



PRESS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Chagrin Arts awards performing arts scholarships to two high school seniors

CHAGRIN FALLS, OHIO – In 2017, Chagrin Arts established two \$500 scholarship awards to be presented to high school seniors whose activities demonstrated a passion for the performing arts. One scholarship was made available to students who lived in the following communities: Auburn, Bainbridge, Bentleyville, Burton, Chagrin Falls, Chardon, Chester, Gates Mills, Hunting Valley, Moreland Hills, Munson, Newbury, Orange, Pepper Pike, Russell, S. Russell, Solon, or Woodmere. The second scholarship was available to students currently enrolled in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District.

After a rigorous selection process this year, with 28 eligible applicants, the scholarships were presented to the 2018 recipients at Chagrin Arts' "Fire Up! Annual Performing Arts Bash" on May 16. *The Chagrin Valley Times Performing Arts Scholarship* was presented to **Sydney Gembka of West Geauga High School**, and the *Stephen G. Thomas Performing Arts Scholarship* was presented to **Kayla Thomas of Cleveland School of the Arts**.

"Chagrin Arts strives to bring the power of the arts to as many as possible and the deserving recipients truly exemplify how encompassing that power is when combined with their own passion for the arts," said Karen Lazar, Executive Director of Chagrin Arts.

Sydney is an avid musician and singer. She plans on pursuing a double major in Percussion Performance and Music Education at either the University of Michigan or DePaul University this fall. She would like to teach music in some capacity, stating "music has this spiritual way of connecting people that other subjects lack. Music is about learning to play not only with each other, but for each other. Music education is very important to me and I hope to inspire others through music for the rest of my life." Sydney credits her love of music, and reason for pursuing a degree in music education, to the many inspiring music teachers she has had, especially her band director, Mr. Branch, who always encouraged her and never told her that she wasn't good enough to do something.

Kayla is an inspiring ballerina. Since the age of six, she has dedicated her life to dance and was motivated to be the best at her craft. Through her experience, she has come to an understanding that "there is a tremendous lack of diversity in the dance industry. A profession where my skin tone can factor into my success," said Kayla "means there are barriers to be broken. I am motivated to send a message through dance...that no matter where you come from, you can create something through the arts that is valued by the world. After my performing career, I want to teach, choreograph, and most importantly, inspire the next generation so they can create too."

MORE

Kayla plans on double majoring in dance and business with a minor in social work. One day she would like to create a nonprofit organization that introduces children of all colors to the fine arts. The organization's mission would be to give every child the opportunity to learn a new way to express themselves positively through hard work and creation. "My hope," says Kayla "is to provide Cleveland communities with the opportunity to be creative, which was a chance I was given many years ago."

Last year's scholarship recipients included Vishal Sundaram from Solon High School who recently finished his freshman year at Cornell University, and Nijah Holliday from Cleveland School of the Arts who is pursuing a degree in music education.

CHAGRIN VALLEY TIMES PERFORMING ARTS SCHOLARSHIP

The Chagrin Valley Times Performing Arts Scholarship was created via funding provided by the *Chagrin Valley Times*, whose staff has played a leading role in bringing arts and culture to thousands, providing cost-effective advertising, editorials, catalogs and shout-outs for *every* arts and culture organization in Chagrin Falls and beyond. This \$500 scholarship is open to students who live in Auburn, Bainbridge, Bentleyville, Burton, Chagrin Falls, Chardon, Chester, Gates Mills, Hunting Valley, Moreland Hills, Munson, Newbury, Orange, Pepper Pike, Russell, S. Russell, Solon, or Woodmere.

STEPHEN G. THOMAS PERFORMING ARTS SCHOLARSHIP

The Stephen G. Thomas Performing Arts Scholarship is named in recognition of Steve's ongoing dedication to Chagrin Arts as one of its founding members and current Board President. Funding is provided by Chagrin Arts and is open to high school seniors currently enrolled in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District.

TO OBTAIN ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For more information about the performing arts scholarships or Chagrin Arts, call Chagrin Arts at (440) 247-9700 or visit ChagrinArts.org.

ABOUT CHAGRIN ARTS

Chagrin Arts is a community 501(c)(3) organization whose goal is to enrich life through the presentation of inspiring performances and stimulating conversations. The organization's most visible programs are its *Chautauqua-in-Chagrin™* lecture series and the *Performing Arts Series*.

Chagrin Arts receives public support with local tax dollars from Cuyahoga Arts & Culture, to preserve and enrich our region's artistic and cultural heritage. Additional sponsorship provided by the Ohio Arts Council, Huntington Bank, Chagrin Valley Times, The Inamori Center for Ethics and Excellence at CWRU, Sapphire Creek Winery & Gardens, and Electronic Merchant Systems.

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ATTACHED IMAGES

1. Sydney Gembka with Ken Douthit of the Chagrin Valley Times
2. Kayla Thomas, senior dance photo