

Geva Theatre's 2025 Essie Calhoun Diversity in the Arts Awards

Rochester, N.Y. — Geva Theatre's annual Essie Calhoun Diversity in the Arts Award ceremony took place on Thursday, April 24, 2025. This year's "Essie" Award recipients are **Curtis K. Rivers** and **Marie Rivers**, **Patricia Corcoran**, **Ralph Thompson**, and **AKOMA African American Women's Gospel Choir**.

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.

The Essie Awards Selection Committee consists of Thomas Warfield, Annette Ramos, Essie Calhoun-McDavid, Nancy Gong, Elizabeth Williamson, and Eron Damercy.

The award statue was created by glass artist Nancy Gong. The 2025 Essie Calhoun Diversity in the Arts Awards are, in part, made possible by the support of its sponsor, Volvo Cars Rochester.

Learn More about Our Award Recipients

Curtis K. Rivers & Marie Rivers have been pillars of the Rochester community for over 30 years, contributing to education, the arts, and cultural enrichment. As co-founders of Mood Makers Books and longtime educators, they have championed African American literature, learning, and youth empowerment. Their mentorship has inspired generations of young artists and creatives to pursue their dreams and has woven a tapestry of connections that enriches Rochester's arts community in countless ways. Curtis and Marie continue to inspire through their service, artistry, and commitment to legacy.

Patricia Corcoran is a member of the Tonawanda Onondowaga (Seneca) nation and a member of the Bear Clan. She teaches Indigenous and Environmental studies at the Harley School. Trish serves on the Board of Friends of Ganondagan, reads with NOON - Witness to Injustice blanket exercises, serves on the Indigenous Advisory Council for the Climate Solutions

Accelerator, the Indigenous Health Coalition with Common Ground Health, is a writer-director-performer with Remnantsart.org and is Chair of the Rochester Indigenous Peoples' Day Committee (second Monday in October, Join us!). Trish is a proud Mother, a happy gardener, and does not drink plastic bottled water.

Ralph Thompson is a Rochester-based photographer and artist whose work spans photography, drawing, and painting, rooted in a creative journey that began in the 1960s. Inspired by his upbringing and experiences across the U.S., Ralph founded Gallery74 and later helped launch the WOC Art Collaborative, building community through art. He continues to freelance, create, and archive his work while developing two photography books, with his award-winning images featured in *The Washington Post*, *Life in the Finger Lakes Magazine*, and more.

AKOMA African American Women's Gospel Choir - *Since 1995...and the rest is Herstory*

AKOMA, Rochester's African American Women's Gospel Choir, celebrates 30 years of song, sisterhood, and service. Founded in 1995, AKOMA blends gospel, spirituals, and spoken word to uplift, empower, and honor African American heritage. AKOMA's 30th Anniversary Scholarship Concert, *PearlEssence*, will take place on June 14, 2025, at Monroe Community College, with proceeds supporting scholarships for young African American women.

About Geva Theatre

Founded in 1972, Geva Theatre is a not-for-profit, professional theatre company dedicated to creating and producing professional theatre productions, programs, and services of a national standard.

Geva offers a wide variety of educational, engagement, and literary programs, nurturing audiences and artists alike. Geva Theatre sits on the ancestral and unceded territory of the 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 James Haskins.

Find out more about Geva Theatre 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.

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