

# spotlight

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY THEATRE

MAY/JUNE 2022



## IN THIS ISSUE

aactWORLDFEST 2022

TEAMS Conference

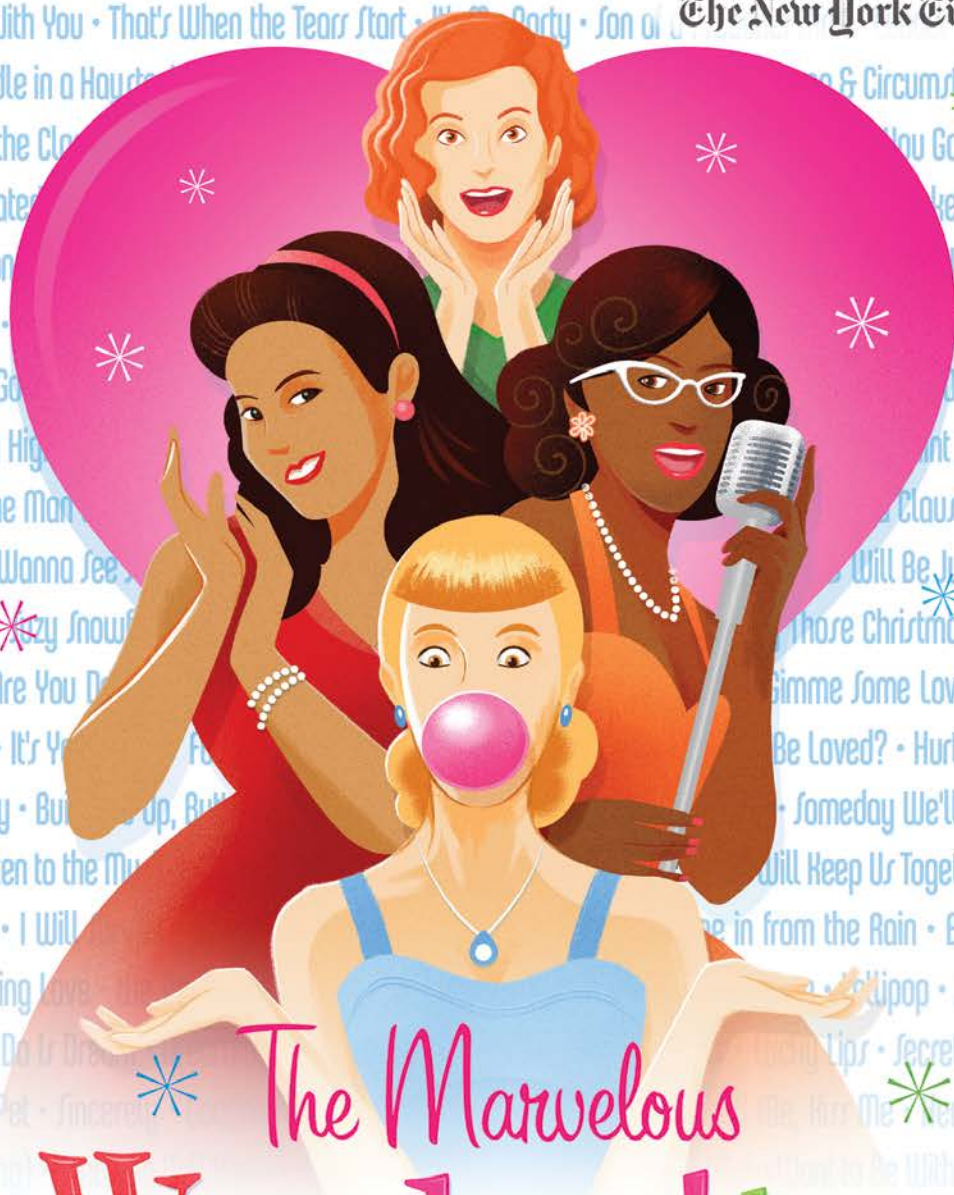
AACT National Awards

Creating a Community of Volunteers



**"THIS SHOW IS AN UTTER CHARM BOMB!"**

*The New York Times*



# The Marvelous Wonderettes

The  
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WONDERETTES  
**CAPS  
AND  
GOWNS**

Winter  
Wonderettes

The  
MARVELOUS  
WONDERETTES  
**Dream  
On**

The Marvelous  
Wonderettes  
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## President's Letter

**Chris Serface**  
AACT President



Hello AACT Family,

Thank you! For the last two years I have had the honor and privilege to serve as your President and it has been an absolute pleasure.

If you'd asked me at the beginning what my term would look like, it definitely wouldn't have been during a pandemic that brought community theatre to a grinding halt. The great thing is, we took it in stride. We had challenges, successes, laughter, and tears, and we all did it together. My standing ovation goes to the staff of AACT who have helped us through COVID-19 with their drive to make sure we all had the resources and help we needed.

I am a member of AACT because of the support it has brought me. I've grown as an administrator, an actor, a director, a technician, a board member, a community member, and most importantly, as a human. Without the great people I've met through AACT from all over the world, I would not be where I am today.

I encourage you all to look to AACT for ways you can become better, too. Find the workshop or conference that speaks to you. Go to a festival and see the beautiful theatre that your peers are creating. Whatever it is, enjoy it and walk away changed in some small way.

Elections are happening now for the next group of talent that will help shape AACT in the years ahead. I hope those who join the board and serve in executive roles will find it as rewarding as I have. Thank you for being a part of AACT's future.

I look forward to crossing paths with all of you in the course of time (hopefully at aactWORLDfest, TEAMS Conference, and AACTFest 2023). Until then, always feel free to reach out if you need an ear.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Serface".

The Heuer Publishing logo, featuring the word "HEUER" in a large, stylized serif font, with "PUBLISHING" in a smaller sans-serif font below it, and "ESTABLISHED 1928" in a very small font at the bottom. The background of the logo is a photograph of five performers on a stage, illuminated with blue and purple light. They are in various poses, some with arms raised, suggesting a theatrical performance. The performers include a woman in a white top, a man in a light blue shirt, a woman in a black dress, a man in a green shirt, and a woman in a teal top and grey skirt.

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A standard black and white square QR code located in the bottom right corner of the banner.

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## Contacting AACT

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AACT welcomes *Spotlight* input and requests for advertising rates. Contact David Cockerell at [david@aact.org](mailto:david@aact.org) to submit content. Contact Darlene DeLorezo at [darlene@aact.org](mailto:darlene@aact.org) for advertising rates and specs.

**On the cover:** Felicity (Ashley Potts) sells dresses online for *Linen and Fate*, a home business guaranteed to make her rich, in the Midland Center for the Arts production of *MLM is for Murder (Or Your Side Hustle is Killing Us)*, photo: Midland Center for the Arts

**Thank you to Subplot Studio** for their sponsorship of the new look and design of *Spotlight* magazine. We look forward to this ongoing and growing partnership in order to bring you the best *Spotlight* quality and content. We encourage you to check out the wonderful products and services **Subplot.com** has to offer you and your theatre!



25 YEARS

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*Footloose*, the exhilarating movie musical adaptation, celebrates its 25th Broadway anniversary next year! Let your audience cut loose to the rhythm of its rockin' score, featuring Top 40 hits and electric new songs for the stage. More at [concordshows.com/Footloose](https://concordshows.com/Footloose).

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### Jamie Ulmer

Beatrice, NE (2025)

### Sally Barnes

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### Donna Fisher

Casper, WY (2022)

### TBD

### Jon Douglas Rake

Tacoma, WA (2022)

### Dane Winters

Germany (US Army) (2022)

# Upcoming Events

## AACT Online Roundtables

May 17 - *Finding the You in Youth: Training Young Artists Teaches You, Too*

June 14 - *Understudies & Swings*

2022 schedule: [aact.org/roundtables](https://aact.org/roundtables)

## aactWORLDVEST 2022

June 20-26 - Venice Theatre, Venice, Florida

[aact.org/worldvest](https://aact.org/worldvest)

## AACT Summer 2022 Annual Membership Meeting

Saturday, June 25, 10:30 am - 12:30 pm - Venice Theatre, Venice, Florida

[aact.org/calendar](https://aact.org/calendar)

## AACT Summer 2022 Board Meetings

Executive Committee Meeting: Saturday, June 25, 9:00 – 10:30 am

Board Meetings, I and II: Saturday, June 25, 10:30 am – 12:30 pm

Venice Theatre, Venice, Florida

[aact.org/calendar](https://aact.org/calendar)

## TEAMS 2022

July 29-31

Hale Centre Theatre, Salt Lake City, Utah

[aact.org/teams](https://aact.org/teams)

# AACT Staff

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Marketing/Communications Director

### David A. VanCleave

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### Kathy Pingel

NewPlayFest Dramaturg

### Mary Jo DeNolf

Festivals/Engagements Coordinator

# Spotlight

*Spotlight* is published bimonthly by the American Association of Community Theatre for its members, and is annually distributed to an expanded list of known community theatre organizations and interested individuals.

**Editors:** David Cockerell and Stephen Pelthman

**Content and Resource Contributors:** John Andzulis, Susan Austin, John Bavoso, Caleb Buford, Anne Canvasser, Chad-Alan Carr, Lori Chase, Quiana Clark-Roland, Camile Cline, David Cockerell, Laurie Colton, Winston Daniels, Darlene DeLorenzo, Mary Jo DeNolf, Jennifer Hamilton, Travis Kendrick, Karen Matheny, Midland Center for the Arts, Kathy McHaney, Linda Miller, Paola Nogueras, Jill Patchin, Stephen Peithman, Kathy Pingel, Chris Serface, Jon Skaalen, Karen Schaeffer, Casey Wayne Soelberg, David A. VanCleave, Venice Theatre, Cori Veverka, John Viars, Maner Manush Theatre Company

**Design and Layout:** by Subplot Studio

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# Don't Miss Out On aactWORLDVEST 2022



Venice, Florida, and all it has to offer is ready for you! If you haven't yet, register today for aactWORLDVEST 2022. This amazing international community theatre festival runs June 20-26, so be sure to register, book your flight, and reserve your hotel room on the beautiful and balmy west coast of Florida. Go to **aact.org/worldvest** to get started.



**Andrea Lattari and Cinzia Grande of the Maner Manush Theatre Company** from Italy will return to aactWORLDVEST, this year with a production of *The Fabulous Journey*, about the adventures of two actors during the Renaissance who travel across Europe and introduce the new language of Commedia dell'Arte\*

*\*Performing companies and productions are subject to change. Visit **venicetheatre.org** for updates.*

Venice Theatre is excited to host aactWORLDVEST for the fourth time.

"If you've attended before, you know a fantastic time and friends, old and new, await you," says Lori Chase, Special Projects Coordinator at Venice Theatre. "Experiencing live theatre is a treat in any setting, but experiencing live theatre from all over the world while vacationing in Venice, Florida, is heaven. Our resort city on the Gulf of Mexico boasts award-winning beaches, tree-lined avenues with every type of restaurant and shop you can imagine, and a welcoming community of folks who will become life-long friends. We've seen it happen again and again."

Festival productions, workshops, and parties are plenty to keep attendees busy, but there also are opportunities for boating, fishing, golfing, biking, paddle boarding, and exploring Old Florida rivers and creeks (and the unique wildlife that call them home). Several state parks and preserves provide the perfect setting for a relaxing hike or boat ride.

Take a short drive or bus ride and you'll find even more to do:

- Sarasota is consistently hailed as one of the nation's top-five cities for the arts. You'll find theatre, ballet and symphony performances, art galleries, the renowned Ringling Museum, and the world-famous Selby Botanical Gardens.
- Just an hour away you can enjoy Tampa Bay Rays major league baseball games or Busch Gardens Amusement Park and Zoological Gardens.
- Walt Disney World and Universal Studios are about two hours away. Head the other direction and you'll find yourself deep in the legendary Florida Everglades.
- The Kennedy Space Center is just a three-hour drive from Venice.

*"Breathtaking theatre, invigorating workshops, professional networking, tourist attractions, and local haunts. They're all here for you to enjoy. Come early and stay a few days after the festival to enjoy all that Florida has to offer. We can't wait to see you in June!"*

*- Lori Chase, Special Projects Coordinator at Venice Theatre*

*continued on next page*



## aactWORLDVEST Partner Hotel: Hotel Venezia

[aact.org/ramada](https://aact.org/ramada)

Room rates are \$129 for a room or \$159 for a suite.

Call **941-315-8474** and mention aactWORLDVEST when making your reservation.



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Access to all MainStage Jervey Theatre shows

All workshops

All after-glow parties

\*aactWORLDVEST 2022 registration prices listed above are for AACT members. If you are not a member, add \$75 to adult registration; \$15 to student registration.

## AACT Airline Discount Codes:

### Delta Airlines

Sarasota Bradenton Airport (SRQ)

Meeting Code: **NMV4F**

### United Airlines

Sarasota Bradenton Airport (SRQ)

Z Code: **ZKDA**, Agreement Code: **572012**

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[venicetheatre.org/international/](https://venicetheatre.org/international/) is the best place to stay up-to-date and to learn more about all there is to do at aactWORLDVEST2022. Visit the site today to register for this fabulous event. You’ll have the time of your life at this Festival in Paradise!





Advice from a Sponge:

## Take the Plunge and Soak it Up!

**Cori Veverka**

The challenges we've all faced, of working to survive and thrive through the pandemic, had me itching to connect with others facing the same storm. I wanted to learn and share from other people who have navigated those turbulent seas and have stayed afloat.

As the Artistic Director of a park district-run theatre program, I must admit that while AACT was an organization on my radar, I wasn't quite sure if it was for me. We are one part recreation program, one part community theatre, and one part something else. I knew that AACT could be a resource for groups like mine that had youth productions, educational programming, and challenges with promotion and ticket sales. However, on the other hand, we have no board to report to, and we don't have our own theatre space. Was AACT a good fit for us?

I decided to take the chance and register for the Community Theatre Management Conference (CTMC) in early March—and I am so glad that I did! The virtual option felt very safe for me as a low-stakes introduction, and I was able to connect and learn, all from the comfort of my own home, with my trusty dog by my side.

As everyone logged in for our introductory session, I immediately felt welcome. Yes, there were old friends greeting each other warmly and wildly, but newbies like me were engaged in the dialog from the start. The AACT team (including Winston Daniels, Quiana Clark-Roland, and David A. VanCleave) got things rolling by reinforcing that we all do things a little differently, and there are no one-size-fits-all solutions. What each of us is doing might be the thing that works for us but might not for someone else. My fear of not fitting in fell away as I discovered the diversity of the groups represented in the room.

Chad-Alan Carr did a wonderful job as facilitator for the weekend. He kicked off introductions by asking each of us to share what we wanted to gain from the conference. Some people had specific questions, but the one that really struck home was the person who said they just wanted to be a "sponge and soak it all up." Because that was exactly how I felt. I didn't know exactly what to expect, or what I would be able to contribute, but I wanted to be along for the ride.

The weekend was filled with breakout sessions where we discussed the topics in which we had identified as the most important to us. There were evergreen conversations on financing the organization, working with the board of directors, and managing volunteers, as well as current issues like bringing back patrons, participants, and sponsors after a rough two years, and moving forward with more mindfulness of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

There were rapid-fire polls that showed us how things worked for our wide variety of organizations, and informative sponsor drop-ins that provided helpful tools and tips for selecting shows, ticket sales, and enhancing productions.

I was pleased to be able to get feedback and perspective on the specific questions I had going in. Among the things I learned was that virtual playbills were a hit with some theatres (and that ushers had QR codes for the playbills on their badges as they were seating people), and that most of the theatres had passed along ticketing fees to the purchaser with little to no pushback.

I was surprised that some of the best nuggets came from the conversations I thought wouldn't apply to me and my program. In the conversation about boards, for example, many people recommended a book about crucial conversations that went right into my Amazon cart. From the conversations about financing the organization, I got ideas for offering tickets or class vouchers to people who volunteer or fill out a survey. I also learned which of the attendees would be my best resources for future questions and guidance, and that AACT membership comes with access to unique tools, not to mention discounts from service and product providers that many of us are already using.

I am so thankful that I didn't let my fear of not fitting in hold me back from taking the plunge. After this first experience of soaking everything up at CTMC, this sponge is ready for the next opportunities to connect, learn, and grow with AACT.

***Cori Veverka is the Artistic Director of the Limelight Theatre Company in her role as Cultural Arts Supervisor at the Oswegoland Park District in Oswego, Illinois***



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writer for JOAN RIVERS, PHYLLIS DILLER and LILY TOMLIN

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# Harris Cashes Out!

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Reviews and photos: [www.londos.net](http://www.londos.net)

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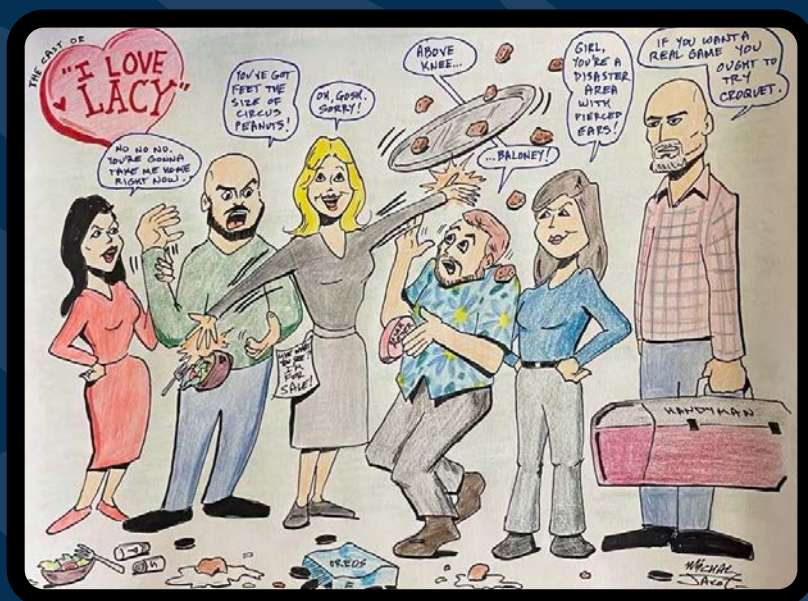


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# You Deserve TEAMS 2022

## The Conference Three Years in the Making is Here, July 29-31

Cue the drum roll—AACT's second in-person conference is set for July 29-31!

After spending so much time and energy dealing with the pandemic and its impacts, you deserve the opportunity to gather with like-minded peers from across the country. You deserve to learn new strategies from experts in your field. You deserve a hug from a new friend and peer whom you just met three days before. You deserve the space to vent about the struggles of trying to please your entire audience. You deserve to raise a glass and celebrate the end of The Zoom Years.

### You deserve TEAMS 2022.

Don't get us wrong—the last two years weren't entirely bad. As an organization, we're thankful for the opportunity it's given us to develop virtual programming, with its ability to connect easily with peers anywhere in the world. Virtual opportunities are not disappearing (read more about our ongoing virtual roundtable series on page 14), but we admit there is something truly magical about an AACT in-person conference.

That was the experience of Casey Wayne Soelberg of Actors' Repertory Theatre of Idaho at our last TEAMS conference. In the November/December 2019 issue of *Spotlight*, he called it a "revitalizing three-day quest for [enhancing] community theatre skills."

*"People here understand. They know. I found the unanimous synergism everywhere at the AACT TEAMS Conference was like the goosebumps you feel when you hear your favorite song, or watch a performance you've been waiting your entire adult life to see. It doesn't get much better than that. Ultimately, I found that sharing stories, problems, and solutions made for a memorable and mind-stretching experience. The TEAMS Conference helped us all to unravel the underlying messages within our shared experiences—and the potential for growth they contain. We came away equipped with the tools to succeed—with the help of the right people and a positive attitude."*

- Casey Wayne Soelberg of Actors' Repertory Theatre of Idaho  
continued on page 12

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Information

## Pick a TEAMS Track That Fits Your Interests and Needs

At its heart, TEAMS is a high-performance educational conference that offers tracks in Technical Theatre, Educational Programming, Artistic Direction/Vision, Marketing, and Stage Management. This year's conference is hosted by the renowned Hale Centre Theatre in Salt Lake City, Utah, from July 29-31. The five individual tracks are held simultaneously, making it convenient for co-workers to share rides, rooms, and registration discounts.

Don't deny yourself the opportunity to attend this amazing conference, three years in the making. You deserve it. Register now at [aact.org/teams](http://aact.org/teams).

### Technical Theatre

Professional advice on technical elements to support your upcoming shows. Hands-on training in special effects, automation, scenic design/construction, lighting design, and more.

*Facilitator:* Bob Frame, Director of Theatre Operations, Cayuga Community College, Auburn, New York, Retired

### Educational Programming

Boost your theatre's education program, exchange ideas and experiences, and learn skills to better manage your programs.

*Facilitator:* Robin Heldt Spahr, Education Director, Des Moines (Iowa) Community Playhouse.

### Artistic Direction/Vision

Discover and re-envision exciting ways to produce high-quality theatre. Select the right plays for your next season; learn solutions for choosing directors, recruiting actors, and solving technical problems; and examine long-range planning.

*Facilitator:* Tim Jebesen, Executive Director, Midland (Texas) Community Theatre.

### Marketing

Learn strategies for small, medium, and large-sized arts groups to build audiences, create loyalty, and use marketing and branding in today's changing social media world.

*Facilitator:* Lee Ann Bakros, Marketing and PR Director, Des Moines (Iowa) Community Playhouse

### Stage Management

Tap into best practices for organizing rehearsals, supporting the director, managing the cast, and getting the curtain to go up on time.

*Facilitator:* Amber Bielinski, Head of Stage Management Program/Production Manager, University of Utah

Registration (Opens January 2022)	Early Bird (through June 29, 2022)	Standard
<b>Group (3 or more): AACT Member</b>	\$225/person	\$250/person
<b>Group (3 or more): Non-Member</b>	\$300/person	\$325/person
<b>Individual: AACT Member</b>	\$250/person	\$300/person
<b>Individual: Non-Member</b>	\$325/person	\$350/person
Registration covers continental breakfast, Saturday lunch, snacks, and materials.		

**Bonus Offer:** Regularly priced at \$55, tickets will be discounted to \$25 for participants to see the Hale Centre Theatre productions of *Singin' in the Rain* and/or *Silent Sky*. Tickets available for Saturday night, July 30, and for the evening performances before the conference, Thursday, July 28.



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Visit [aact.org/TEAMS](https://aact.org/TEAMS) for links to  
receive the AACT discounted rates  
Deadline to Reserve: July 5, 2022

#### Room Rates (AACT discount):

\$149 for King/Queen Standard,  
breakfast included

\$139 for King/Queen Standard,  
breakfast not included



### Residence Inn Salt Lake City/Sandy

270 West 10000 South  
Sandy, Utah 84070  
Phone: 801-561-5005

Visit [aact.org/TEAMS](https://aact.org/TEAMS) for links to  
receive the AACT discounted rates  
Deadline to Reserve - July 05, 2022

#### Room Rates (AACT discount):

\$139 for Studio Suite,  
breakfast included

\$229 for 2-Bedroom Suite,  
breakfast included

## Airline Discounts

When booking with either airline below, use the appropriate  
AACT discount codes below..

### Delta Airlines

Group Ticket Designator: **NGNHQ**, Account Code: **NMV4F**

### United Airlines

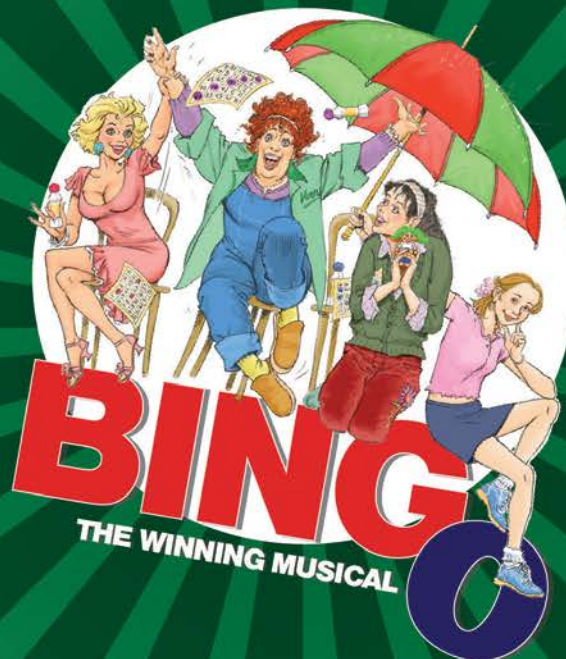
Salt Lake City (SLC) Valid Travel Dates: 07/25/2022 -  
08/04/2022

**Z Code: ZKDA**, Agreement Code: **572012**

**Note:** Due to the various uncertainties of travel, AACT recommends  
travel insurance for your protection in the event of illness,  
weather, family emergency, or anything else that might cause flight  
cancellation and/or delays.

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- The Minneapolis Star-Tribune  
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- The Associated Press



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# Authenticity, Representation, and 1,000 Props

## Market House Theatre's World Premiere of *Unpacking Mother*

AACT NewPlayFest 2022 celebrated another world premiere on February 10, when *Unpacking Mother*, by Karen Schaeffer, opened at Market House Theatre in Paducah, Kentucky. The outstanding opening night performance was filmed, then streamed the following weekend on Broadway On Demand.



**Opening Night of the AACT NewPlayFest 2022 world premiere of *Unpacking Mother*, by Karen Schaeffer, at Market House Theatre in Paducah, Kentucky:** **Seated** (left to right): Carrie Blomquist, Dramatic Publishing Professional Leasing Director; Amber Dawn (cast); Karen Schaeffer, *Unpacking Mother* Playwright; Anna Tamaoka (cast); Linda M. Lee of the Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation; **Back row** (left to right): Denise Bristol (Assistant Director/Stage Manager); Kathy Pingel (Director, AACT Dramaturg); David A. VanCleave, AACT Education Coordinator; Jerome Veit, Market House Theatre Technical Director; Michael Cochran, Market House Theatre Executive Director

Directed by Kathy Pingel, the production ran through February 20, with nine live performances and two days of international streaming. The theatre also offered one enriching post-show discussion for audiences, with cast, director, and playwright.

As funny as it is moving, *Unpacking Mother* is the story of two estranged sisters, Cassie and Kathryn. The youngest, Cassie, has spent the past 10 years as the primary caregiver for their mother, who suffered from multiple sclerosis and hoarding disorder. When their mother dies, Kathryn returns home for the first time in years to help Cassie make sense of the hoarded possessions that fill their childhood home. As they unpack boxes, they encounter their younger selves and unearth truths about their mother's illness, their father's secrets, and their own broken relationship.

In her Playwright's Notes for MHT's playbill, playwright Karen Schaeffer explains that the idea for *Unpacking Mother* came from a conversation with a friend who was struggling with a loved one's hoarding. Hoping to help her, Schaeffer started doing research on hoarding, and was surprised to learn that it is a severe psychological disorder. She decided to bring that into the light, along with the play's themes of abandonment, unwilling caretakers, and mental illness, explaining, "My wish was to speak a truth for people who aren't often seen or heard."

That desire for authenticity and representation was shared by the show's director, Kathy Pingel. In addition to her own experience as AACT NewPlayFest Dramaturg, Pingel decided to hire social psychologists Dr. Caitlin Powell and Brian Johnson to work as additional dramaturgs on the production. The team provided the cast with research on a variety of topics relevant to their characters, including the effect of being left alone to care for an elderly parent and how people react when they see signs of their parents' mental and physical conditions. This added level of support elevated the performances of both Amber Dawn and Anna Tamaoka as Cassie and Kathryn, respectively.

*continued on next page*



After not speaking for years, sisters Kathryn (Anna Tamaoka) and Cassie (Amber Dawn) take a break from sorting their late mother's hoarded possessions and try to mend their broken relationship in the Market House Theatre production of *Unpacking Mother*

Shedding light on hoarding disorder provided an extra challenge for the show's designers, as well as the actors and director. Many productions have a single props designer, notes MHT Executive Director Michael Cochran, but *Unpacking Mother* required a team of five to fill Tom Hansen's realistic set with over 1,000 props. And since the show follows the sisters packing (and unpacking) the piles of possessions, those props are not mere set dressing—they are handled by the actors and moved throughout the show, resulting in an extensive reset process following each performance. (MHT's Board President, Phillip Chesnut, volunteered to handle that 45-minute responsibility.)

Audience responses from Market House's premiere production prove that the team's mission for representation and authenticity was successful. During the opening-night reception and the post-show discussion the following night, audience members praised how the production handled complex relationships and experiences.

"It was like having a conversation with my sister," one audience member said. Another urged friends on social media to "See this play and you will see at least one person you know." Someone else appreciated the nuance in the sisters' relationship, noting that "Neither is right or wrong. I found myself siding with one of them at one point, only to internally scream at them the next."

Schaeffer says that creating characters that her audience will recognize has always been her goal as a writer. Shortly before she turned 50, she grew frustrated that the only roles available for a woman her age were a generic mom or quirky aunt. She wanted to see herself, her friends, and neighbors onstage.

In less than two weeks, she had finished the first draft of her first script, *Girls' Weekend*, a farce focused on a group of women ages 45-70. The hit play has been produced across the country, as well as in Canada, Germany, and Australia. So successful was the world premiere at the Des Moines Community Playhouse in 2014 that audiences begged her to write a sequel. The result—*Girls' Weekend 2, The Bachelorette Party*—opened at Iowa Stage Theatre Company on April 29 this year. Her other works include the romantic comedy, *Choices!*; an H.G. Wells-inspired period piece with life-sized puppets called *All the Gravities*; and *Recompense*, a twisted revenge play.

Schaeffer cherishes her NewPlayFest experience and is grateful for everyone involved, writing:

*"From the moment I submitted the script, I felt supported. The play's progress was communicated throughout each tier of the review process. Once Market House chose the play, my experience was beyond anything I ever dreamed. Everyone worked as a team. Even before rehearsals officially began, Kathy Pingel invited me to sit in on virtual table reads and the dramaturgy presentation. And, once rehearsals started, I was sent rehearsal reports to stay informed of the process. All of this, and the integral workshop portion of NewPlayFest, provided me with a timely opportunity to discuss challenges, make adjustments, provide smoother transitions, and clarify intentions. I received invaluable feedback from every member of the team and when I left, I knew the story couldn't be in better hands. When opening night came, I watched the audience as they became more absorbed in the story... leaning in...going on the journey Amber Dawn and Anna Tamaoka created as the sisters. I was able to remove myself as the writer and become part of the audience. The entire process with AACT NewPlayFest and Market House Theatre allowed me to elevate the story of Unpacking Mother, giving it complexity and polish. I am truly blessed."*



Michael Cochran, Executive Director of Market House Theatre, receives a check from Linda M. Lee of the Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation on opening night of the world premiere of *Unpacking Mother*, by Karen Schaeffer, February 10, 2022, in Paducah, Kentucky



# A Play is Only 'New' Once

## Midland Center for the Arts' World Premiere of *MLM is for Murder*

The AACT NewPlayFest 2022 world premiere of John Bavoso's *MLM is for Murder* (or *Your Side Hustle is Killing Us*) was everything the playwright had hoped for. The production by Michigan's Midland Center for the Arts was spot-on, and audience reception was overwhelmingly positive.

What the audience didn't see, of course, was the collaborative process that led up to that triumphant opening night—and which is key to the success of the AACT NewPlayFest.

The work began early on, with a three-day workshop that involves intense collaboration between playwright, director, and actors.

Playwright Bavoso explains: "My favorite part of any new play process is the table work, and my experience at Midland, with director Chad William Baker and the incredible cast, was one of the best I've had. The first day of the workshop was spent talking and asking questions—it's so humbling that anyone wants to perform words I've written, but even more so that such talented actors put so much thought and care into bringing those words to life. It helped me see the play in a new light and make valuable changes to the script in our short amount of time together."

The impact works both ways, points out Travis Kendrick, Midland's Manager of Produced Theatre and Theatre Education. In fact, he says, "the actors, director, and entire creative team were on cloud nine from having John Bavoso in the rehearsal room for those early workshop days. So much great conversation about story, character, and themes came out of that weekend."

Four weeks after the workshop weekend, John returned for opening night. With him was AACT Dramaturg Kathy Pingel, Linda Lee of the sponsoring Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation, and Linda Habjan of Dramatic Publishing. All script changes were seamlessly incorporated, and the pace was brisk. Better yet, the audience received the world premiere of *MLM is for Murder* as enthusiastically as the playwright, who says, "The actors brought real pathos to a script that leans into the campier side of dark comedy."

Following the opening night performance, Midland Center for the Arts hosted a question/answer session.



**Opening Night of the AACT NewPlayFest 2022 world premiere of** *MLM is for Murder* (Or, *Your Side Hustle is Killing Us*), by John Bavoso, at Midland Center for the Arts in Midland, Michigan

**Kneeling** (left to right): Travis Kendrick, Midland Center for the Arts Manager of Produced Theatre and Theatre Education; Lindsay Van Arsdale (cast); Ashley Potts (cast); **Standing** (left to right): Scott Henze (Wardrobe Supervisor); JR Bornemann (Lighting Designer); Kathy Pingel, AACT Dramaturg; Claudia Marsh; Stephanie Wimer (cast, Costume Designer); Rebecca Krohn (cast); Katie Short (Stage Manager); Playwright John Bavoso; Aja Jade Philipot (cast); Dan Kettler (cast); Maxie Froelicher (Sound Designer); Chad William Baker (Director, Properties Designer); Evan Lewis (Scenic Designer); Diane Willcox, Midland Center Vice President of Communications and Development; Matt Travis, Midland Center Senior Director Of Artistic Planning; Linda Lee of the Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation; Linda Habjan, Dramatic Publishing Vice President of Acquisitions

"I've been a part of less-than-stellar talk-backs," says Bavoso, "but this one was filled with genuine curiosity, thoughtful questions, and warm support."

The conversation was led by Travis Kendrick, who says "the audience was so excited to learn more about the story and the new play process. Plus, they had the unique opportunity to pose questions directly to the playwright."

Both Kendrick and Bavoso are glad to have gone through the NewPlayFest process.

"Overall, being a part of AACT NewPlayFest has easily been one of the highlights of my career to date," says Bavoso. "For any playwrights out there considering submitting for the next round, I'd unequivocally encourage you to do so."

Speaking for Midland, Kendrick sums up the experience: "A play is only 'new' once, and everyone involved in *MLM Is for Murder* (Or *Your Side Hustle Is Killing Us*) cherishes this special opportunity."

*continued on next page*

## About the Play

In *MLM is for Murder*, Minerva Ross has escaped the doldrums of her graphic design job in Washington, DC, by writing and narrating her own feminist true-crime podcast about how and why women commit murder. Meanwhile, on the other side of the country, Felicity Evanston, a stay-at-home wife and mother (and Minerva's high school nemesis) is selling ridiculously patterned leggings for a company called Linen & Fate—as much as to have something that's just hers as it is to supplement her husband's income. But when the usually bubbly and unassuming Felicity snaps, she decides the only way to get ahead is to literally start killing off the competition. The two women haven't crossed paths in years, but both now experience the kind of success they've been so desperately craving—and risk losing their families, freedom, and very souls in the process.

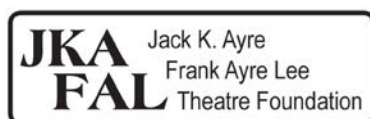
## About the Playwright

John Bavoso is a Washington, DC-based playwright, book and theatre reviewer, marketer, and aspiring unicorn wrangler. He writes plays mostly about women and queer people who are awkwardly attempting (and generally failing) to engage with serious subject matter, using only their dry wit and impeccably timed combative taunts. He is a member of the Dramatists Guild of America, a Pinky Swear Productions company member, a 2019 Lambda Literary Fellow, and recipient of District of Columbia FY18 and FY19 Arts and Humanities Fellowships. His plays have been produced and/or developed in theatres across the country, as well as in Canada, Japan, South Korea, United Arab Emirates, Australia, and the UK.



Felicity (Ashley Potts) goes live for the first time to sell dresses and leggings for Linen and Fate, a home business guaranteed to make her rich, in the Midland Center for the Arts production of *MLM is for Murder* (Or Your Side Hustle is Killing Us)

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The Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation provides a grant that helps make AACT NewPlayFest possible. The Foundation was created by the children of Frank Ayre Lee as a tribute to their father, and a legacy for the creative endeavors of his cousin and friend, Jack. The family is pleased to honor both men through AACT NewPlayFest, in presenting and promoting new theatre works. For more information, visit [aact.org/newplayfest](http://aact.org/newplayfest).



Dramatic Publishing Company publishes AACT NewPlayFest's winning plays in anthologies, and licenses production rights for the winning plays. Visit [aact.org/dpc](http://aact.org/dpc) for direct links to Dramatic Publishing Company's NewPlayFest anthologies and plays, plus information about discounts and special offers for AACT members.



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# HELP IS COMING!

## The New York Times *THEATER; STAGE IN TROUBLE? SEND IN THE NUNS!*



“It’s no news that Dan Goggin’s *Nunsense* and his variations thereof, very small musicals that morph into humongous cash cows, have been the saviors of theaters all over the world.” – *The New York Times*



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## NewPlayFest 2024 Submit a Script/Call for Reviewers

### Submit a Script to NewPlayFest 2024

Playwrights may submit scripts for AACT NewPlayFest 2024 during May and June, 2022. Only non-musical, full-length plays will be accepted. Scripts must be unpublished and must not have received a full production. (If selected, the AACT theatre's production is to be a world premiere.) Only one script per playwright. No fees for AACT-member playwrights; nonmembers pay a \$10 script processing fee. For script submission, more information, and script formatting guidelines, visit [aact.org/newplay24](https://aact.org/newplay24).

### Be a NewPlayFest 2024 Reviewer

Volunteer Reviewers read and score submitted AACT NewPlayFest 2024 scripts in several rounds of evaluations. If you'd like to be a part of this exciting AACT festival as a Reviewer, apply and find more information at [aact.org/newplay24](https://aact.org/newplay24).

## Artie's Advocacy Tip

On March 15, 2022, President Biden signed the \$1.5 trillion spending omnibus: **Final FY22 Appropriations Legislation Passes.**

Highlights that directly impact the arts and culture, nonprofits, and individuals:

- \$180 million for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)
- \$268 million for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS)
- \$525 million for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting
- \$36.5 million for Assistance for Arts Education
- \$1.28 billion for Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants

View an in-depth chart of funding and outcomes at [artsactionfund.org](https://artsactionfund.org).

Source: [americansforthearts.org](https://americansforthearts.org)

## Seeking Workshop Proposals (and Ideas) for AACTFest 2023

AACTFest 2023 will be held in Louisville, June 12-17, 2023. The AACT Education and Workshops Committees are currently accepting proposals and ideas for in-person workshops that will inspire and engage.

Workshops can explore any aspect of theatre, including Acting, Administration, Design/Tech, Directing, Diversity/Inclusion, Education, Fight Choreography, Licensing, Marketing/Outreach, Musical Theatre, IT (Tech), Youth Programming, ...and more!

### Tips to consider when submitting a proposal:

- Unique and specific topics are encouraged
- Active & hands-on is best—attendees learn by doing
- Most workshops are 75-minutes, but longer or shorter presentations are considered.

To submit a proposal, complete the form at [aact.org/workshop-rfp](https://aact.org/workshop-rfp) and submit by **October 30, 2022**.

*Is there a topic you'd like to learn more about? Email your ideas to AACT Education Coordinator David A. VanCleave at [dvancleave@aact.org](mailto:dvancleave@aact.org).*





# Celebrating Youth Theatre at AACT YouthFest 2023

## Louisville, Kentucky

AACT YouthFest 2023, the 3rd National Youth Theatre Festival, will be held in conjunction with AACTFest 2023, the National Theatre Festival, June 12-17, 2023, in Louisville, Kentucky.

AACT is looking for theatres and schools interested in performing an all-youth cast show at AACT YouthFest 2023. Participation in AACT YouthFest is by invitation. Interested youth theatre troupes submit an application, and selected troupes will be invited to participate. Funding for travel assistance will be available.

### Application Deadline: June 15, 2022

#### Basics:

- Company must be or become an AACT Organizational Member
- All performers must be 12th grade and younger (2023 high school grads are eligible to participate.)
- Scenery elements are encouraged to be minimal, and everything must fit inside a 10' x 10' square offstage
- Companies are allowed 45 minutes total time for set up, performance, and strike
- Each cast member, crew member, director, and chaperone must have a full registration to AACTFest 2023

To learn more about YouthFest, including rates and deadlines, visit [aact.org/youthfest](https://aact.org/youthfest) and review the YouthFest Participant Guide.

**The AACT Youth Theatre Conference 2023**, a customized educational opportunity, will take place in conjunction with AACTFest 2023 and AACT YouthFest 2023 in Louisville, Kentucky.

The focus will be on cultivating youth who aspire to be leaders within the arts community and providing advanced training in the theatre arts. Participants will be exposed to a line-up of powerful theatre performances from around the country,



Paola Nogueras

*The Terrace Playhouse Youth Theatre Troupe from the United States Army Garrison in Ansbach, Germany, presents This Side of Heaven, by Dan Zolidis, at AACT YouthFest 2019 in Gettysburg, PA*

AACTFest 2023 full registration includes the keynote speakers, workshops, performances of youth shows, as well as the national award-winning companies' shows from the AACTFest 2023 festival cycle, receptions, adjudications, social events, the festival awards ceremony, and more! AACTFest 2023 has discounted rates for youth.

AACT YouthFest is not a competition, but rather a celebration of Youth Theatre! Performances will be adjudicated, with opportunities for individual and group awards. Don't delay; **applications are due June 15!** Our early deadline is designed to give your group maximum time for project grant-writing and other fundraising opportunities.

We look forward to hearing from you soon!

Interested or have questions? Email AACT YouthFest 2023 Chair, Chad-Alan Carr at

**[Chad@GettysburgCommunityTheatre.org](mailto:Chad@GettysburgCommunityTheatre.org)**



*AACT YouthFest 2023 is made possible by is made possible in part by a grant from the Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre Lee Theatre Foundation.*

engage in educational workshops, receive mentoring and shadowing from arts professionals, and take part in activities that are challenging and fun!

The conference is open to ages 12-18. Upon registering, participants will receive a survey to help us align their individual schedule to their interests.

Be on the look-out for more information! Registration will be available soon and space is limited!

# UPDATE!

The "Covid-19 Community Theatre Resource Group" has a new name!



The COVID-19 Community Theatre Resource Facebook Group has a new name, because its mission has expanded. The purpose of this Facebook group is to connect the theatre community and share resources. The Community Theatre Resource Group is open to anyone working or interested in theatre. We ask you to be respectful of each other and that you read and adhere to the Group Rules before participating. Thank you for participating in discussions and for being a part of the work to keep theatre thriving.

JOIN THE DISCUSSION:



facebook.com/groups/  
communitytheatreressourcegroup



## Become a Roundtable Panelist!

What makes AACT Roundtables so dynamic is the opportunity they offer to hear from a variety of voices and viewpoints, without boundaries. If you would like to serve on one of our upcoming panels, or have a topic to propose for future sessions, we encourage you to submit the online form at [aact.org/panelist](https://aact.org/panelist)

# Roundtables Offer New Perspectives

AACT first launched its monthly member-only Roundtable series in response to the COVID-19 shutdown, providing theatres an opportunity to face unprecedented challenges together. Two years later, needs have changed, but the program continues to be a valuable resource for organizations of all sizes, offering a wide variety of topics and perspectives.

Each Roundtable features a panel of community theatre peers, providing broad-based viewpoints from multiple experts. Attendees gain in-depth knowledge from the panelists' hands-on experience and also have the opportunity to ask their own specific questions. Roundtables are streamed live, and videos are also available for viewing afterwards.

All Roundtables are free and offered exclusively to AACT members.

## Upcoming Roundtables

**May 17** - *Finding the You in Youth: Training Young Artists Teaches You, Too*

Learn how to develop quality youth programming that serves the young artist and the organization at large.

**June 14** - *Understudies & Swings*

Examine the pros and cons of using understudies and/or swings in your productions, plus helpful tips to make the most of the opportunity.

**July 19** - *Audience Enrichment*

Further engage theatergoers through pre-show lectures, post-show discussions, audience study guides, and more.

**August 16** - *Accessibility Toolkit*

Come away with practical ideas for serving all your audiences and volunteers, including those with special needs, mobility issues, language barriers, impaired vision or hearing, economic barriers, and more.

For more information about AACT Roundtables, including registration details, visit [aact.org/listing](https://aact.org/listing).



AACT Roundtables are sponsored in part by Ludus, powering theatres' ticketing, marketing, and fundraising needs.



# AACT Announces National Awards for 2022

AACT is proud to announce the recipients of the 2022 AACT National Awards, which will be presented during aactWORLDVEST 2022 in Venice, Florida.

## Art Cole Lifetime of Leadership Award

*Honors a lifetime of leadership in community theatre by members of AACT who have provided leadership at the national level, in addition to local and/or regional levels*



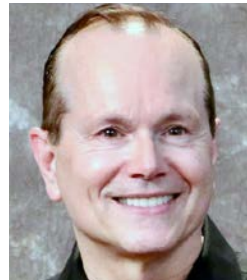
**Michael Spicer** (Salina, Kansas) has served 43 years as a theatre professional. After graduating in 1978 from the University of Virginia with an M.F.A. in Theatre Directing, he held leadership positions as Artistic Director at Sioux Falls Playhouse, Artistic

Director and Associate Director at the Delray Beach Playhouse, Theatre Midland, Sunset Playhouse, and Palo Alto Players. He became the Executive Director of Salina Community Theatre (SCT) in 1998 and remains so today. Under Michael's leadership, SCT has received two National AACTFest awards and the Governor's Arts Award, doubled its staff, increased its programming, and successfully completed a multi-million-dollar capital campaign to expand its facility. Michael has served on the boards of AACT, the Association of Community Arts Agencies of Kansas, the Texas Non-Profit Theatre Association, and the Salina Area Chamber of Commerce. Michael has stated that he believes that "community theatre is the foundational theatre of this country."



## Distinguished Merit Award

*Presented to individuals and organizations in recognition of contributions made to promote and develop the highest standards for community theatre*



**Tim Higgins** (Royal Oak, Michigan) joined Grosse Point Theatre in 1985 and has been sharing his incredible talents ever since. As an award-winning actor, director, and choreographer for over 30 productions, his thoughtful artistic vision and attention to detail

raises the level of excellence with each production he takes on. His professional career as a retired VP of Information Technology for a major bank brings yet another critical skill set that has benefited his theatre. Tim is the driving force of the company's Strategic Planning Committee, working to increase member engagement and coordinating with the board to implement policies and procedures to enhance business operations. Other theatre groups in Michigan, as well as the Naples Players in Florida, have also benefited from Tim's artistic talents. As Tim says, "the transformative power of theatre continues to inspire people of all walks of life for themselves and their community."



**Star Center Theatre** (Gainesville, Florida) Founder Rhonda Wilson's vision 21 years ago was to provide an "opportunity for all kids to be a part of this thing I always loved—a space where everyone can sparkle and shine!" Over the past 22 years, the group has expanded to

include adult artists and audiences, and has used its platform and programs as a catalyst for social change, as well as traditional productions that reflect the diversity of the country. Both the organization and its founder have been recognized nationally, regionally, and state-wide. Awards include 2017 and 2018 Finalist for Excellence in Theatre Education presented by the Tony Awards, and Carnegie Mellon, as well as Allstate National Champion for Good, Florida Governor's Award for Investment in Youth, State Diversity and Inclusion and Women of Vision, and the Purpose Award from Gainesville Black Professionals.

*continued on next page*

## Twink Lynch Organizational Achievement Award

*Recognizes AACT member theatres for successfully completing major steps in new directions, expanding services to their community, or moving to the next level of organizational development*



**Stage Left Theater** (Spokane, Washington) underwent a major shift in 2021, dedicating more of its resources than ever before to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Stage Left has replaced all passive non-discrimination policies with

active inclusion efforts, including not only policy changes but also outreach and community partnerships. The company partnered with multiple theatres in Spokane and the larger inland Northwest region to collaborate on these efforts, and ensure that opportunities are being broadened across the board, not just within its own walls. During the pandemic shutdown, Stage Left was at the forefront of virtual theatre-making in the region, presenting its first virtual festival, a collection of monologues titled Masterpiece Monologues. In addition to other regional and national awards, Stage Left won the Spokane Arts Award for Inclusion, and Artistic Director Jeremy Whittington was awarded the 2021 Governor's Arts & Heritage Luminary Award.

## Make a Legacy Gift

Please consider including the American Association of Community Theatre in your legacy plans through a will, trust, life insurance gift, or other legacy gift. Through these special gifts, friends like you are able to sustain AACT's mission and provide learning experiences for AACT-member companies participating in AACTFest national festivals

To learn more about AACT's Legacy Society, visit [aact.org/legacy](http://aact.org/legacy) or contact the AACT office at [info@aact.org](mailto:info@aact.org)

## David C. Bryant Outstanding Service Award

*Recognizes individual members of AACT for significant, valuable, and lasting service to community theatre*



**Susan Harrington** (Roslindale, Massachusetts) holds multiple degrees in Early Childhood Education and has been involved in community theatre for over 40 years. Currently serving as the Board Secretary for the Eastern Massachusetts Association of

Community Theatres, she has also served as the EMACT representative to NETC and AACT. She is a member of EMACT's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Council, and works diligently to promote diversity, equity and accessibility for Eastern Massachusetts theatre groups. Susan is also actively involved with the Arlington Friends of Drama, The Lexington Players, The Hovey Players and The Footlight Club, and serves as a Distinguished Achievement and Special Honors consultant, assisting companies through evaluation and education. As a state festival team member, she provides a unique level of expertise, freely sharing her knowledge and working tirelessly to ensure that groups in eastern Massachusetts have the tools they need to achieve success.

## Robert E. Gard Superior Volunteer Award

*Presented to individuals above the age of 65 who have faithfully served community theatre on a non-paid basis for over 25 years*



**Dee Baldock** (Verona, Wisconsin) founded the Verona Area Community Theater in 1992, hoping to create a theatre experience that was welcoming for families. For 30 years, she has continued to produce, direct, act, build sets, and serve on the board

as an unpaid volunteer. Dee was a crucial member of the fundraising and planning team that in 2017 secured a \$1.7 million, 14,625 sq. ft multi-use building, and worked tirelessly with the City of Verona to create an agreement to exchange land for housing the city dance program. Dee was integral in starting VACT's youth theatre program in 2003, in which over 30 different schools across nine communities are regularly represented. In 2004, she was elected to the Wisconsin Association of Community Theatre and has served as its Treasurer for 16 years. She continues to recruit volunteers to join in her original vision of "having fun" by doing theatre.





**Larry Bernard** (Columbia, Missouri) has been an active volunteer with Columbia Entertainment Company (CEC) theatre for 32 years. His journey began as a member of the ensemble in a production of *My Fair Lady*, and over the years has

included, as Larry says “every job in this theatre except to conduct and play in the orchestra.” For the past 15 years, Larry has staffed the box office, and for the last decade has functioned as the volunteer operations manager. As one community member stated, “Larry’s greatest strength is how genuinely engaged he is with others. He is generous with praise and goes out of his way to make everyone who steps foot in the theatre feel like they are welcome and a part of the family.” According to Executive Director Enola Riann White, “Larry is one of the best parts of this theatre—he is CEC.”



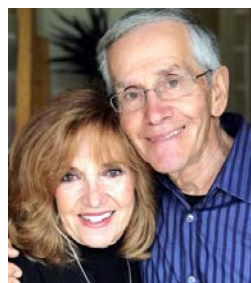
**Emmajean Evans** (Grosse Pointe, Michigan) has made an over 50-year commitment to Grosse Pointe Theatre, gracing and helping expand nearly every aspect of the organization. An award-winning actor, she has also worked offstage in numerous

capacities, including directing, producing, makeup, props, and costumes. She is a past board president, chair of social events, and has served on several committees, including leading the 50th anniversary celebration. Emmajean was awarded the coveted Worker of the Year two times, and has helped build the Youth On Stage program by teaching leadership and theatre skills. As a person of color, Emmajean has shared her wisdom and perspective regarding diversity and inclusion, engaging special needs children and encouraging people from various cultures to be part of the theatre family. As Emmajean puts it “I love encouraging people to be the best they can be, and, in turn, they bring out the best in me.”



**Alatheia Blischke** (Midland, Texas) and her husband Jim first began as members and, as owners of a local book store, financial supporters of Midland Community Theatre (MCT). Her theatrical involvement began in 1997 as a reader of new scripts,

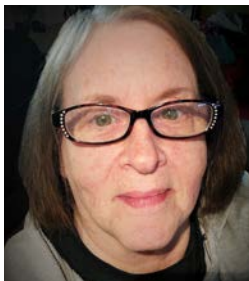
then as secretary/archivist, and finally as Chair of the MCT Board from 1999-2006. Alatheia put her passion for sewing to work in the costume and prop shops, working to create, catalog and organize, as well as assisting other local groups. She continues in the prop shop to this day, taking on all challenges: puppets, magical dragons, jellyfish, puppets and even chickens. Alatheia states “I am a proud techie! Each of the other six West Texas community theatres I’ve worked with have broadened my perspective on what a ‘community theatre’ is to itself and to its community.” In 2011, she began working in the theatre’s archives, conducting her most ambitious project to date—curating MCT’s 75-year history for the Midland County Historical Museum.



**Ron and Freida Houck** (Newport, Kentucky) have been with the Footlighters since the 1960s, and have been instrumental in the success, growth, vision, leadership, and heart of the theatre. They have served in about every role, including as board members and

donors, in set building, maintenance, membership, and fundraising. The Houcks, along with three others, made a dream a reality through their personal financial investment that allowed the Footlighters to purchase the Stained Glass Theatre in Newport. They championed the renovation of the historic landmark, and in 1991 led the effort to build a state-of-the-art 163-seat theatre in the building’s upper level. In 2007, Ron and Frieda were awarded the Art Rouse Award by the Association of Community Theatre of Greater Cincinnati for their outstanding commitment to local community theatre. As the Houck’s say - “We are thankful for every opportunity of volunteering to make community theatre a reality for others in the future.”

*continued on next page*



**Jean Hardie** (Spokane, Washington) began work in community theatre as a college student at the JayRob Comedy Playhouse in Sacramento, California, and then moved on to the Grand Street Theatre in Helena, Montana. For the past

over 40 years she has been with Spokane Civic Theatre, where she has directed, taught theatre classes, and is one of their most highly respected performers. Jean helped to create a traveling teen group called the Box 'N Hat Players, which entertained at churches, retirement homes, schools, and other venues throughout the Inland Empire. She helped develop these young artists and instilled in them a passion for theatre. When asked about her work, she expressed, "I am most proud of the work I did with young people, several of whom have gone on to have professional theatrical careers, become drama teachers, or who still, as adults, are part of the Civic Theatre family."



**Gayla Kirmer** (Spearville, Kansas) has been involved with The Depot Theater since its inception about 40 years ago, and is a current board member, serving in the role of Company Liaison. She has been a performer and director, and during the COVID-19 pandemic

worked long hours for months, organizing volunteers to purge, clean and organize costumes, props, lighting fixtures, storage spaces, set pieces, and rehearsal and laundry facilities. The offices were put in order, cleaned and painted for newly hired staff. Says Artistic Director Jon Montgomery, "Gayla has, mostly single-handedly, taken it upon herself to ensure the functional success of the Depot Theater, Inc. Her hard work and leadership have been an immeasurable benefit for us—and she has smiled through it all." Gayla herself feels that community theatre "is important to the education and development of our youth and to the entertainment and economic development of southwest Kansas."



**Michael Krickmire** (Fairport, New York) holds B.A., M.A. and M.F.A. degrees in Theatre Directing, and has faithfully served the Rochester and New York state theatre community for well over 25 years. He has directed for many theatres throughout the

state, and is currently serving his third term as President of the Theatre Association of New York State (TANYS). Over the years, Michael has worked to create a symbiotic relationship between TANYS and the New York State Theatre Educators Association (NYSTEA), whose membership is composed of K-12 educators. He currently serves on several boards, as well as the Education and "Stars of Tomorrow" steering committees of the Rochester Broadway Theatre League. Michael has received several awards for his work in theatre and strongly believes "that the power of community theatre deeply enriches the lives of those who volunteer onstage, backstage and in board positions, while bringing art to life for the audiences that support their efforts to do so."



**Lynn Nelson** (Tupelo, Mississippi) has been active in theatre since she played the part of the spoon in her third-grade play about manners. Her theatre career continued when she was cast in a role at Tupelo Community Theatre in 1984, where she has

been active ever since. She has served as a TCT board member since 1995, as well as on the board of the Southeastern Theatre Conference as VP of Divisions and as Community Theatre Division Chair. Lynn has directed shows at TCT, as well as in surrounding communities. She is active in state, regional and national theatre with the Mississippi Theatre Association and AACT, where she was recently inducted as an AACT Fellow. To quote TCT past president Tracie Conwill, "Lynn Nelson invited me to work backstage in 1996. I did and have not left the building since. I have so much respect for Lynn and her leadership in community theatre."

*continued on page 30*



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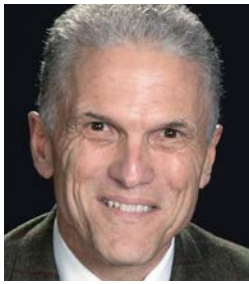
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**Rob Rice** (Tupelo, Mississippi) has been an active member of Tupelo Community Theatre since 1987. Over the last 35 years Rob has been in dozens of TCT shows, including *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, which was the theatre's first to win the Mississippi Theatre

Association festival and advance to the Southeastern Theatre Conference festival. Rob supports TCT financially as a patron, as well as through his business. He has served various board terms since 1997, including as president in 2002, when TCT employed its first executive director—a step which brought a new level of stability to the organization. His strong business sense has helped TCT stay viable and continue growing through its 51 years. In theatre, Rob says he has “found a family of wonderful and creative lifelong friends who not only love theatre but also love each other. And that is even better than a standing ovation.”

### Mort Clark International Achievement Award

*Recognizes individuals and organizations for significant achievement in the promotion of excellence in international community theatre. This award may be presented at an international event*



**Dr. Roger Ellis** (Grand Rapids, Michigan) earned a Master's degree in Drama and a Doctorate in Theatre from the University of California, Berkeley. He founded the Cultural Diversity Program in theatre at Michigan's Grand Valley State University in 1991, and led

students on four study-abroad experiences as director of the School of Communications' International Conference on theatre great Augusto Boal, presenting performance workshops in movement and acting in Germany, Greece, France, the Caribbean, Switzerland and Canada. He has served as State President of the Theatre Alliance of Michigan, and as Vice-President for World Theatre for the International Amateur Theatre Association (IATA). He has been the U.S. representative of amateur theatre at international conferences in seven countries and was Chair of IATA's Artistic Development Committee. A current member of AACT's International Committee, Roger says “I truly believe now that in our troubled world today, those of us in amateur theatre worldwide contribute mightily to the future of decent people and hopeful societies worldwide.”

### Special Recognition Award

*Presented to individuals and organizations whose contributions to community theatre are far reaching and of a special nature*



**Ann Davis** (York, Pennsylvania) is a founding member and longtime volunteer at Dreamwrights Center For Community Arts. In her role as Executive Director, guiding both volunteers and staff as they evolve and adapt to the needs of the York community, Ann identified


the need to engage with a more diverse group of residents through programming and community events. She believed the world of theatre has the power to benefit and unite the York community. With that in mind, in 2016, DreamWrights embarked on a \$2.5M capital campaign—helmed by Ann—which successfully secured commitments for \$1,909,635. DreamWrights successfully completed the construction of Phase I in 2017, and then completed the Phase 2 portion of fundraising—again, headed by Ann—and is currently in the construction phase. In addition to paperwork and grant applications, Ann is no stranger to rolling up her sleeves, as well as being a positive and grounding force for both staff and community.



**Mandi Theater** (Buffalo Grove, Illinois) was founded in 2015 and is dedicated to producing the classics of Indian as well as international literature, with the goal of using theatre to connect with people on various social issues. Part of its mission is to

educate, inform and entertain its community via material that focuses on social issues and values pertinent to the lives of young people. Another strong focus for Mandi has been the Hindi-speaking senior population, which is comprised largely of immigrants. As a response to the global pandemic, Mandi Theater was among the first to host a “Quarantine Theater Festival.” It invited over 18 different theatre groups to showcase their pre-recorded plays via Mandi Theater's live-streaming platform, engaging 30,000+ viewers around the globe. The company's work has received several honors, including the Illinois Theatre Association's Excellence for Community Theatre Award in 2020, and an Excellence in Performing Arts Award from the Artists Association of North America in 2019.





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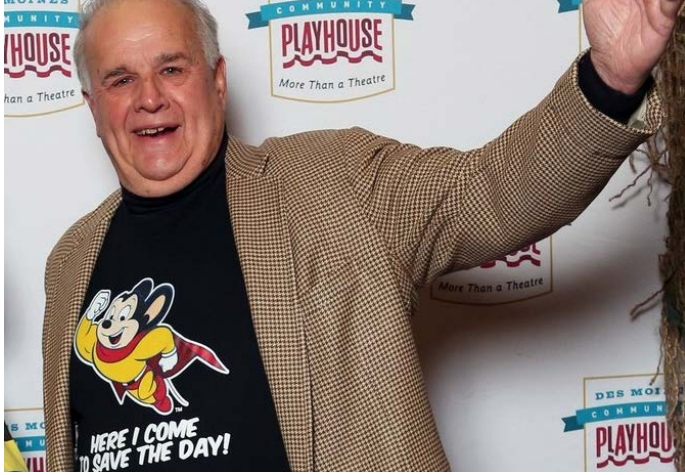


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*Rod welcomed everyone he met as a valued friend and indispensable colleague*

## Friends We'll Miss **Rod McCullough:** *A Quiet Giant of a Man*

### **John Viars**

*John Viars is the former, Executive Director for the Des Moines Community Playhouse in Des Moines, Iowa, and a Past President of AACT*

On March 9, 2022, long-time AACT member Rod McCullough, whose career consisted of supporting, elevating and, in some cases, rescuing community theatres, passed away, after a months-long illness.

As news spread of Rod's death, the outpouring of love and appreciation on social media from friends and colleagues across the country emphasized his insight, dedication, quiet wisdom, humor and love for community theatre during his long involvement with AACT, The Lincoln Community Playhouse and The Des Moines Community Playhouse.

AACT friends will remember Rod's leadership as president and on multiple committees and his relentless passing of the hat for endowment donations at events. They will also remember his kindness, support, and passion for theatre, gin, and Jaguars.

Rod's kindness and generosity manifested itself in many forms, often unexpected, as in 1997, when, at the end of a long day of adjudicating NACT, the Nebraska state theatre festival, Ron Ziegler and I were visited at our roadside motel by Rod, in his jaunty green Jaguar, from which, in a demonstration of Cornhusker hospitality, he delivered an ample supply of Red Stripe Jamaican beer as a nightcap, following up, several days later by sending a case of the same beer.

Rod loved Lincoln, Nebraska, and Lincoln loved him. He grew up there, performing onstage in 22 productions at the Lincoln Community Playhouse, before becoming its managing director, a position he held for 18 years.

Even after leaving his job in Lincoln, Rod remained deeply committed to the theatre's success. Morrie Enders, current executive director of the Lincoln Community Playhouse (a job for which Rod

recommended him), refers to Rod as a "quiet giant of a man—soft spoken, but the words he spoke were wise," adding "he's the reason I'm here."

Rod joined the Des Moines Community Playhouse as managing/development director in 2004. For the next 13 years, his management gradually transformed the operation of the Playhouse, refocusing efforts on programs that were core to its mission, and which resulted in greater artistic quality and efficiency.

Two years after his retirement in 2017, Rod wrote in an essay for the Playhouse's 100th anniversary book: "The major thrust of my theatrical career was in management, but, for me, the play's the thing. I remember sitting in the audience for 2016's *12 Angry Men*, thinking, 'It just doesn't get any better than this!' It does, of course, and will continue to do so, in large part because of the efforts over the last few years by dedicated, focused people who love the Playhouse and what it means to Des Moines."

Note that Rod acknowledges there has been a positive change but takes no credit for it.

After his retirement, he and his wife Julie moved to upstate New York to be close to their son, Dylan and his expanding family in Brooklyn.

We kept in touch, at lunches when I made it into New York, and by phone during his illness. Our last call was 10 days before his death. Like many others, I lost both a great friend and a colleague.

In Rod McCullough's 30-year career as a theatre professional, he had a tremendous positive impact on the growth, stability, and success of three different organizations, the people involved with them, and the communities they serve. We with AACT were fortunate to be among them.





*AACT Executive Director Julie Crawford presents Bill the 2012 AACT Art Cole Lifetime of Leadership Award at the 2012 AACT New York City Convention*

## Friends We'll Miss **Bill Muchow:** *A Man of Many Talents*

### Jon Skaalen

*Jon Skaalen is retired from Very Special Arts (VSA) Minnesota and the AACT Board of Directors. He is currently serving on the Minnesota Association of Community Theatres (MACT)*

Long-time community theatre leader and AACT legend Bill Muchow died March 27. Born December 19, 1945, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, his father and mother were both accountants, and Bill followed a similar path, enjoying a fulfilling work career, as well as volunteer roles with CPA societies and community theatre organizations.

After graduating from high school in 1963, he joined the Glenshaw Players stage crew and built sets for summer shows, sparking a life-long interest in technical theatre. He attended Westminster College in New Wilmington, Pennsylvania, graduating in 1967 with a major in accounting, economics and business administration, and a minor in history and political science. As a freshman he was recruited to work on the big spring show, the first of many theatre and music productions at Westminster for which he served as assistant technical director. After receiving his M.B.A. from Penn State, he became a Certified Public Accountant, working for several major firms, and serving on state CPA boards as treasurer, vice president and committee member. He retired in 2008.

Bill devoted much of his off-work energies to the world of community theatre at local, state, national, and international levels. His many contributions came on the production, technical, and administrative sides of close to 200 shows, mostly in Minnesota, where he had put down roots.

Bill was an active member of the Minnesota Association of Community Theatres (MACT). Elected to the MACT board in 1992, he later served as treasurer, and was president (1995-1999) when it celebrated its 25th anniversary. He helped produce and design a number of festival productions for the Dakota Fine Arts Consortium, including several that advanced to regional and national festivals. He co-chaired several regional theatre festivals, as well.

Bill served as AACT President from 2007-2009, Treasurer for six years, as well as Executive Vice President and

treasurer for the AACT Endowment. He also spent considerable time as a member of the Audit, Finance, Educational Development, Festival, International, and Endowment committees.

In 2005, Bill was named an AACT Fellow for "contributing significantly to the idea and ideal of community theatre and to AACT," and in 2012 received AACT's Art Cole Award, honoring a lifetime of leadership in community theatre at the local, regional, and national levels. Bill also received MACT's highest lifetime achievement award, the Fliehr Award (named after two AACT presidents, Kay and Richard Fliehr), recognizing distinguished service to Minnesota Theatre. Bill's role on the AACT International Committee led to him serving as a U.S. delegate at four World Congresses of the World International Amateur Theatre Association (IATA). He was vice president of the North American Regional Alliance and a board member of Theatre USA. He was an enthusiastic attendee of many international festivals, as well.

His recent health issues with diabetes, lung, and heart didn't keep him from attending virtual board meetings, but complications led to stays at Fairview Southdale Hospital and one final day of hospice. He died Sunday, March 27, of kidney and heart failure, with complications from COVID.

Bill is survived by many friends, including Donna Norberg, whose Palm Springs, CA, home provided welcome relief over a number of winters, as well as many theatre friends who respected Bill's abilities, kindness and generosity through the years.

A celebration of his life will be held June 25 at 11:00 at Gill Brothers Funeral Home, 9947 Lyndale Ave. S., Bloomington, Minnesota. For more details, go to **[gillbrothers.com](http://gillbrothers.com)**; **952-888-7771**, or **MACT.net**. As Bill has done countless times, his wishes are for you to consider both applauding and donating to your favorite theatre.



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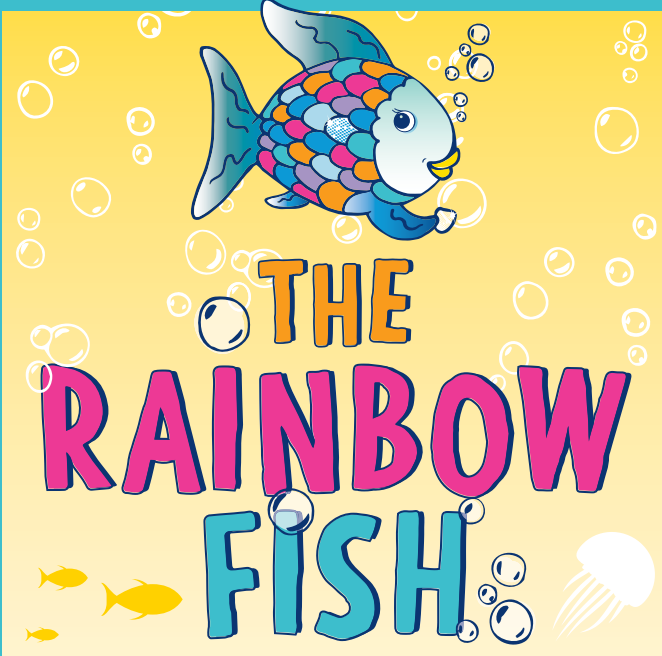
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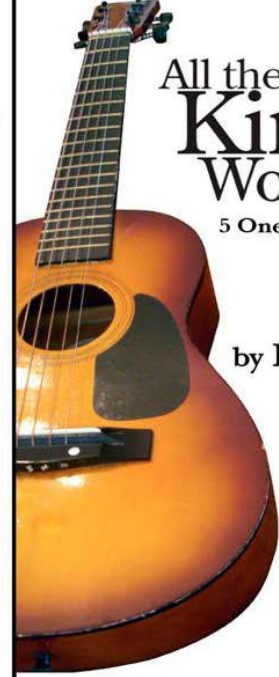


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## Tips on Recruiting and Engaging Technical Volunteers

# Creating a Community

John Andzulis

One of my favorite times of the day at Venice Theatre is 10:00 am. That's when our scene shop volunteers take their break from working on our next production. The coffee is always hot, free, and plentiful. Food on the green room table is considered communal, sometimes including donuts or croissants. And there's always lots to talk about.

That time together is key because our volunteer work force touches every aspect of our productions. We involve them in scenery construction, lighting/electrics and costumes. Our volunteer stage managers coordinate volunteer running crews, and our patrons are guided by front-of-house volunteers, as well. When a patron receives a letter or post card, they're reading a piece that's been addressed by one of our marketing and development volunteers. In fact, whenever someone sees a Venice Theatre production, they are seeing countless volunteer work hours.

It's safe to say that without our volunteer force (most of them retirees) we would be a much different organization. Staff would not be able to cope with our busy schedule without them. At the end of the day, we are a volunteer organization with a professional staff leading, guiding, and educating our volunteers.

But how do you get them into the room to begin with? How do you build and rebuild the volunteer ranks? How do you keep them engaged? After nearly 15 years as Technical Director and Production Manager, I can tell you there isn't a one-size-fits-all process. There are, however, some methods we've found that work better than others that I'd like to share.

## Building the Community

Theatres routinely use email, social networking, and even print news to reach people. One resource you might not be tapping into is your current volunteer force. Whether it's a live event or a Facebook post, your volunteers are your best method of getting the word out to the larger community of potential new volunteers. Encourage your volunteers to share your organization's social media posts.

Having volunteer advocates or ambassadors is another great way to recruit, while also making your current volunteers feel valued. Let them tell "their" story of your organization. If you pick the right ones, they will be the best recruitment tool you have. Print out a business card and encourage them to hand out the cards in their communities, at restaurants, in grocery stores, and churches. They are going to those places anyway, and they can and will help the cause.

All these methods work well and don't depend on heavy staff involvement. Couple your volunteer advocates with a structured recruitment event, and you will see a jump in new volunteers.

For example, pre-COVID, our production volunteer coordinator (also resident stage manager and head of props) Lisa Million scheduled our first Volunteer Fair. One Saturday morning, our production staff gathered in our mainstage theatre to meet with potential volunteers. Along with those ever-important coffee and donuts, we introduced ourselves, gave a tour of the production areas, and listened to what our volunteer advocates had to say. Our goal is to do this quarterly, but it really depends on our production schedule. (We even did one of these events via Zoom when we couldn't meet, due to COVID.)

Recruitment events have been successful for us, both in terms of strengthening our volunteer community and in adding potential donors. Using our volunteer advocates is very important; it shows how invested our current volunteers are to the potential ones.

*continued on next page*



Venice Theatre volunteer Lisa Hamilton shares her talents by painting the throne for *Beauty and the Beast*



*Venice Theatre volunteers enjoying the work day in the new Venice Theatre Tech Art Center*

*continued from page 37*

I'm not saying you need to have one of these events every Saturday. (In fact, for the sake of your staff, please don't.) But when you're creating your calendar, plan them in. It will make it easier for everyone concerned.

## Keeping the Community Engaged

Don't waste any time—get the volunteer paperwork filled out and start them as soon as possible. They've shown their interest. There is nothing more frustrating for a new volunteer than to have to wait. In some cases, of course, they will have to wait. But keeping them informed—and perhaps finding other jobs than their preferred ones—will help keep them engaged. That's key because engagement and retention go hand in hand.

People volunteer for many different reasons, whether it's for the love of the art or the need to find somewhere to belong. But some things are true for all: they love to be kept busy, they love to have fun, and they love to be a part of something they can share. Be ready for them. Always have a few projects in the back of your mind that volunteers can take on. They are there to work, and they can move mountains with your guidance.

At Venice Theatre, for example, we tend to schedule general benchmarks for our scene shop volunteers weeks before the build, and then schedule the specifics the day before. In the last few hours of a workday, Resident Scene Designer Tim Wisgerhof and I go over the next day's projects. We make sure we have all needed supplies and an idea of which volunteers are coming the next day. The more organized we are, the smoother the experience will be for our volunteers.

For the most part, we let our volunteers schedule which days they will come in, but I'm never shy about asking them to come in more often. Projects are assigned based on individual talents, and we tend to partner people whose talents will complement one another. This knowledge takes time and some trial and error to work out, but is extremely helpful when planning out a build.

One method we use for accessing skills is to pair a longtime volunteer with a new volunteer on their first day. This helps the newcomer get to know the other volunteers and how the shop works. This also shows the value and trust you have in that long-term volunteer, by making them part of the onboarding process.

Always remember that life happens. Even the best-made plans can change in an instant. Just go with the flow and be willing to shift priorities. This goes for having too few or too many volunteers. This is where those extra projects may come in handy. A little psychology also helps: No one wants to clean the shop or organize the electrics closet, but when you entrust them with the responsibility, they will leap at a chance to make it their own.

Your appreciation doesn't always have to cost much, if anything. Let your volunteers pick the music in the shop, or organize potluck lunches, and spend some time celebrating your organization's successes. Take and post pictures of volunteers at work on social media, and use them on your website or around the green room—or in your lobby.

## Final Thoughts

While it's true that there is no single formula for recruiting and retaining volunteers, there's no doubt that the more you can do to show your organization's investment in them, the more they will return that investment both in time and money. And, just as important, they will also encourage new volunteers to join your organization.

These strategies may add a little more work to your already hectic schedule, but they will pay off. And remember to have a little fun, for you as well as your volunteers. It can't all be work!

***John Andzulis has been the Venice Theatre's Production Manager and Technical Director for nearly 15 years. He works closely with volunteers in all aspects of production, and serves as resident lighting designer for theatre's 17-production season.***





*Presenting the honor to Quiana Clark-Roland is Tom Booth, Executive Director of Tupelo Community Theatre*

## Honored by SETC

### Quiana Clark-Roland

AACT Executive Director Quiana Clark-Roland was honored as a member of the SETC Hall of Fame at the 2022 SETC Convention, March 12, in Memphis, Tennessee.

Established by SETC in 2015, the Hall of Fame recognizes persons, living or deceased, who have made major contributions to the organization. These may be administrative, artistic and/or financial contributions that have had a significant impact on SETC's success over a sustained period.

Quiana Clark-Roland is the Executive Director of the American Association of Community Theatre. She has been successfully leading the national association since she joined AACT in 2017. Prior to joining AACT, Clark-Roland served as the executive assistant and program manager for the Southeastern Theatre Conference (SETC) from 2009 to 2017. Prior to COVID, SETC's annual convention would attract over 5,000 theatre practitioners, artists, students, and educators.

During her time with SETC, Quiana was responsible for overseeing the coordination of convention logistics, events, operation teams, and programming. "I was so honored to receive this award. Much of what I've learned came from my time working and building relationships at SETC."

Prior to SETC, she began her career as the Administrative Assistant for the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance, a membership and service organization based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, while attending graduate school at Drexel University. Quiana has an M.S. in Arts Administration from Drexel University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and a B.A. in Arts Administration with a minor in Theatre from the University of Kentucky, in Lexington, Kentucky.

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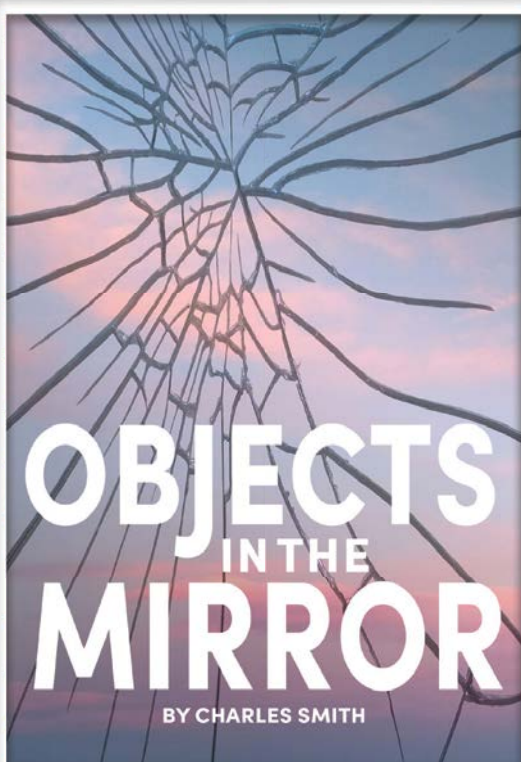
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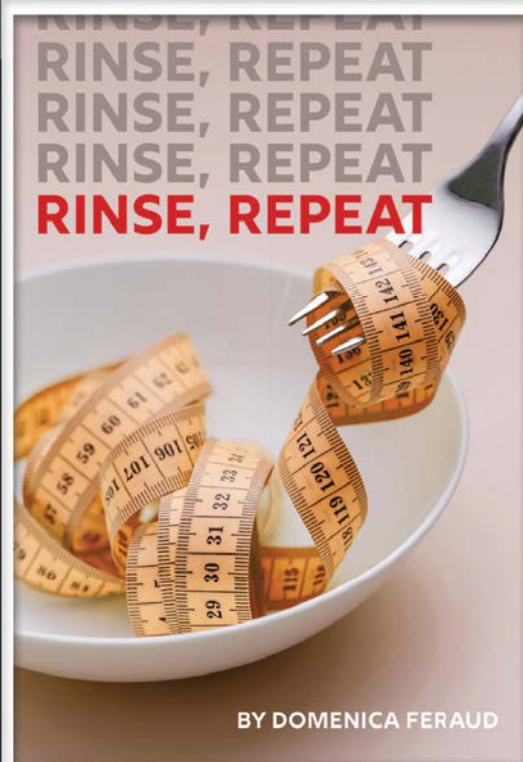
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After fighting for her life for four months, Rachel finally goes home for a trial weekend. But what happens when the people you love most, the ones you believe want the best for you, are the ones causing the most damage without even knowing it? Where do you go when the place you feel you most belong might be the place that almost killed you in the first place? *Rinse, Repeat* sharply conveys the painful truth about a woman's fight for her life in the face of an eating disorder.

*Cast size: 2m., 3w.*

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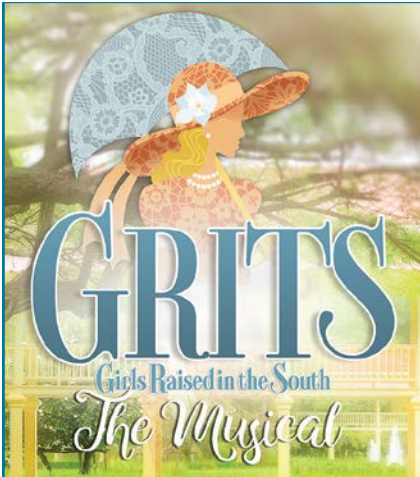
**Jack K. Ayre and Frank Ayre**  
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# Calendar of Events - 2022

Dates	Event	State	City	Contact phone	Contact email	Web Site
May 17	AACT Roundtable: You and Youth	Virtual	Virtual	817-732-3177	winston@aact.org	aact.org/roundtables
June 20-26	aactWORLDVEST 2022	FL	Venice	941-488-1115 x271	lorichase@venicetheatre.net	venicetheatre.org/international
June 14	AACT Roundtable: Understudies & Swings	Virtual	Virtual	817-732-3177	winston@aact.org	aact.org/roundtables
June 25	AACT Annual Membership Meeting	FL	Venice	817-732-3177 x2	karen@aact.org	aact.org/calendar
June 25	AACT Summer Board Meeting	FL	Venice	817-732-3177 x2	karen@aact.org	aact.org/calendar




**A hilarious musical snapshot of the south by Erica Allen McGee!**

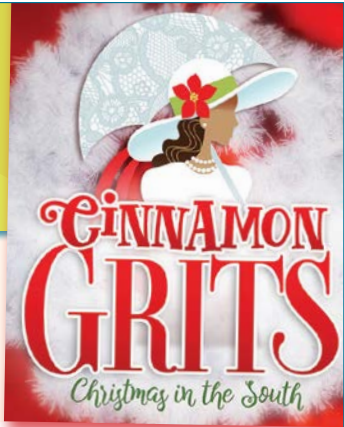
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# New Roles

## Lee Gundersheimer



**The Players Centre for Performing Arts** in Sarasota, Florida announces the hiring of their new artistic director, **Lee Gundersheimer**.

The 92-year-old organization looks forward to growing through

Gundersheimer's strong skill set, cultivated over many years and in various areas of theatre. "After an extensive nationwide search, The Players Centre search committee and Board of Trustees feel confident in the abilities and many talents Lee brings to the table," says CEO William Skaggs. Gundersheimer is returning to Florida, where he began his theatre career over 40 years ago.

Raised in Miami, he is a graduate of the B.F.A. program in Theatre at Florida State University, and received his Actor's Equity Card before graduating from college as one of the original apprentices at the Burt Reynolds Dinner Theatre in Jupiter, Florida. In addition, Gundersheimer holds an M.F.A. in directing from Brooklyn College. He was based in New York City for many years, where he built a theatre, Avalon Rep, and helped plan, build, and serve as producing Director of the Century Center for the Performing Arts in Union Square.

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# Opportunities & Resources

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The 2022 Americans for the Arts Annual Convention will be held May 18-20 at the Omni Shoreham Hotel in Washington, D.C. The event includes special opportunities to engage in Americans for the Arts' Strategic Realignment Process. Due to safety concerns, a firm registration deadline ahead of the in-person event has been instituted. No registrations will be processed on-site.

**Americans for the Arts**  
[convention.artsusa.org/](http://convention.artsusa.org/)



The 32nd annual Theatre Communication Group (TCG) National Conference will take place in Pittsburgh from June 16 to 18, 2022, and will include robust online access to programming.

**Theatre Communications Group**  
[circle.tcg.org/home?ssopc=1](http://circle.tcg.org/home?ssopc=1)

## EarlLewinPlaywright.com

### PREVIEW

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Black Theatre Network's (BTN) 36th Annual Conference will take place in Detroit from July 24 to 27, 2022.

BTN Conferences serve as a national forum for the exchange of ideas between professionals, educators, and students of Black Theatre.

**Black Theatre Network**  
[blacktheatrenetwork.org/index.php](http://blacktheatrenetwork.org/index.php)

## New Play Contests

**Veterans Repertory Theatre** seeks full-length plays from veteran playwrights who meet *one* of the following criteria: A current or former US military, law enforcement, fire, EMS, foreign service, or intelligence service veteran, or an immediate family member (parents, siblings, children, and spouse).

**Deadline: July 3, 2022**

There is no participation or submission fee. Winners receive grants ranging from \$10,000 for the full-length winner to \$1,000 for the 10-minute play winner.

Visit <https://vetrep.org/> for listing of all awards and submission details.

For more play contests, visit the AACT website at [aact.org/contests](http://aact.org/contests).

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