century Historic Haudenosaunee clothing and material culture for re-enactments, museums and film staging. At the onset of the pandemic; while schools were

quarantining and students were home she & Michael maintained a connection to youth and families via YouTube telling two stories a day for a month. Returning to work a month later she aided in developing 45 minute interactive zoom classrooms at Ganondagan and also the 10 minute interpretation. Many museums and cultural institutions looked to the success of these programs as a good creative model.

In 2021-2022 she worked with Geva Theatre Center's Artistic Council; script reading for diversity, equity and inclusion.

Tonia is also a storyteller, bead worker, and an herbalist. Tonia is carrying on the family tradition of basket making which she learned from her paternal grandmother, Orakwino on the Akwesasne reservation where she was raised. Tonia travels to the Haudenosaunee communities collaborating teaching basketry and also the ethnobotanical plant uses through walks.

She is asked to present at many different museums such as the Rochester Museum & Science Center, Seneca Nation Museum, Akwesasne Museum and the National Museum of the American Indian (NYC), to name just a few. Tonia currently is a working artist and cultural knowledge bearer employed by Creatives Rebuilds New York and in partnership with Friends of Ganondagan.

About 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.

The 516-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 series of contemporary drama, comedy, musical theatre, and new play development programs. In addition, the Fielding Stage hosts visiting companies of both local and international renown.

Geva offers a wide variety of educational, engagement, and literary programs, nurturing audiences and artists alike. Geva Theatre Center sits on the ancestral and unceded territory of Opppthe O-non-dowa-gah, 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.

Geva is under the leadership of Artistic Director Elizabeth Williamson and Executive Director Christopher Mannelli.

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

END