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Teddy Zehner makes enduring legacy in Madison's arts community

Madison, Wis. (June 20, 2024) — In the bustling tapestry of Madison's arts scene, Theodora "Teddy" Zehner's unwavering dedication has woven threads of inspiration throughout the community for three decades. In a testament to her enduring legacy, Zehner, who passed away in August 2023, bestowed a transformational gift on three organizations she held dear. With funds totaling about \$2 million, she ensures that Madison Museum of Contemporary Art (MMoCA), Overture Center for the Arts and Forward Theater Company will continue to thrive for years to come.

An artist and passionate supporter of the arts, Zehner adorned Madison's cultural landscape with her talent and passion. She specialized in designing Jacquard fabrics for commercial and residential purposes with expanded technique in printing, dyeing and painting fabrics. As a faculty member at Rhode Island

School of Design and in the fiber and materials studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, she nurtured the next generation of artists and innovators.

Within the heart of Madison's arts community, Zehner was a familiar presence. She regularly attended museum openings, artist lectures, gallery tours, theater performances, donor events, concerts and art fairs. She dedicated herself to MMoCA, Overture Center and Forward Theater Company by serving as a mentor on various boards, committees and volunteer positions.

Zehner's remarkable act of generosity serves as a poignant reminder of the immense impact one individual can have on their community.

Her final estate gift to MMoCA is upwards of \$900,000.

"For over 30 years, Teddy made a home at MMoCA by sharing her warmth, passion and humor with visitors," said Paul Baker Prindle, the Gabriele Haberland Director of MMoCA. "She built a community at openings, lectures, tours and fundraisers, developing deep friendships and lasting connections. Teddy gave so much of herself to the Museum as a docent, trustee, volunteer and President of the Art League. In her passing, she continues to give. With this transformative contribution to MMoCA, she ensures that future generations can find the same sense of connection and community. Her gift allows MMoCA to continue offering free admission, free educational programming and free docent tours to school children."

Zehner served on MMoCA's Board of Trustees and committees and as president of Art League and MMoCA volunteers. She chaired multiple successful fundraisers, including Design MMoCA and Hair Affair. She was also a regular volunteer at Holiday Art Fair and Art Fair on the Square and valued her role as an MMoCA docent, leading educational tours of exhibitions.

"As a renowned fiber artist, Teddy found her home at the museum," said her friend of 20-plus years Vikki Enright. "It was important to her to make connections and build relationships, and she was incredibly generous in her giving."

Friend Katie Dowling-Marcus agrees, "Teddy really believed in the way the arts can bring people together. Most of her deepest friendships were created and maintained through the arts."

Dowling-Marcus and Zehner trained together to be docents, served on MMoCA's board and co-chaired fundraising committees. They loved seeing art together at the museum and attended many shows and events at Overture Center. They often went on "art adventures" to Chicago, Milwaukee and West Bend.

Both friends said Zehner lived her life intentionally, thoughtfully and frugally, then left the money she saved to the organizations that made her feel a part of their family.

Zehner left upwards of \$900,000 to Overture Center, which has been allocated to the organization's endowment.

"Teddy was practical in her philanthropy," said Emily Gruenewald, Overture's Chief Development Officer. "She understood that the things organizations need most to do their best work are often overlooked – like funding building improvements or equipment. She'd ask me 'What capital projects are planned?' and she'd send a check to help. It's fitting that Teddy designated her gift to the Overture Capital Endowment, which will allow Overture to reinvest in the building, mechanical systems and

equipment that are critical to ensuring the center remains state of the art for all the artistry that occurs here. I like to think that this is her way of continuing to be a part of the performances she loved so much. Teddy was a valued friend to many of us at Overture; it is an honor to be a part of her legacy."

Forward Theater Company received \$50,000 from Zehner's final estate.

"Teddy was a long-time and deeply beloved member of Forward's audience," said Forward Theater Company Artistic Director Jen Uphoff Gray. "She was also a committed and enthusiastic volunteer, and we miss her dearly. Her bequest has been directed to our Future Forward Endowment, where it is being matched dollar-for-dollar by the Pleasant T. Rowland Foundation. Teddy's generous support ensures that the contemporary, thought-provoking and professional theater that she so loved continues to flourish in Madison."

Those lucky to count themselves among Teddy's inner circle know that she had a way of making each friend feel valued and cherished. She was always generous with her time and fiercely loyal, which is evidenced in her final planned gift to these organizations.

"Anyone in Teddy's presence felt drawn in by her magnetic charm and sense of humor. She will be remembered for her warm and gregarious nature, hilarious stories, quick wit and style," said Dowling-Marcus. "Teddy wanted to inspire others by setting an example, giving back to the arts as a volunteer and donor."

Enright said, "These are the organizations Teddy loved most, and this is how she continues to give back even when she is gone."

Zehner's estate gifts are a testament to her enduring love for the arts and her desire to support the cultural vibrancy of our community. Her legacy lives on in the countless individuals whose lives she touched, the organizations she championed and the spirit of generosity she embodied.

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. Overture's mission is to support and elevate our community's creative culture, economy and quality of life through the arts. overture.org

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