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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Geva Theatre Center honors ***Reenah Golden*** and ***Strings for Success*** with 2019 Essie Calhoun Diversity in the Arts Awards

Rochester, N.Y., April 3, 2019 – Actress, spoken word artist, social activist and educator **Reenah Golden** and the Center for Youth’s **Strings for Success** program have each been honored by Geva Theatre Center with **2019 Essie Calhoun Diversity in the Arts Awards**.

Geva created the award in 2011, which was named in honor of Essie Calhoun-McDavid, retired Chief Diversity Officer, Director of Community Affairs, and Vice President of Eastman Kodak Company. Ms. Calhoun-McDavid was the first recipient of the award, given annually to a person and/or organization that promotes and encourages diversity in the arts. Past recipients include Garth Fagan (2012), School of the Arts (2013), Thomas Warfield (2014), Nydia Padilla-Rodriguez (2015), Rachel DeGuzman (2016), Debora McDell-Hernandez (2017), and Delores Jackson Radney (2018).

Geva’s Artistic Director **Mark Cuddy** remarked, “What incredible arts advocates we have in the Rochester region! Reenah Golden, as an individual, and the organization Strings for Success, led by Patty Yarmel and Gretchen Judge, exemplify the dedication it takes to make a difference in people’s live—especially children. Their inclusive approach has made our community a richer place to live, and they are worthy recipients of the award that personifies its namesake, Essie Calhoun-McDavid.”

Reenah Golden, winner of the 2019 Essie Calhoun Award for an individual, is the Founder & Artistic Director of The Avenue Blackbox Theatre, where she is working with the community to transform an art-deserted quadrant with collaborative, multidisciplinary, socially-conscious programming. For nearly 20 years, Reenah has been using the stage to educate, affect social change and create new ways of thinking. As a professional actor, Reenah has toured in *No Child...* by Nilaja Sun, a one-woman show about arts-in-education, at Geva,

Syracuse Stage, Kelly-Strayhorn Theater in Pittsburgh, Indiana University, NW Theatre on Grand, and various universities. In 2014, she presented a collaborative work entitled, *To Mothers of Sons* for TedX - Flour City.

Reenah teaches, presents, performs and guest-lectures regularly at schools, organizations, colleges, universities and cultural institutions locally, nationally and internationally. A native of Rochester and graduate of Benjamin Franklin High School (Urban League Black Scholar) and Rochester Institute of Technology (McNair Scholar), she is co-founder of Kuumba Consultants; an arts-in-education agency dedicated to matching artists of color with youth agencies and schools seeking quality arts and cultural programming. In 2006, she founded "Slam High," a performance poetry program for teens that has received national acclaim. This program was featured in the HBO docu-series *Brave New Voices* in 2009. She is the recipient of the Edith Glick Shoolman Children's Educational Foundation grant, Partners of the Americas Education and Culture travel grants, New York State Council on the Arts Individual Artist Award a Poets & Writers grant, and the 2006 Writers & Books Teacher of Young People Literary Award.

Internationally, Reenah has delivered presentations, residencies, workshops and professional development internationally and she speaks and presents regularly at arts, cultural and education conferences including CommonGround, National Conference of Teachers of English (NCTE), The American Educational Research Association (AERA) and Partners of the Americas. Reenah has participated on several Rochester City School District (RCSD) boards, committees and school improvement plans including school based planning team, PTA (past-president), and administrator selection committees bringing critical issues of cultural inclusion to the table. In 2016, Reenah designed and founded the Achieve Blackbox theatre at PUC Achieve Charter School to promote literacy, cultural responsiveness and community engagement. Her youth performance troupe the noDrama club resides at The Avenue Blackbox Theatre and also tours their plays, remixes, improv sketches and spoken word.

Reenah is the author of two chapter books; *Revelations from the Single Mama Tribe* and *All Me*, and a collection of poems written with her own child, a poet since birth entitled, *Mother to Son*. Her work has been published internationally in academic texts such as *The Rhizome of Blackness: A Critical Ethnography of Hip-Hop Culture, Language, Identity and the Politics of Becoming* (New York: Peter Lang, [2014]) and locally in *Post, Rochester Magazine* and several anthologies produced by Writers & Books, including *A Woman's Voice*.

Reenah is the author/producer of three plays: *Office Politics* and *Black Coffee-The Poets Café*, *Hip Shake* (co-authored), two choreopoems and several short films, *Girl Talk*, *Caught Up*, *Gang Related* and *Fam or Fame*. She is also an independent broadcast producer, television personality and radio host. Her performing arts and spoken word education work with urban schools has been represented in two international documentaries:

Why Critical Pedagogy and *Slam High*, sponsored in part by the Paulo and Nita Freire Critical Pedagogy Project at McGill University and University of Rochester Warner School of Education, both about her work as a Teaching Artist in Rochester public schools. Reenah writes and presents regionally with her black women's writing collective, *We All Write*, representing the strong, powerful and often omitted voices of black women. On Thursday nights at 8 p.m. she hosts *The Goddess Hour* on 104.3 FM (live-streamed at wayofm.org).

Strings for Success, winner of the 2019 Essie Calhoun Award for an Organization, began in 2008 with the guiding mission of **positively influencing children's lives through the study of violin**. The program began with 16 students, a collection of donated violins and the belief that all children should have the opportunity to benefit from the transformational power of music. **Strings for Success is a program of The Center for Youth in partnership with Dr. Charles T. Lunsford School 19**. Now in its eleventh year, Strings for Success serves more than 100 students annually and more than 150 instruments have been donated. Strings for Success has touched the lives of hundreds of children and families at School 19, and has provided benefits beyond music, including increasing school attendance, promoting healthy peer relationships, developing a love of learning, and fostering positive goals for the future. Students from Strings for Success are encouraged to audition for RSCD's School of the Arts, the highest performing high school in the district, to continue their musical studies, and to date, 26 students have been accepted. Strings for Success has performed with professional, college and community orchestras, at festivals, at various museums and concert halls, and has traveled to Albany, Boston, New York City, and Washington D.C., to perform.

Dr. Patty Yarmel is the Program Director of Strings for Success. She has a B.A. in psychology from SUNY Buffalo, and master's and doctoral degrees in clinical and developmental psychology from the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle, and completed her training as a clinical psychologist at Yale Medical School. She is a registered Suzuki violin teacher. Dr. Yarmel studied violin through college but her desire to help children and families who were experiencing emotional trauma in their lives led to her degrees in psychology. Dr. Yarmel has decades of experience working in the field of child psychology in Head Start and early intervention programs, and in private practice. Dr. Yarmel has also been committed to helping the Rochester community for many years — volunteering in several RCSD schools including School 45, School 29 and the School Without Walls, and serving on the Education Committee of the Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative. She also co-founded and directed the Summer Reading Fun program at The Center for Youth which has provided tens of thousands of books to children living in Rochester.

Mrs. Gretchen Judge is the Music Director of Strings for Success. She has a B.S. in music education from SUNY Fredonia and a master's degree in music education from Ithaca College. She is a registered Suzuki violin teacher. Mrs. Judge has been teaching music nearly 30 years and she is a string adjudicator for the New York State School Music Association, and she is on the violin faculty of the Green Mountain Suzuki Institute where she teaches violin, viola, beginning orchestra and chamber music. Mrs. Judge teaches violin and viola in her private home studio. Her passion for teaching music has always been to bring high standards of music education and opportunity to students in underserved areas.

The **Essie Calhoun Diversity in the Arts Award** recognizes that art allows for the expression of truths and beliefs, and helps us gain an understanding of one another and our world. It further acknowledges that a mixture of cultures stimulates creativity, the sharing of ideas, and the building of a common collective future, which has always been close to Ms. Calhoun-McDavid's heart.

The Essie Calhoun Diversity in the Arts Award is designed by local artist **Nancy Gong**, one of America's foremost glass artists. Ms. Gong combines the traditional techniques of stained glass craftsmen and stone carvers with her own style of creating texture and painting to craft pieces which are coveted by collectors around the world. The Essie Calhoun Diversity in the Arts Award is a stunning multicolored pyramid of glass.

Attached Photo by imaginé Photography: Artistic Director Mark Cuddy, Essie Calhoun-McDavid, Reenah Golden, Gretchen Judge, Patty Yarmel, Executive Director Christopher Mannelli.

**For further information, please contact:
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GEVA THEATRE CENTER

Founded in 1972, Geva Theatre Center is a not-for-profit, professional theatre company dedicated to creating and producing professional theatre productions, programs and services of a national standard. As Rochester's leading professional theatre, Geva Theatre Center is the most-attended regional theatre in New York State, and one of the 25 most subscribed in the country, serving up to 160,000 patrons annually, including more than 20,000 students.

The 516-seat Elaine P. Wilson Stage is home to a wide variety of performances, from musicals to American and world classics. The 180-seat Ron & Donna Fielding Stage is home to Geva's own series of contemporary drama, comedy and musical theatre; Geva's New Play Reading Series and the Hornets' Nest—an innovative play-reading series facilitating community-wide discussion on controversial topics. The Fielding Stage also hosts visiting companies of both local and international renown.

Geva Theatre Center offers a wide variety of educational, outreach and literary programs, nurturing audiences and artists alike. Since 1995, the organization has been under the artistic direction of Mark Cuddy.

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