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**TO:** ARTS COMMISSION

**FROM:** Kerry Adams Hapner

**SUBJECT: 2022 CORNERSTONE OF THE  
ARTS AWARDS**

**DATE:** June 14, 2022

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Approved /s/ Nanci Klein

Date June 15, 2022

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## **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the Arts Commission approve the selections for the 2022 Cornerstone of the Arts Award, Creative Impact Award, and Community-Based/Business Support for the Arts Award.

## **BACKGROUND**

Inaugurated in September 2013, through a partnership between the City of San José Office of Cultural Affairs and the Arts Commission, the Cornerstone of the Arts awards and event program was established.

The awards are bestowed annually at the Cornerstone of the Arts Event, during which Cultural Affairs grantees are also honored for their collective contributions. The event is held in October and the program includes the following categories:

- **Cornerstone of the Arts Award;**
- **Creative Impact Award; and**
- **Community-Based/Business Support for the Arts Award.**

Nominated by community members and Arts Commissioners, honorees are selected according to the following eligibility and criteria for each award category:

- **Cornerstone of the Arts Award** - An individual(s) or creative entrepreneur who has provided effective leadership and/or support over time, leading to the betterment of San Jose's arts community and the quality of life for our citizens.
  - a. Eligibility
    1. An individual or individuals (not an organization)
    2. Working in any sector (nonprofit, public, or private)
    3. Past honorees are ineligible
  - b. Criteria
    1. Significance
    2. Innovation
    3. Inclusiveness
    4. Timing of Recognition
  
- **Creative Impact Award** - A cultural or artistic project or program that has made a significant impact on the community.
  - a. Eligibility
    1. An individual or partnership of individuals (nonprofit or business sector)
    2. Must have produced a special cultural or artistic project or event that has significantly impacted the San José community
    3. Special cultural or artistic project or event does not have to be reoccurring
    4. Past honorees are ineligible
  - b. Criteria
    1. Significance of Project
    2. Community Impact
    3. Innovation
  
- **Community-Based/Business Support for the Arts Award** – Community-Based/Businesses that have made a significant impact in strengthening the vibrancy of San José through their leadership and support for the arts. It is envisioned that the selected honoree is a business that supports the arts philanthropically, through sponsorship, or programming and that it supports the arts outside of its core business.
  - a. Eligibility:
    1. Community-Based/Businesses that have established strong partnerships with the arts community in San Jose

2. Demonstrated support of the arts in the form of financial, in-kind, promotional, or other types of support
  3. Nonprofit organizations are ineligible to be nominated
  4. Past honorees are ineligible
- b. Criteria
1. Significance of Support
  2. Community Impact
  3. Duration of Support
  4. Collaboration

2022 will mark the ninth year of the Cornerstone Awards. Previous Cornerstone Award recipients include the late Irene Dalis, founder of Opera San Jose, late Mayor Susan Hammer, founders of the Castellano Foundation Carmen and Al Castellano, founders of San Jose Taiko Roy and PJ Hirabayashi, founder and former Artistic Director of Teatro Visión Elisa Marina Alvarado, founder Randall King and Executive Director Cathleen King of the San José Stage Company, Artistic and Festival Director of San Jose Jazz Bruce Labadie; General Director of Symphony San Jose Andrew Bales, and the late Dr. Jerrold Hiura (*posthumous*).

The 2022 awards will be presented at the Cornerstone of the Arts event at the Hammer Theatre on October 21, 2022. FY 2021-2022 City of San José Office of Cultural Affairs' grantees will also be recognized for their contributions to San Jose's cultural life.

## **ANALYSIS**

Applicants were asked to complete an online application by the extended deadline of May 13, 2022. (Cornerstone of the Arts Nomination Guidelines can be viewed [here](#)).

The 2022 Cornerstone of the Arts committee was comprised of the following past honorees and Arts Commissioners:

- PJ Hirabayashi, *founder of Taiko Peace and past honoree*
- Roy Hirabayashi, *co-founder of San Jose Taiko and past honoree*
- Juan Carlos Araujo, *San José Arts Commission*
- Janett Peace, *San José Arts Commission*

The Committee met on June 13, 2022 to review 18 nominations. All the nominations identified leaders that have made a significant impact on San Jose's cultural landscape. Each nomination was carefully reviewed against each award's eligibility and criteria. After the deliberation, the Committee is recommending the following awards in 2022:

- Chike Nwoffiah, *Cornerstone of the Arts Award*
- Mosaic America, *Creative Impact Award*
- Rotary Club San Jose, *Community-Based/Business Support for the Arts Award*

**Cornerstone of the Arts Honoree (selected excerpt from nomination)**

Chike has been a bonafide staple in the San Jose / Silicon Valley arts and culture ecosystem for the last 25 years. In 1994, he founded Oriki Theater, an African performing arts group that debuted at the then “*San Jose America Festival*” with a living exhibition of an African Village, complete with life sized huts, a royal palace, live drumming, dancing, storytelling, face painting and re-enactment of daily life in a traditional Africa. Chike and Oriki Theater went on to run several successful seasons of theatrical productions at the Montgomery Theater and was one of the early adopters of the City of San Jose’s Arts Incubation program. His focus in using art practice as a vehicle for lifting the historically marginalized immigrant communities, is legendary. Oriki Theater continues to run programs in local schools, colleges, and community centers across the city and beyond.

In 2010, Chike created the Silicon Valley African Film Festival (SVAFF) and presently serves as its founding director. SVAFF is an annual festival, at the Hoover Theater in San Jose, comprised of filmmakers, film enthusiasts, curators, students, academics, celebrities, government officials and community members for a shared appreciation of Africa. As the only film festival in California that is singularly focused on films from Africa and its diaspora, SVAFF has become a Mecca for African and African ancestry people in San Jose and Northern California. The weekend event features, film screenings, live performances, fashion show, food, arts and craft exhibitions, workshops, and panel discussions. Chike, through the film festival, has placed San Jose on the global stage as a city that is welcoming to world citizens of every stripe. The festival has played host to Hollywood celebrities like Danny Glover, Isaiah Washington, Susan Taylor, and world leaders, including former Deputy Prime Minister of the Bahamas Cynthia Pratt, several African country ambassadors and consul generals, and filmmakers from all over the world.

Along the trajectory of activating arts in service of community, one of Chike’s lasting legacies in our community is his Oriki Rites of Passage program, a manhood development and mentoring program for teenage African American boys that is now in its 17th year of operation. This annual 3-month weekend academy, held on the campus of Mount Pleasant High School in San Jose, has trained, and mentored over 200 boys who, today, are upstanding members of our community. This award-winning program has now been adopted in over 12 cities across the United States, from Bakersfield, California to Brooklyn, New York and is a perfect example of the power of arts and culture practice to catalyze change.

Chike is a leader and a respected voice in the local, national, and international creative industry scene and a fierce advocate for the arts. He has testified several times before the California State legislature in support of funding for the creative sector and served on NEA's National Heritage Fellowship, Folk and Traditional Arts and Arts Education grant review panels. From

2009 to 2012, he served as faculty and Coach for NEA's annual Education Leaders Institute which gave birth to Create CA. He served eight years as a Trustee and Grants Committee Chairman of the Arts Council Silicon Valley (now SVCCreates) and had oversight for the annual distribution of over \$1 million dollars to Artists and Arts organizations in Silicon Valley. From 2004 to 2008, he served as a Fund for Folk Culture strategy panelist on the development of support systems for Immigrant and Refugee Arts in the United States. In 2013, he was appointed by the California Superintendent of Education to serve on the California Blueprint for Creative Schools Task Force. He served as Arts Advisory Commissioner for San Diego International Airport from 2009 to 2016. Chike is a founding board member of the Alliance for California Traditional Arts. He presently serves on the President's Community Advisory Council of the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, Equity Advisory Council of SVCCreates, and board of Pavillion Afriques at the Cannes Film Festival.

Chike has taken arts and culture practice into spaces that hitherto would be considered incompatible. His corporate communication and team building workshops using drumming as a metaphor has been embraced by Silicon Valley's high-tech companies. A Class XXI senior fellow of the American Leadership Forum Silicon Valley, Chike created and presented a program he called "Cross-Cultural Communications in Drums" to his classmates to demonstrate how the metaphors of community drumming can be applied to daily work life. The presentation featured drumming interactive playing of djembe drumming by Oriki Ensemble, Aztec drumming by Tezkatlipoka and Taiko drumming by San Jose Taiko. The program was adopted by American Leadership Forum (ALF) Silicon Valley and has become a component of the ALF's annual training sessions.

As an academic, Chike has brought arts and culture into academic circles and influenced arts and culture classroom discussions and pedagogy. He has written guest blogs for ALF Silicon Valley and SVCCreates. He was a contributing author to the critically acclaimed book *"Black Cultural Traffic - Crossroads in Global Performance and Popular Culture"* edited by Stanford University professors Harry Elam, Jr. and Kennel Jackson and the 2021 book *"Cinemas Africanos contemporâneos - abordagens críticas" / "Contemporary African cinemas - critical approaches"* by Brazilian film scholars Ana Camila Esteves & Juscielle Oliveira. Chike was an adjunct professor at Menlo College from 2019 to 2016 and a guest lecturer at UCLA's Urban Policy Institute, UC Santa Cruz's History department, SacState's Center for African Peace and Conflict Resolution, Southern New Hampshire University's Community Development graduate program and Claremont Graduate University's Management of the Arts program. He has presented keynote speeches at United States Post Office unveiling of the Ella Fitzgerald Stamp, Santa Clara County Black Educators conference, the National conference of Community Arts Educators, 2020 Marion Cilker Conference for the Arts in Education, etc. He is Evergreen Valley College's 2021 Commencement Speaker.

Chike was a founding member of First Voice South Bay, an alliance of multicultural leaders in the Silicon Valley arts and culture ecosystem that was formed in the early 2000s and met monthly to network, explore shared opportunities and solutions to common challenges. He has always sought ways to build bridges across people and communities of various backgrounds.

When our country witnessed a reckoning with its dark history of racial injustice which exploded with the murder of George Floyd, Chike quickly used his arts practice to animate conversations on social justice issues. His film festival rolled out a series of monthly virtual Cinema Cafes that used film as a pathway to courageous conversations. From March of 2020 to March of 2021, the film festival screened over 30 short films in its free virtual Cinema Cafe program and provided a safe forum for community members to engage each other in dialogue on issues of race and social justice. When the infamous devastating earthquake of January 12, 2010 hit Haiti, Chike reached across to all communities, rallied Silicon Valley artists and successfully directed the first and only Silicon Valley Artists for Haiti Relief Concert. The concert was held at the Historic Hoover Theater on February 27, 2010, and featured a variety of Silicon Valley Multi-cultural arts groups, including: Oriki Theater, San Jose Taiko, Abhinaya Dance Company, Island Moves, Danzantes Aztecas, Kaisahan, Vovinam, Vivace Youth Chorus of San Jose, Eddie Gale, and many more. 100% of the proceeds were donated to the Haiti Relief Fund. From 1998 to 2008, Chike created the Silicon Valley Diversity Youth Forum, a full day annual gathering for Silicon Valley high school students, teachers and administrators to engage each other on issues of race, ability, gender, and creed.

Chike is the ultimate cultural diplomat and has continued to use his talent and skills in the arts to bring our world together and create a space for dialogue and shared understanding of our common journey as a human family. His philosophy which he often talks about is that “Art is life and Life is Art”. He has used his platform as an artist, art administrator and advocate to weave arts into the consciousness of the community and serve a bigger purpose. He has won several awards and recognition for his work, including the 2019 Cultural Icon Award by Poppy Jasper International Film Festival, several Congressional and California Legislature certificates of recognition, San Jose / Silicon Valley NAACP Freedom Fighter Award, and Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Community Service Award. Chike was a 2021 Creative Ambassador for the City of San Jose and was inducted into the Silicon Valley Black Legends Hall of Fame Class of 2021 for a distinguished and outstanding career in the arts, music, theater, television, and movies and enhancing the lives of people in the Black Community. Chike is a gem in the community with a rare talent and capacity to combine excellence in arts and culture practice with selfless and compassionate social and community service. He is a mentor to many and always willing to share his knowledge with everyone around him. He continues to teach, guide and share, and is watched by many. The San Jose/Silicon Valley NAACP best summarized what Chike means to our community when they wrote “*prior to Chike Nwoffiah, there was a void in this community of real, educational, entertaining, informative African culture.*”

*The Cornerstone of the Arts Committee is pleased to recommend Chike Nwoffiah as the recipient of this year's Cornerstone of the Arts Award.*

**Creative Impact Honoree (selected excerpt from nomination)**

Mosaic Festival Silicon Valley premiered on October 2, 2021, as a free, full-day community-focused celebration of diverse artistic forms and disciplines led by artists and culture bearers

from 20+ culturally distinct communities in San José and Silicon Valley. The festival brought together more than 50 partners to create a day of experiential arts engagement for over 1500 community members, featuring 28 performances from distinguished local artists and culture bearers, panel discussions, workshops, visual arts, food, and handicrafts at the School of Arts and Culture at Mexican Heritage Plaza in San José. Developed by Mosaic America's co-founders, Usha Srinivasan and Priya Das, Mosaic Festival Silicon Valley created a sense of belonging for everyone in our rapidly diversifying region. No other regional festival or event features such cultural diversity and cross-cultural connection. Mosaic Festival Silicon Valley offers the community the opportunity to share their heritage and traditions with neighbors and friends in a safe and supportive environment.

An event as large as Mosaic Festival Silicon Valley is an important social and economic part of our arts and culture ecosystem. The highly diverse audience results from each artist, organization, and culture bearer bringing their community to the event. The audience comes together as witness and leaves having had a shared experience, learning about different cultural traditions, broadening their individual empathy, and building a sense of belonging for each audience member and artist. Mosaic events strive to remove barriers and allow audiences to engage with communities outside of their own experience. Rather than a blended approach, which would be more palatable to a broader audience, Mosaic events and the Mosaic Festival Silicon Valley are rare opportunities to experience multiple distinct and unique identities that contribute to one beautiful vision of San José. As a performing arts organization, Mosaic America deeply understands how challenging the pandemic has been for local artists to continue their craft and earn an income. Mosaic has a proven track record of creating economic opportunities for under-represented artists through paid performance opportunities and bringing artists together across disciplines to commission new works that promote true community inclusion. Within a month of the issuance of the shelter-at-home orders, Mosaic launched the free digital performance series, Mosaic Connect, which launched with a newly commissioned work. Two more Mosaic commissions debuted at the Mosaic Festival; *Confluencia*, featuring common rhythms of Flamenco and Indian classical dance, and *Black Pacific*, featuring cultural practices from Afro-Pacific regions born out of the sustained migration between its peoples. Mosaic America's approach to building community is quite innovative. The Mosaic Festival Silicon Valley is a first-of-its-kind, multidisciplinary, cross-cultural arts event. Mosaic Festival Silicon Valley sets a new standard for diversity, inclusion, and belonging in the arts and our local community.

The Mosaic Festival is the culmination of lessons learned from over five years of presenting "mosaic" style of programming, where art forms from at least two world cultures that call the Bay Area home join together to create new work without compromising the rich history or cultural ties of each art form. In many ways, the Mosaic Festival looks very much like the first Mosaic America show in November of 2016, which featured performances from 12 cultural traditions. A Mosaic event's participatory audience engagement aspect was born in 2018 at the FolkSi Festival at Mexican Heritage Plaza. In 2019, the Mosaic team took on the challenge of fully realizing their mission by pushing into community spaces with ticketless [free] curated cultural experiences. These events, such as Mosaic Sunnyvale and Mosaic's partnering with the Montalvo Arts Center for 'THREADS, weaving humanity', were mission-driven events with full performance programs and immersive interactive workshops. Through Mosaic America's culture

mapping project, Mosaic Atlas, they have identified over 120 culturally distinct communities in Silicon Valley. As they progress in culture mapping and outreach, Mosaic finds new artistic partners and new communities to promote through performance. Mosaic America's continuing outreach and engagement work enrich community ties and guarantee that the Mosaic Festival Silicon Valley will remain relevant and reflective of all who live in San José.

*The 2022 Cornerstone of the Arts Committee is pleased to recommend Mosaic America as the recipient of the this year's Creative Impact Award.*



**Community-Based/Business Support for the Arts Honoree (selected excerpt from nomination)**

The Leigh Weimer's Emerging Artists Awards (LWEA) is a program of the Rotary Club of San Jose. The LWEA awards were established to honor the legacy of Leigh Weimers, a lifelong champion of the arts and a longtime member of the Rotary Club. Leigh, whose column ran in the San Jose Mercury News for more than 40 years, was an eloquent supporter of the arts in Silicon Valley. A mention in his column could catapult an actor, singer or painter into the talk of the town and launch a career. He and his wife Geri were ubiquitous at the theater, ballet, symphony, art gallery openings, fundraisers, and literary events.

The LWEA awards are intended to continue that commitment to the arts by recognizing and supporting emerging artists in Santa Clara County. Since its establishment in 2013, the LWEA committee has awarded \$162,000 to 56 emerging artists living and working in the region. These unrestricted gifts range from \$500 micro-grants to \$5000 awards. These awards may be used for car payments, rent, student debt, more art supplies, or any other need the recipient may have.

From dresses made of candy wrappers to storytelling rappers to a rap jingle written specifically for the San Jose Rotary, the LWEA has recognized Bay Area emerging artists in virtually every artistic discipline – actors, musicians, playwrights, painters, sculptors, quilters, dancers, comedians, composers, choreographers, filmmakers and lighting designers. With an average of 85 applicants per year, it is clear that there is abundant interest in the program and an abundance of talent that we hope to recognize in the coming years.

A group of LWEA committee members review the applications each year and choose 3 - 4 recipients for \$5000 awards. The members of the selection committee all have expertise in the arts as practicing artists, curators, directors, etc. The criteria for selection are based on 1) quality; 2) a demonstrated commitment to the applicant's particular discipline; 3) a lack of notoriety – defined as emerging. The only requirement of the awards is that the recipients participate in an awards ceremony where they are able to introduce themselves and their work to an audience of 200+ members of the community.

In the summer of 2020, during the darkest days of the pandemic, the LWEA committee realized that the artistic community was perhaps the most deeply impacted by the global shutdown. With performance spaces shuttered, museums and galleries closed, festivals and performances canceled, artists lost significant sources of income. Working with arts leaders and non-profit groups throughout the region, the LWEA committee was able to give out micro-grants in the amount of \$500 and \$1000 to 24 emerging artists in the Bay Area.

The committee also realized that it was critical to have the regular awards continue in 2020 despite the pandemic. They opened the application portal in May and extended the usual June 30 deadline to July 15th to allow applicants ample time to submit their materials. The selection committee pivoted to an online platform to discuss the applicants and make decisions about the winners. With the help of some of the former recipients as well as the 2020 winners, the committee was able to produce a fantastic video that was presented to the Rotary Club members and many others via Zoom in October 2020. Fortunately, they were able to meet in person in October 2021 and present a hybrid program for in-person and online audience members.

During the 10 years that the LWEA has been in existence, it has built up a huge network of collaborators. They include all 56 award recipients and virtually all the non-profit art groups in the county who encourage artists from all artistic disciplines to apply for the award. They also partner with the Office of Cultural Affairs and SV Creates to market the award opportunity to their communities of artists and, of course, use every social media channel available to promote the opportunity. The significance of the committee's impact is perhaps best communicated by the recipients of the awards. Their effusive appreciation has made the committee acutely aware of how much these awards mean to the artistic community.

*The 2022 Cornerstone of the Arts Committee is pleased to recommend Rotary Club San Jose as the recipient of this year's Community-Based/Business Support for the Arts Award.*

### **PUBLIC OUTREACH**

The nomination guidelines were posted on the City's website and dispersed through the Office of Cultural Affairs' distribution lists. Announcements of the nomination guidelines were also made through social media.

/s/

KERRY ADAMS HAPNER  
Director of Cultural Affairs