

NOW, MORE THAN EVER

Business Council for the Arts' annual Obelisk Awards celebrate the symbiosis of North Texas business and nonprofits, and in 2020, it's critical.

BY STEVE CARTER



It's been 32 years since Raymond Nasher founded the Business Council for the Arts, a win/win initiative that's been facilitating partnerships between area businesses and arts organizations ever since. With a current roster of 70-plus member companies, benefiting 300-plus nonprofits, BCA's contributions to the North Texas arts/cultural landscape is enormous. Small wonder, then, that every November, BCA pauses to recognize and celebrate the year's vital accomplishments with its annual Obelisk Awards. As awards events go, the Obelisk is unique, with nonprofit beneficiaries nominating business benefactors, and benefactors nominating arts organizations. Winning honorees are recognized in seven categories: Business Champion for the Arts, Outstanding Leadership Arts Alumnus, Visionary Nonprofit Arts Leader, Arts Education, Distinguished Cultural Organization, Arts Partnerships, and New Initiatives, as well as a Lifetime Achievement award in select years.

But in its long history, this year's Obelisk Awards ceremony will be a first: a virtual celebration on Tuesday, November 17, with an 11:30 a.m. pre-event followed by presentations from noon to 1:00 p.m. (It was originally scheduled for the Fairmont's International Ballroom, but the pandemic had other ideas.) The theme of this year's awards is "State of the Arts," and Katherine Wagner, BCA's CEO is pumped. "At the end of the day, the Obelisk Awards has two purposes: One, we are honoring and recognizing those that have been exemplary, great examples for others in the business world; and then what we also want is for others to learn from these businesses." Co-chairs this year are Mimi Crume Sterling, Neiman Marcus Group Vice President of Corporate Culture and Philanthropy, and renowned architect Cari K. Walls, AIA, principal at MDW Studio; they're also among nine other jurists. This year's crop of winners comprises a formidable A-list of benefactors and beneficiaries. Here's a sampling:

2020's Business Champion for the Arts is Sanjiv Yajnik, president of Capital One's financial services and the Dallas

Symphony Association's chairman of the board of governors; he was nominated by the DSO. BCA's Katherine Wagner enthuses, "Sanjiv is just a really great exemplar of business support of the arts, both as an individual and also in really pushing his company to support the arts, and creativity, and innovation as much as they can, both internal and external."

Next, drum roll please for this year's Visionary Nonprofit Arts Leader, Margie J. Reese, nominated jointly by the African American Museum of Dallas and SLDcreative. "Margie Reese was the head of what's now the Office of Arts and Culture, which used to be called the Office of Cultural Affairs in Dallas," Wagner says. "She's phenomenal—she's someone who has a national presence, especially in the areas of arts education and diversity in the arts. Margie's iconic."

2020 happens to be a year that features a Lifetime Achievement honoree, and this time it's Dr. Dennis Kratz, nominated by UTD's School of Arts and Humanities. And the school should know, since Kratz was its dean for 22 years. He's now the university's associate provost and founding director of its Center for Asian Studies. His career is the stuff of legend, including founding new degree programs, research centers, and the very first Confucius Institute in Texas, among many other milestones. Wagner rhapsodizes, "He's brilliant. He's completely brilliant."

Distinguished Cultural Organization kudos go to the Dallas Chamber Symphony and Founder/Artistic Director/Conductor Richard McKay, nominated by the law firm of Bell Nunnally and Martin LLP. DCS's laurels include 30-plus commissions and premieres of new works, and it's the city's only professional chamber orchestra. And the Arts Partnerships (large) Obelisk goes to Frost Bank, nominated by the Nasher Sculpture Center, which is a long-term beneficiary of Frost Bank's largesse.

Now, more than ever, businesses partnering with the arts—the envelope, please... **P**

From left: Dr. Dennis Kratz will be honored with the Lifetime Achievement Award. Photograph courtesy of the University of Texas at Dallas; Capital One's President of Financial Services, Sanjiv Yajnik, is this year's Business Champion for the Arts honoree. Photograph courtesy of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra; Margie J. Reese, principle MJR Partners-Arts Management Services and Obelisk Visionary Nonprofit Arts Leader honoree. Photograph by Turk Studio.