

WINNERS OF 2011 STARS IN THE ARTS AWARDS ANNOUNCED

Naples, Florida (December 6, 2010) - The United Arts Council of Collier County has announced that five leaders in the arts community have been selected to receive the prestigious 2011 *Stars in the Arts* awards. Winners are **Kristen Coury, Mark Danni, Donna Fiala, Naples Music Club** and **Opera Naples**.

The United Arts Council initiated the *Stars in the Arts* program six years ago to recognize individuals and organizations for leadership in the arts. Nominations are accepted from the public, and this year 53 nominations were received – the largest number ever. A selection committee that consists of past *Stars in the Arts* winners and leaders in the arts community review applications. They carefully assess credentials and rate each nominee based on their contributions to our arts community.

Council president, Mally Khorasantchi points out, “It is important to note that these awards are really from the community. The public nominates worthy candidates, and nominees are evaluated by their peers. This year’s winners are certainly deserving of this recognition.”

Awards will be presented to the winners at a luncheon at the Naples Grande Resort on Friday, March 4. Information about the event is available by calling 263-8242 or visiting the United Arts Council’s website at: www.CollierArts.com.

The 2011 winners come from various arts disciplines, including theatre, music, government and education.

Kristen Coury is the founder and Artistic Director of Gulfshore Playhouse. For over six years, she has been a passionate advocate of professional local theatre and educational opportunities. Starting from scratch, she has built Gulfshore Playhouse into a respected force in the local arts community. Coury has enjoyed a successful career as a director and producer both in New York and Naples. She has directed feature films and theatre and produced a music CD. She has worked for Walt Disney Theatrical Productions, Andrew Lloyd Webber’s Company and London’s Shakespeare Company. Coury was named one of the “40 Under 40” list by Gulfshore Life magazine and is listed in “Who’s Who of American Women.”

Mark Danni is a director, musician and conductor – however, he is first and foremost a teacher. Danni teaches drama at The Community School of Naples and is the first teacher to receive a *Stars in the Arts* award. In addition to teaching, he serves as Director of Performing Arts at the school. He has taught and mentored many talented students, including *American Idol* finalist, Paige Miles. Danni is also the Founding Artistic Director of TheatreZone, a professional Equity theatre company, and is an enthusiastic champion for local theatre. His career started in New York City as a drummer on Broadway (*Chicago, Grant Hotel, Miss Saigon*). Danni was the conductor for the national tour of *Les Miserables*. He continues to tour as a conductor and drummer, and has played with the Naples Philharmonic Orchestra.

Donna Fiala is a Collier County Commissioner and a long-time advocate for the arts. She was one of the founders of the Bayshore Arts group, which set up a gallery there as revitalization of the area began. The group now includes the performing arts and has expanded its vision to create

a cultural center in the Bayshore area. Fiala was the inspiration behind pursuing the “Cultural District” designation with the Bayshore CRA. She is serving as Honorary Chair of the Bayshore Festival of the Arts this year. Fiala was one of the key supporters of the 2002 “Cultural Assessment” project, the only comprehensive research into the impact of the arts in the county. Funding was secured for the project through her leadership, and its results still guide cultural planning in the county today. Fiala is an ex-officio board member for the United Arts Council, and devotes her time to many other civic and community organizations.

The **Naples Music Club**, founded 45 years ago, continues to fulfill its mission of supporting music education and performance. The Club presents high quality musical events for a variety of audiences and enables its members to develop their talents. They also provide awards and scholarships to local music students and collaborate with other local music organizations. Outreach programs include support of FGCU’s Music School; organizing student recitals to provide public performance opportunities; providing seminars and master classes; and arranging for mentors for student musicians. Since 1970, they have awarded \$420,000 in scholarship money to over 600 promising middle and high school music students. They are a past recipient of Education Foundation’s “Outstanding Partner in Education” award.

For five seasons, **Opera Naples** has thrilled audiences as Southwest Florida’s only professional opera company. Every year they produce operas in a variety of styles and engage the nation’s finest singing actors, stage directors and guest conductors for principal roles, while encouraging talented local performers. Their mission includes being “an integral part of the community, further enriching local artistic culture, drawing from the community in order to give back to it.” Community education programs include the “Young Artists” and “Student Apprentice” programs, along with in-school mini-performances. They offer free student matinees, and at least one family-friendly opera, sung in English, every season at affordable prices.

Nominations are now being accepted for the 2012 *Stars in the Arts* awards. Nomination forms are available online at: www.CollierArts.com.

Past *Stars in the Arts* award recipients have been: Philharmonic Center for the Arts, Classic Chamber Concerts, Naples Art Association, Art League of Marco Island, Naples Players, Paradise Coastmen Barbershop Chorus, Myra Daniels, Patty & Jay Baker, Harriet Heithaus, Dr. Erich Kunzel, Dolph von Arx, Clyde Butcher, Olga Hirshhorn, Andrea Clark Brown, Delores & John Sorey, Charlie Horn, Paul Arsenault, Bill Meek, Jonathan Green, Mary Margaret Gruszka, Joel Banow, Dr. Ron Bowman, Betsy & Al Harris, Jim Rideoutte, Kathy Spalding, Dr. Ron Doiron, Ted Tobye, Elaine Vreenegoor, Bette Young, Toby Blumenthal & Bert Phillips, Peg Longstreth, & student *Star* Kylan Moran.

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