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## **Overture Center receives grant from Madison Community Foundation to fund middle school theater program**

**Madison, Wis.** (Jan. 24, 2024) —Overture Center Foundation is the grateful recipient of \$35,000 from Madison Community Foundation (MCF) to pilot a program that will help Madison-area middle schools create high quality musical theater programs and enrich existing programs. Earlier this month, MCF announced \$935,000 in grants to 19 local nonprofits across the Greater Madison area.

“Thanks to this support from MCF, Overture will be able to continue working with middle schools to start and grow their musical theater programs,” said Karra Beach, director of Broadway engagement programs. “This program bridges the gap between our Disney Musicals in Schools elementary school theater program and the Jerrys’ high school musical theater program, ensuring, especially in the Madison Metropolitan School District, students will have opportunities to be part of a musical at each stage in their schooling.”

Beach further noted that participating in robust arts education program can help students develop their sense of self, expand problem-solving skills, exercise empathy and deepen relationships with peers.

**Disney Musicals in Schools:** Working with Disney Theatrical Group, Overture relaunched its Disney Musicals in Schools program in January 2023 after a long break due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Five

Madison-area elementary schools participated in the program: Hawthorne Elementary School, Henderson Elementary School, Leopold Community School, Nuestro Mundo Community School and Mendota Elementary School.

Participating schools receive a 17-week musical theater residency in their first year, led by a team of teaching artists trained by Overture Center and Disney Theatrical Productions, at no cost. Each school also receives performance rights and educational support materials. Support is provided for licensing and materials in the second and third years of participation as well.

New this past year, Overture's musical theater programs included a middle school: Akira Toki Middle School. Overture teaching artists led classes for the drama classroom students as well as students in the afternoon musical theater club, teaching skills students can use on stage and backstage. Students interested in technical theater had the opportunity to visit Overture for a backstage tour of Capitol Theater and Overture Hall and participated in a technical theater career panel.

Disney Musicals in Schools was launched in 2010 in response to Disney Theatrical Group's concern that under-resourced public elementary schools were not afforded equitable access to the arts. After successfully offering the program in New York City schools, Disney Theatrical Group began collaborating with organizations in other communities across the United States. Overture Center is among 18 arts organizations in the world collaborating with Disney Musicals in Schools.

**The Jerrys:** Overture's high school program, the Jerrys, encourages, recognizes and honors excellence in high school musical theater. The program began in the 2009/10 school year with 23 productions within 45 miles of Madison and has since expanded across the state through partnerships with Marcus Center for the Performing Arts and The Grand Theater. Educators and industry professionals review productions at Wisconsin high schools and community theater organizations and provide valuable feedback to students. In its first decade, the Jerry Awards engaged more than 700,000 students, teachers, theater professionals and community members. In 2022/23, the Jerrys program had 500-plus award recipients from 105 productions in 97 communities across the state.

**Madison Community Foundation Impact Grant:** The MCF grant will be used to bridge the gap between the elementary and high school musical theater programs.

"We work very closely with the directors at high schools participating in The Jerrys program, and they noted that many middle schools are not doing musicals," said Beach. "The goal of our program is to establish a tradition of musical theater at middle schools and strengthen the programs at schools who already produce musicals through feedback and workshops. It's about making sure students are able to sing, dance, act and work backstage on musicals from elementary school all the way through to high school and beyond."

The MCF grants, directed to organizations working in critical areas like learning, community development, arts and culture, and the environment, underscore MCF's commitment to supporting the nonprofit organizations in our community working to nurture creativity, increase inclusivity, bolster learning and provide opportunities for our community members. This year's grants acknowledge the importance of art and cultural opportunities to the quality of life in our area. Another recurring theme in this year's grants is growth: helping organizations become better staffed and resourced to grow, pursue ambitious capital campaigns, and scale up key projects in community development, arts and learning.

*Overture Center's Disney Musicals in Schools program is sponsored by The Cap Times Kids Fund and Starion Bank. Overture's Jerry Awards are sponsored by American Girl's Fund for Children, Katie Dowling-Marcus and Ben Marcus, and contributions to Overture Center.*

**OVERTURE CENTER FOR THE ARTS** in Madison, Wis., is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit arts organization that features seven state-of-the-art performance spaces and four galleries where national and international touring artists, nine resident companies and hundreds of local artists engage people in nearly 700,000 educational and artistic experiences each year. With the vision to “create extraordinary experiences through the arts,” Overture’s mission is to support and elevate our community’s creative culture, economy and quality of life through the arts. [overture.org](http://overture.org)

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