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Business Council for the Arts Announces Winners of the 2026 Obelisk Awards

Six Honorees Recognized for Impact on Arts, Culture, and Community in North Texas

North Texas, August 24, 2026- Business Council for the Arts (BCA) today announced six North Texas businesses and individuals whose leadership and commitment to the arts will be celebrated at the 38th annual Obelisk Awards on Thursday, November 5, 2026, from 11:00 AM to 1:30 PM at the JW Marriott Dallas Arts District.

Founded in 1988, Business Council for the Arts is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing business support for arts and culture. With a membership of 150 leading North Texas companies and organizations, BCA provides arts-based employee engagement programs such as the Leadership Arts Institute, On My Own Time™, and Art at Work to its member organizations. BCA's annual signature event, the Obelisk Awards, stands as the region's premier celebration of business-arts partnerships. This event draws a large audience of executives, entrepreneurs, and civic leaders each year to honor those whose investments of time, talent, and resources have transformed North Texas' cultural landscape.

"This year's Obelisk Award winners represent one of the most inspiring line-up of businesses and business leaders we have ever celebrated," said Joel Austin, Chair of the BCA Board of Directors. "Each winner shows what becomes possible when business leadership and a genuine commitment to the arts come together. It has been a good year for North Texas, and these honorees remind us why the arts remain essential to the strength of our communities and our economy."

This year's event is co-chaired by BCA Board Members Michael Janicek, Senior Associate and Senior Lighting Designer at Corgan, and Andrea Nayfa, a luxury real estate agent with Allie Beth Allman & Associates and a board member of Texas Ballet Theater. They serve alongside Honorary Chair Donna Wilhelm.

"We are deeply honored to have Donna Wilhelm serve as this year's Honorary Chair," said BCA Founder's Chair Nancy A. Nasher, owner of NorthPark Center. "Donna's generosity, vision, and lifelong advocacy for the arts have left an extraordinary mark on North Texas. Her leadership

embodies exactly what the Obelisk Awards celebrate: the belief that when business and the arts move forward together, our entire community grows stronger.”

"North Texas is stronger when business, the arts, and community leadership move together," said Stacie Adams, Chief Executive Officer of Business Council for the Arts. "This year's honorees show how many forms that can take, from expanding arts education and pro bono partnership to reimagining healthcare for the creatives who sustain our culture. Their leadership expands access, creates opportunity, and keeps the arts central to the growth and wellbeing of our region."

The 2026 Business Council for the Arts Obelisk Awards Honorees include:

Business Champion for the Arts – Jeff Ellerman, Executive Vice Chairman, Stream Realty

Jeff Ellerman, Executive Vice Chairman of Stream Realty, will be honored for the strategic governance leadership he has brought to the arts as a longtime Trustee of the Dallas Museum of Art and its Board Chair from 2022 to 2025. He has chaired the Museum's Budget & Finance, Building and Grounds, and Trustees & Governance committees, and as Development Committee chair from 2018 to 2021 he led donor engagement that generated more than \$2 million annually in new and renewed gifts. His stewardship has helped the DMA sustain free general admission for 320,000 annual visitors and deliver more than 2,500 educational programs reaching over 90,000 community members each year. Ellerman played a pivotal role in selecting Nieto Sobejano Arquitectos for the Museum's Master Facilities Plan and continues to guide its transformational building project and capital campaign. Beyond the DMA, he serves as Chairman of The Loop Dallas, a public-art and placemaking initiative—including the Nasher Public collaboration on the Hi Line Connector trail—that integrates art throughout the city's landscapes and neighborhoods.

Nominated by: Tamara Wootton Forsyth, Interim Director, Dallas Museum of Art, and Philip Haigh, Executive Director, The Loop Dallas.

Arts Education – New York Life – North Dallas

New York Life will be honored for its sustained commitment to arts education through its partnership with Broadway Dallas's High School Musical Theatre Awards (HSMTA), one of the largest youth arts programs in North Texas. Over the past two years, New York Life has invested \$134,000 in the program, which serves more than 7,000 students annually from approximately 100 high school productions across the region. The program awards roughly \$70,000 in scholarships each year—more than \$700,000 since its inception—and connects students to the national Jimmy Awards. Since 2011, participation has grown from 35 productions to 100 in 2026, with Broadway Dallas students earning national recognition among more than 150,000 peers nationwide. Beyond financial support, Amber Rose, Partner at New York Life – North Dallas, serves on the Broadway Dallas Advisory Board and chairs its Development Corporate Subcommittee, reflecting a commitment that pairs investment with hands-on leadership to expand opportunity for young artists.

Nominated by: Ken Novice, President and CEO, Broadway Dallas, and Adam Hunter, Major Gifts Officer, Broadway Dallas.

Arts Partnership – Vinson & Elkins

Vinson & Elkins will be recognized for a sustained, multi-year pro bono partnership with KERA that treats top-tier legal expertise as cultural infrastructure. Rather than write a check, the international law firm applies Fortune 500–level legal counsel at no cost, enabling the public-media organization to pursue growth that would otherwise be out of reach. That support has powered KERA’s broader Arts & Cultural Expansion Initiative, led by President and CEO Nico Leone, including the integration of WRR classical radio and new partnerships with organizations such as The Cliburn. The clearest example is Vinson & Elkins Partner Chris Rowley’s pro bono legal leadership on KERA’s February 2026 acquisition of *From the Top*, the acclaimed program showcasing young classical musicians—a complex deal that required more than 300 hours of legal work. By offering that expertise where budgets fall short, the firm exemplifies a true arts partnership.

Nominated by: Nico Leone, President & CEO, KERA.

Outstanding Leadership Arts Alumna – Kristina Kirkenaer-Hart, Director of Cultural Tourism and the Dallas Music Office, Visit Dallas

Kristina Kirkenaer-Hart, Director of Cultural Tourism and the Dallas Music Office at Visit Dallas, will be honored as an Outstanding Leadership Arts Alumna whose career bridges artistic experience and strategic leadership. A former professional dancer with a BFA from NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts, an MA in Arts Administration, and an MBA from SMU, she brings more than 20 years of experience in the arts to her work. Since launching the Dallas Music Office in 2024, she has built Dallas Sounds Amplified, a citywide busking program that creates visibility and performance opportunities for local musicians. Through partnerships, relationships with arts and cultural organizations, and cross-sector opportunities, the Music Office has helped participating artists connect to paid performances, reach new audiences, and gain greater industry visibility, with artists going on to receive awards, recognition, and new professional opportunities. As Director of Cultural Tourism, she oversees the DTPID Event Marketing Fund, coordinating more than \$1.5 million in annual funding for more than 90 Dallas arts and cultural organizations. She has also built programming and partnerships with Dallas hospitality organizations that increase visitor awareness of the city’s arts and cultural offerings and create stronger connections between the visitor economy and Dallas’ creative community. She also helped launch Creatives Care Dallas, an innovative healthcare program designed to provide affordable access to care for Dallas-based creatives, demonstrating how collaborative arts leadership can strengthen a city’s creative community and economy.

Nominated by: Craig Davis, President and CEO, Visit Dallas, and Edwin Cabaniss, Founder, Kessler Presents.

New Arts Initiative – Arete Health

Arete Health will be recognized for Creatives Care Dallas, a new initiative created in partnership with the Visit Dallas Music Office that structurally addresses a long-unmet need: affordable healthcare for the independent artists and creative professionals who power the region’s cultural life. Led by Arete Health CEO Byron Sanders, the program offers a straightforward monthly membership built around gig-based creative work—virtual primary care, 24/7 telemedicine, behavioral-health support, and reduced-cost prescriptions. In its first phase, Creatives Care

Dallas enrolled more than 100 artists and creative professionals across Dallas County, many of whom previously had no reliable healthcare access. A portion of program proceeds is reinvested in the community through Amplified Minds, a Dallas nonprofit providing therapy, counseling, and mental-health resources for creatives. By applying private-sector healthcare infrastructure to the realities of creative careers, Arete Health has built a replicable model now drawing national attention—moving Dallas beyond celebrating the arts to structurally supporting the people who sustain them.

Nominated by: Mike Lawson, Dallas Arts Advocate.

Lifetime Achievement – Tara Lewis, Founder, Arts Community Advocate

Tara Lewis will receive the Lifetime Achievement Award for systemic, sustained leadership across the North Texas arts community. An energy-industry executive and formerly part of the PwC tax practice, Lewis has channeled a distinguished business career into hands-on leadership at many of Dallas's most important cultural institutions. She served as Board Chair of TACA from 2020–2022, capping nearly two decades of service to one of the region's most influential arts grantmakers. With Carol March, she co-created TACA's Bravo Awards, whose Artist's Bonuses deliver cash directly to individual artists and which has earned national recognition as a model in arts philanthropy. Her leadership also spans Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts, where she is the outgoing Advisory Board chair after 14 years on the Board, incoming Board Chair of the Dallas Children's Theater, and gala support for The Cedars Union, the Turtle Creek Chorale, and Pegasus Contemporary Ballet among others. Across these institutions, Lewis stands as a connective force in Dallas's vibrant cultural community.

2026 Obelisk Awards Sponsorships and Underwriting

Sponsorships and underwriting opportunities provide unique ways for businesses, organizations, and individuals to recognize the 2026 Obelisk Award honorees' accomplishments and gain valuable brand recognition among the event's attendees.

Sponsorship packages include marketing recognition, outdoor billboard placement, a VIP Art Experience, complimentary valet parking for all attendees, and invitations to the exclusive Obelisk Awards Patron Party on October 8, 2026. Sponsorship details can be found at <https://ntbca.org/obelisk-sponsorships/>

Tables for the Obelisk Awards on November 5, 2026, are now available for purchase. A limited number of individual tickets will be released at a later date.

2026 Obelisk Awards Sponsors to date include:

Connoisseur Sponsors – Oncor and Nancy Nasher + David Haemisegger

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Each honoree of the 2026 Obelisk Award receives an original and one-of-a-kind artwork in glass created by Dallas artist Simon Waranch.

About Business Council for the Arts

Since its founding in 1988 by real estate developer and philanthropist Raymond D. Nasher as a Dallas Citizens Council initiative to foster parallel growth in North Texas's cultural and business sectors, the Business Council for the Arts (BCA) has thrived under visionary leadership. In 2007, Nasher's daughter, Nancy A. Nasher, succeeded him as Founder's Chair, bringing her own passion and dedication to the organization's mission. Today, Founder's Chair Nancy A. Nasher, Board Chair Joel Austin, and CEO Stacie Adams lead a network of more than 150 leading businesses and organizations that champion the arts in workplaces, classrooms, and communities across the region. BCA's programming spans creative workforce development, community engagement, and leadership cultivation. Signature initiatives include On My Own Time™, Art at Work, and the Leadership Arts Institute, alongside committee-led series—Arts & Health, Arts & Real Estate, and Arts & Technology—that explore how the arts drive innovation, well-being, and community revitalization. For more information or to join, visit www.ntbca.org.

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CONTACT:

Stacie Adams

214.552.6414

stacie.adams@ntbca.org