

A can't-miss virtual affair: Bonfils-Stanton Foundation honors 5 Coloradans at 35th Annual Awards Celebration

DENVER, CO (November 10, 2020) – Denver's arts scene deserves to be celebrated for bringing vibrancy and enhancing the quality of our lives - especially in the whirlwind year that is 2020. Bonfils-Stanton Foundation is honoring **Ed Dwight, Marcela de la Mar, Susan and Jeremy Shamos, and Catherine O'Neill Thorn** for making significant and unique contributions to Denver's arts and culture scene at its [35th Annual Awards Celebration](#) on November 20.

The [Annual Awards Program](#) acknowledges and celebrates leaders in our community who make a meaningful impact on Denver's arts and culture landscape by naming an 'Artist' honoree, 'Community Service in the Arts' honoree, and 'Arts and Society' honoree.

In response to these times, for the first time, the entire event is virtual and available for free to the public – a great way to escape this year's stress and enjoy performances and programming with some of the best Denver artists, performers and contributors. The lineup for the event includes dance performances by Colorado Ballet, Wonderbound and Cleo Parker Robinson Dance along with spoken word pieces by local youth poets who participate in Art from Ashes programming.

Bonfils-Stanton Foundation has commissioned artist Gregg Deal to provide an artistic land acknowledgement and Sam Pike Films to create mini documentary-type films on each honoree that will inspire all attendees.

"The Annual Awards Celebration is one of the Foundation's most cherished traditions and programs that has evolved and changed over the years along with the Foundation and the community. Being virtual means we'll miss seeing our friends and community at an in-person event, but the virtual programming will properly honor these five fantastic individuals for making such an incredible impact on the community through their work, volunteerism and efforts," says Gary Steuer, Bonfils-Stanton Foundation's President & CEO.

This year's event will take place on **November 20 from Noon – 1:30 p.m.** and will stream on Bonfils-Stanton Foundation's website here: bonfils-stantonfoundation.org/events/

How to Attend: This year's 35th Annual Awards Celebration is open to the public and free to attend. Register for the event: tinyurl.com/BSF2020Awards

For the Media: Your readers and viewers will love hearing inspiring stories from the 35th Annual Awards Honorees. Let's get a story on the books. E-mail **Erica Boniface** at Erica@ColoradoMediaNetwork.com or call **303-717-8246**.

Some interesting angles to pursue:

- Interviewing **Ed Dwight**, who is **one of the most influential and prolific sculptors of modern American art, particularly public art, and the first Black astronaut**. Over the course of his 40-year career, Ed has created over 128 large scale memorial installations throughout the country;

some of which are on display at the Smithsonian Institute. He has also created 18,000 smaller gallery sculptures which are eagerly collected by galleries and art lovers throughout the world.

- Interviewing one of Denver's "Top 25 Most Powerful Women," **Marcela de la Mar** – she'll detail her 23-year career as Executive Director of the Mexican Cultural Center (MCC). Through Marcela's tireless work, **she's brought the beauty and magic of the Mexican culture to Coloradans** for over two decades.
- Interviewing **dedicated and visionary philanthropists, Susan and Jeremy Shamos**, who have been supporting Denver's arts and cultural landscape for over 30 years. Their accolades and work deserve to be celebrated – and their stories will help spread kindness and happiness to your readers and viewers.
- Interviewing published poet, writer and journalist **Catherine O'Neill Thorn** about using her work through Art from Ashes to transform and touch many lives. In a society that often negatively stigmatizes mental health, Catherine has **created an outlet and hope for some of Denver's most disadvantaged youth**.
- Interviewing Bonfils-Stanton Foundation's President & CEO **Gary Steuer** about the Annual Awards Program's positive impact it has on Colorado communities. Gary will **educate viewers on the Foundation's work – and why arts and culture is so important for the betterment of Coloradans' lives**.

Honoree bios and headshots are pasted below. Please reach out for any additional resources including photos and b-roll for you to use. We'll make the story as turnkey as possible.

About Bonfils-Stanton Foundation's Annual Awards Program:

In 1984, Bonfils-Stanton Foundation's benefactor, Charles Edwin Stanton, established the Annual Awards Program. For over three decades, the honor of distinguished recipients has grown to more than 100 Colorado individuals and organizations. The recognition includes a cash reward of \$35,000 and an opportunity to inspire others to imagine, create, and engage in making our community a more vibrant place for all.

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Meet Bonfils-Stanton Foundation's 2020 Annual Awards Honorees:



ED DWIGHT:
"Artist Award" Honoree

From a young age, [Ed Dwight](#) had a love of and passion for art. However, like most, he was unable to pursue his passion until later in life. Born in Kansas City, Kansas to a father that wanted him to pursue engineering, art took a back seat in Ed's life. He joined the United States Air Force in 1953 in pursuit of another dream to fly jet airplanes, and soon became a test pilot. In 1961 he received a degree in Aeronautical Engineering from Arizona State University before being chosen to become the first African American candidate for astronaut trainee in 1962. Ed trained for almost 4 years, before leaving the Air Force in 1966; regrettably never making it to space. Over the next decade, Ed showed his myriad of talents by working as an engineer for IBM, being a restaurateur in Denver, and starting a real estate business before being able to tap into his true gift - life as an artist.

It was finally in 1974 that Ed went back to school to pursue this lifelong passion of being an artist. He attended The University of Denver, from which he graduated in 1977 with a Master of Fine Arts, and gained a reputation as a sculptor, and created his own bronze foundry and gallery in Denver. Ed is recognized as the innovator of the negative space technique which is used in many of his pieces. Through his combined use of technical engineering acumen, and his vast knowledge of African American culture and history, Ed has become one of the most influential and prolific sculptors of modern American art.

Ed's first major commission was to sculpt Colorado's first African American Lt. Governor, George Brown in 1974 while he was still attending school. This was truly his breakthrough as Brown encouraged Dwight to focus on using his art to elevate awareness of great historical African American accomplishment which at that time was rarely recognized in public art. Soon he was commissioned by the Colorado Centennial Commission to create a series of bronzes entitled "Black Frontier in the American West," which depicted scenes of the contributions African Americans had on the development of the American West. Some of his most notable works include the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. memorial in Denver's City Park; monuments to the Underground Railroad in both Detroit, Michigan and Windsor, Ontario; the Black Patriots memorial on the National Mall in Washington D.C.; and the South Carolina Black History Memorial in Columbia, SC. There are also a number local pieces making an impact in our community: sculpture of ex Bronco's player Darrent Williams on display at the Boys and Girls Club of Denver, the Buffalo Soldier in front of the federal courthouse in downtown Denver, and a depiction of former City of Denver Aviation Director William Smith, which is housed at Denver International Airport.

Over his 40-year career, Ed Dwight has created over 128 large scale memorial installations throughout the country; some of which are on display at the Smithsonian Institute. He has also created 18,000 smaller gallery sculptures which are eagerly collected by galleries and art lovers throughout the world.

Ed Dwight has been awarded an honorary doctorate from his alma mater, Arizona State University; as well as hundreds of Living Legends awards for his achievements and contributions bringing racial progress to light through his incredible works.



MARCELA DE LA MAR:

"Community Service in the Arts" Honoree

Collaborator, connector, and community leader are just a few adjectives that describe how [Marcela de la Mar](#) has made her mark on Denver's arts and cultural landscape. Born in Guadalajara, Mexico, Marcela seeded new roots in the United States at the age of 14 and has called Denver home since 1993. Over her impressive 23-year career as Executive Director of the Mexican Cultural Center (MCC), Marcela dedicated herself to the advancement of Mexican art and culture in Colorado; embodying MCC's mission which "works in partnership with cultural, educational and other institutions to promote and maintain the richness of Mexican culture." Officially retired, her connection with MCC continues as she currently serves as President of the Board. Prior to her work with the Mexican Cultural Center, Marcela worked for 23 years in the Consulate General of Mexico's office as a cultural, political, education and community liaison.

Under Marcela's leadership, the Mexican Cultural Center was able to build sustaining partnerships with some of Denver's well-known, larger cultural organizations to pursue common goals that benefit a broad and more inclusive community. These collaborations have increased the awareness, appreciation and importance of indigenous Mexican arts, artists, customs and traditions while also building a bridge between the Latino community and "mainstream" arts organizations.

In 2001, Marcela and the MCC worked with the Denver Art Museum to develop the first large scale Dia del Niño (Children's) celebration, which has grown to record attendance of over 20,000 attendees. This celebration now embraces collaborations with the Denver Museum of Nature and Science, Denver and Aurora Public Schools, Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver Public Library, History Colorado, Clyfford Still Museum and Byers-Evans House Museum to enhance the richness and beauty of the celebration. Their Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) festival is a month-long collaboration with Denver Botanic Gardens and Longmont Museum— it honors the passing of loved ones with food and elaborate altar decoration and in 2019 over 41,000 attended this community celebration. In 2001 she began laying the groundwork with the Colorado Symphony Orchestra collaborating on several concerts and in 2015 introduced the *Latin Beats: Sonidos de las Americas* concert. This musical celebration includes performances by famed Mexican performers who are accompanied by the Symphony. Each year this free concert fills the seats of Boettcher Concert Hall and serves to unite and educate a diverse audience, and in recent years has broadened its musical focus to include other Latin musical sources from such countries as Venezuela, Argentina and Brazil.

Marcela's leadership has not gone unnoticed, in 2018 she was honored as an *Unsung Heroine* by Latinas First Foundation and was recognized as one of Colorado Women's Chamber of Commerce's Top 25 Most Powerful Women. Because of her work, the MCC received the Mayor's Award for Cultural Impact in 2017. In May 2018, Marcela was appointed by the Governor to the board of the Scientific and Cultural

Facilities District (SCFD) and she is a Mayoral appointee to the Denver Zoo Board of Governors. She is also an active board member for Colorado Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, World Trade Center Denver and Children's Diabetes Foundation. Through Marcela's incredible ability to bring people and ideas together, our community has been able to access and experience the beauty and magic of the Mexican culture.



SUSAN AND JEREMY SHAMOS:

"Community Service in the Arts" Honoree

Dedicated and visionary philanthropists, [Susan and Jeremy Shamos](#), have been leaders in supporting Denver's arts and cultural landscape for over 30 years. Always stepping forward and encouraging others along the way, the Shamos' have whole-heartedly devoted their time, energy and talents to various organizations and projects across Denver.

Jeremy and Susan Shamos have provided support for multiple arts organizations throughout Denver including the Colorado Children's Chorale, The Denver Art Museum, the Denver Museum of Nature and Science, the Museum of Contemporary Art, RedLine Contemporary Art Gallery, Denver Center for the Performing Arts, and DU's Lamont School and Vicki Myhryn Gallery. However, their most notable contributions are to Opera Colorado and Curious Theater Company. Their deep-rooted patronage for these institutions, and their dedicated volunteer leadership at the Board level, has been the spark of innovation needed to ensure the continued success and sustainability for these two cultural landmarks.

The couple has been instrumental in the growth of Opera Colorado for nearly three decades. Initially as season ticket holders and contributors to long-term ardent board members. Serving as co-chairs between 2004 and 2007, Jeremy insists that Susan took the lead during that time to ensure the Opera and the citizens of Denver would have world-class opera for generations to come. Even after stepping down as board members, the duo has continued to serve the organization through commissioned pieces and participation on the Artistic Visioning Committee as part of an extensive strategic planning process. Wanting to recognize their numerous and significant contributions, Opera Colorado has named both Susan and Jeremy as Honorary Directors.

At the loving urging of Susan, Jeremy served as Chair of the Friends of Denver's Historic Auditorium Theater in 2002. It was here that the pair was instrumental in providing leadership and financial support for passing the bond issue to renovate the Auditorium that became the Ellie Caulkins Opera House. With his ability to spearhead community fundraising, Jeremy helped raise the additional \$17 million required to finish the project. He and Susan, along with friends Debbie and Jerry Tepper, also donated the magnificent Chihuly chandelier that graces the lobby of the opera house.

Always working as a team, Jeremy and Susan led Denver's efforts to host the 2008 National Performing Arts Convention (a convening of 30 national associations for theatre, orchestras, opera, chamber music, choral music, and dance). This convention would be the catalyst needed to bring Denver's performing arts scene to national and international recognition. The Shamos' devoted countless hours sharing their

passion for Colorado's art culture, encouraging others to join in to raise the needed funds. Denver proudly hosted the convention, which brought 5,000 artists and arts professionals from around the country and the world.

Jeremy has also been an integral part of Curious Theater Company, where he led the campaign to buy the company's building in the Golden Triangle. Having served on its board for over ten years and as Chair from 2010-2015, his impact reached beyond financial support and routine volunteer hours. He stretched the Company to think out of the box and prioritized developing its long-term sustainability while helping build artistic greatness. He has now rejoined the Board and is serving as Vice President of the Board and Honorary Lifetime President.

On other fronts, Jeremy also serves as a trustee on the Theater Communications Group's "National Council for American Theater" and the Colorado New Play Festival. He served on the boards of New York based Acting Company and St. John's College in Santa Fe, NM and Annapolis, MD. Susan is an advocate for school-based counseling and currently serves as Director of Centus School Counseling. She also serves on the Board for St. John's College and is a former trustee at Denver's St. Elizabeth's School, an independent school devoted to serving an economically and racially diverse family community.

The Shamoses have provided vision and ambition to nonprofit leaders to achieve bigger and greater accomplishments than could ever be imagined. They are daring and energized, which inspires those around them, and they are able to find the magic and beauty in every project they are a part of. It is through this unique and incredible combination of gifts and talents that Jeremy and Susan Shamos have changed the backdrop and future success of Colorado's most important arts and culture institutions. They are also, it should not go without saying, extraordinary human beings whose sense of humor, ebullience and commitment to their community and their family, even exceeds their financial generosity.



CATHERINE O'NEILL THORN:
"Arts and Society" Honoree

In a society that negatively stigmatizes mental health, [Catherine O'Neill Thorn](#) has created an outlet for some of Denver's most disadvantaged youth through Art from Ashes. Using a nationally recognized and award-winning curriculum, Art from Ashes (AfA) starts with pen, paper and poetry for creative transformation through artistic expression. Founded in 2003, AfA is the first youth arts agency in Colorado to use this approach, focusing on youth ages 9-24 years old.

Catherine, a published poet, writer, and journalist, is no stranger to using poetry and literature to transform lives. In 1992 she developed the Phoenix Rising transformational writing process, and used it in treatment centers, probation departments, and held weekly poetry sessions for three years for Columbine students after the shooting tragedy in 1999. Within this program, students gave a public reading attended by international media, and in 2000, O'Neill Thorn published *Screams Aren't Enough*, a compilation of poetry written by the Columbine students, which won the Colorado Book Award. After

major funding cuts to youth organizations and art programs in the state, Catherine began Art from Ashes to continue serving Colorado's struggling young people.

Art from Ashes, which has served more than 14,000 youth, uses creative workshops focused on poetry (Phoenix Rising) and visual art activities (Drawing on Air) to encourage self-expression. These workshops offer youth the ability to connect with facilitators, artists, and the community. AfA has partnered with 180 youth-serving agencies, including schools, to offer programs that give an alternative to the often destructive and unhealthy behaviors associated with violence, poverty, racism, and depression that impacts today's youth.

For her work with Art from Ashes, Catherine O'Neill Thorn has received many awards. Some of the most notable include the Community "Artist" Award by the Pan African Arts society in 2006, *Westword's* Mastermind Award for Literary Arts in 2008, the 2011 Women's Information Network Outstanding Service Award, "Community Leader" honor from Beanstalk Foundation, and recognized as a Colorado Creative in 2018. Further, under the leadership of O'Neill Thorn, Art from Ashes was awarded the Cherry Creek Diversity Conference Human Rights Award, the American Association of Law Libraries Black Caucus Award, the National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Certificate of Excellence, SAMHSA's Service to Science Award, The Denver Mayor's Award for Excellence in the Arts, including the 2018 award for Arts & Culture Youth Award, and has been honored by The President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities as one of the top 50 youth arts organizations in the country an impressive five times.

Catherine's work and impact exemplifies the intention of this award – improving the lives of young people through the power of art and creative expression.

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