

2017 Community Arts Award Recipients

Community Medal of Arts

Elizabeth Kerlikowske

Elizabeth's life as an artist and her commitment to the community are inseparable. She's the author of three full-length books and five chapbooks of poetry, the latest a collaboration with visual artist Mary Hatch. She has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize five times. She has enjoyed two residencies each at Ragdale and the Atlantic Center for the Arts. She stretches herself in every way possible, now also a visual artist, having exhibited in juried shows at the Carnegie Center for the Arts and at the Richmond Center for the Visual Arts

Elizabeth is widely known for her work with Friends of Poetry. Through her work, she initiated the Mural Project, worked with Kalamazoo Public Library on a reading series, She teamed up with Terry Lason at KPL to have a reading series that lasted for years. They brought in well-known writers but primarily were interested in giving local writers a voice and in collaboration with local artist Tom Dietz created "Artifactory", a program that ran 11 years at the Kalamazoo Valley Museum.

Elizabeth worked as a poet in the schools prior to landing a full-time job at Kellogg Community College. She still visits classrooms and gives workshops to teachers on how to teach poetry in the classroom. Most recently, she was the co-director (with Sydnee Peters) of the Alchemy Project. Fifty artists and writers read articles about Alchemy, attended the workshop put on by other members of the group. Writers drew, artists wrote. There were four readings and two visual arts shows.

Nina Nelson

Nina Nelson joined the WMU dance faculty in 1982 and serving as chair of the Department of Dance several times during her tenure. During her time at WMU, she created the Great Works Dance Project which has brought the work of internationally acclaimed dance artists to local stages for more than 20 years and created the popular, innovative and informational benefit event, Dancing with the WMU/Kazoo Stars.

Nina has educated more than 1,000 dancers in modern dance, choreography, movement analysis and dance theory. Most recently, she trained to use dance to work with Parkinson's patients using a method developed by members of the Mark Morris Dance Center that has been proven to improve the quality of life for sufferers.

Nina has choreographed more than 30 substantial dances and productions that have been seen in Kalamazoo, major cities throughout the U.S., and have been singled out twice by the American College Dance Festival Association for artistic excellence. Earlier in her career, she performed extensively both locally and nationally. She is in high demand nationally as an accreditation visitor for the National

Association of Schools of Dance and has been the chair or team member for more than 10 different site visits at institutions across the country.

Business Arts Award

Encore Magazine

For over 45 years Encore Magazine has been a champion of the arts in Kalamazoo. One of the publication's main missions is to promote and highlight the arts in our community - from fine arts to performing arts - no matter how big or small the organization is.

The editorial staff of this monthly publication prides itself on finding and sharing new and unique artistic talent in our area, often introducing the community to artists they may not have been exposed to otherwise. To that end, Encore has also begun showcasing local artists through Art Hop events on the Kalamazoo Mall. The events showcase "Encore's Featured Artist" through a story in that month's issue and an Art Hop exhibit. The events also feature live music by a local musician.

Encore has historically and continues to highlight the leadership and personalities of the area's arts organizations, seeking to connect readers with the individuals that are making Kalamazoo's art community so vibrant.

The magazine has always featured a monthly calendar of events that has focused strongly on arts events, including those events that happen at institutions of higher education. Many of the magazine's readers identify it as the area's "arts magazine. The magazine is cultivating new and younger readers as well, with an average of 4,000 visits to its website and digital edition each month.

Adam F. Carter Young Artist Award

Egypt Trinity Wilder

Egypt Trinity Wilder is a Loy-Norrix High School Student from South Haven, Michigan. She's been a leader in creative writing classes, and for the last year and a half, a leader at Fire Historical & Cultural Arts Collaborative through the Teen Advisory Council and a facilitator for Creative Writing workshops in other settings such as Parchment Library and the Youth Summit on Racism. She has filled three journals of poems on every page, cyphered for 20 minutes straight some days, and performs with incredible liveliness. In 2017, she was the Kalamazoo Youth Poetry Slam champion in a two-round competition with 35 other youth poets from across Kalamazoo county. She went on to be one of the highest scoring poets at Michigan Louder than a Bomb in Detroit against 17 other schools. She's performed at over 10 Open Mics and slams, participated in over 50 workshops, and facilitated 5 workshops in the community. She's a powerhouse of rhyme, smile, specific details and rawness.

Epic Award

K'zoo Folklife Organization

Recognizing that traditional, American folk music forms are primarily and oral, audio traditions, the K'zoo Folklife Organization has taken the position that this music must be performed and promoted to survive. Since 1985, the K'zoo Folklife Organization (KFO) has stayed true to its mission of "promoting the presentation and preservation of multicultural, traditional and contemporary folk music, dance and arts for the education and enrichment of our community".

Partnering with other organizations and municipalities, the KFO has initiated and produced countless benefit concerts and programs to assist the community; such as their 18-year commitment to the "Loaves and Fishes Benefit Concert". They have also raised substantial funds for veteran organizations. Musicians volunteer their time and talent.

As part of their mission, the KFO coordinates venues for acoustic musicians, such as our "Music at the Markets" program, in which we book entertainment at the local Farmers Markets. For over 30 years KFO has continuously run jam sessions for acoustic musicians, featuring folk, bluegrass and country music opportunities.

Gayle Hoogstraten Award for Arts Leadership

Arts Educator

Jeff Mitchell

Jeff Mitchell has been a music educator in the state of Michigan since 1975, serving as a high school band director, private piano instructor, and since 2009, the founder and director of the Kalamazoo Academy of Rock, a program for young musicians ages 8-18. Jeff's contributions to music education have touched hundreds of youth across the state.

Jeff's impact as a music educator and program leader here in Kalamazoo has been profound. His piano instruction offers youth solid foundational skills and the opportunity and instructional support to explore music genres that spark their interest, whether classical, blues, jazz, rock or any combination thereof. Jeff's connection to his students is genuine, and the relationship he develops with each student sustains and fuels their musical growth.

Jeff's flagship program, the Kalamazoo Academy of Rock (KAR), provides a unique opportunity for Kalamazoo youth ages 8-18 to rehearse and perform as part of a rock band. KAR students participate in three sessions per year, with each 10-16-week session culminating in a live public performance at a local performance space. Jeff's vision and consistent leadership brought this program to Kalamazoo, and young musicians have grown exponentially as a result.

Arts Administrator

Joan Herrington

Joan Herrington is the Chair of the WMU Department of Theatre at Western Michigan University, and this makes her both an arts educator and an arts administrator. She has a full season of shows to produce and a full academic unit to operate with students studying in five areas of theatre. She has been at WMU for 21 years, first as a professor before

becoming Chair. In addition to her administrative responsibilities, Joan continues to teach and direct shows, challenging her actors and designers in unique ways with complex material. Her process as a director is an incredibly rewarding one for all involved. She also works professionally as a director and dramaturg.

Joan is the glue that holds faculty, staff, and students together. Her care for students and alumni as artists and people is unmatched. The "people" part is big for Joan. She believes firmly that if we can't help to shape good people as well as good artists while they are here, we are not doing our jobs as educators. She leads by example. For the faculty and staff, her nurturing, transparent, and fearless work and leadership style keep us strong as collaborators and colleagues.