

FUTURE FORWARD

Corporate philanthropy partners with arts organizations, making North Texas a cultural powerhouse.

BY NANCY COHEN ISRAEL



From left: Future Forward cochair Mimi Crume Sterling, courtesy of Neiman Marcus; Cochair Jessica L. Beasley, courtesy of the Ann & Gabriel Barbier-Mueller Museum: The Samurai Collection.

North Texas ranks in the top five multicounty cultural regions in the US, according to Americans for the Arts' 2017 Arts and Economic Prosperity study. Key to the area's success, says Katherine Wagner, CEO of the Business Council for the Arts, is the engagement of corporate neighbors. "We have an increasingly enlightened business community that sees how art is beneficial inside their companies and within the community," she says. She stresses that this commitment of the private sector is the economic engine propelling the region's arts and cultural community.

The BCA's annual Obelisk Awards honors the partnership between business and the arts. Each year the organization assembles a jury, presided over by founder's chair Nancy Nasher, to determine its honorees. Jessica L. Beasley, curator of art at the Ann and Gabriel Barbier-Mueller Museum and Harwood International; and Mimi Crume Sterling, vice president of corporate culture and philanthropy of the Neiman Marcus Group, are cochairing this year's November luncheon. The honorees will receive awards designed by glass artist Polly Gessel.

Following the event's 30th-anniversary retrospective last year, the duo's aim for this year looks ahead, with Future Forward as their theme. "Jessica and I have gone to this event for many years. Our goal is to bring fresh energy to it," Sterling explains. Beasley adds, "With my background in the arts, I have seen firsthand the importance of the efforts of these groups and individuals that are being recognized."

Sterling brings the heft of the Neiman Marcus Group to her role as cochair. "The arts have always been an integral part of our culture. They are very much at the core of what we do," she says. Richard Marcus sat on the founding board of the BCA, and she cites the culture of Neiman Marcus as one that is in line with the spirit of the awards. "Focusing on creativity in youth is our mission," she explains, adding that corporate engagement inspires employees. "We can share this with our internal associates because it increases pride and motivation."

Accenting Future Forward, many of this year's honorees are being recognized for the work they do in engaging young audiences. The Andrea-Mennen Family Foundation was

nominated by the Plano Symphony Orchestra as well as by Chamberlain Ballet for their contributions benefiting children and young adults. The number of nominees from the area's suburbs is particularly notable. "It is fascinating to us that we are getting these nominations from around the area," Wagner says.

The steadfast support of corporate partners such as American Airlines, nominated by The Dallas Opera, infuses the cultural landscape with the ability to think boldly. With the arrival of PNC Bank's Regional President's Office and Corporate Banking Division in 2017, another significant commercial patron joined the area's philanthropists. According to Brendan McGuire, PNC regional president for North Texas, "PNC has a legacy of investing in the communities we serve through support of the arts, as we understand the economic, social, and civic impacts that a thriving arts and culture community has on our city." PNC directs more than half of its giving towards arts and cultural institutions and programs. The Dallas Museum of Art, Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas Symphony Orchestra, AT&T Performing Arts Center, Dallas Theater Center, and Dallas Summer Musicals are among the institutions that benefit from their largesse.

This symbiotic relationship between the business and artistic communities is one in which both sides take a great deal of pride. Through ongoing partnerships, the arts in North Texas continue to serve as a beacon of creativity, inspiration, and economic prosperity. **P**



Clockwise from top: Business Champion for the Arts honoree Charles Eisemann.; Outstanding Leadership Alumnus honoree James Mason; Carlyn Ray, New Initiatives award honoree, courtesy of the artist.