Donald Hicken, Baltimore School for the Arts Theater Department Head, to Retire from School After 36 Years

Tony Award Finalist for Excellence in Theatre Education is example of an educator dedicated to the belief “the arts change kids' lives”

(Baltimore, Md.) -- Baltimore School for Arts (BSA) announced today that long-time head of the theater department, Donald Hicken, would be retiring at academic year-end.

Hicken has been at the school from before day one as a member of the planning team when the BSA was just an idea. Over the years, he has taught and influenced hundreds of students including Jada Pinkett Smith, Josh Charles, Shalita Grant, Tupac Shakur, Lance Coadie Williams and Tracie Thoms.

"Donald has life-changing impact on all of the students he teaches. They learn the power of sustained effort and the responsibility of empathy. Beyond that, he has shaped BSA to be the unique, powerful and nurturing place that it is today. His students and this school are both an awesome legacy of his humane wisdom," said Chris Ford, BSA's Director and Hicken's longtime colleague at BSA.

Earlier this year, Hicken was recognized as a finalist for the first-ever Tony Award for Excellence in Theatre Education, a special honor that recognizes K-12 theatre educators in the U.S. who have demonstrated monumental impact on the lives of students and who embody the highest standards of the profession. More than 4,000 educators across 47 states were nominated for the inaugural award and just three received particular distinction.

In her letter supporting Hicken's nomination, Tony-nominee and BSA alumna Shalita Grant said, "Sometimes I look at my life, and I think, 'wow, I've come so far.' But I cry whenever I ask myself this question: Where would I be if Donald had said no? It breaks my heart when I think about how my life would have turned out. I'm certain I wouldn't have attended Juilliard. My life and the students who've graduated the theater program all have BSA and Donald to
thank. Donald has changed my life and singlehandedly put me on the path to
be the woman I am today."

At BSA, Hicken’s productions include: Romeo and Juliet, Lysistrata, The
Rimers of Eldridge, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Marat/Sade, Curse of the
Starving Class, Yerma, The Caucasian Chalk Circle, The Lady From Maxim’s, his
own adaptation of The Wind in the Willows, A Chekov Sampler, Ionescorama
(an evening of one-act plays by Eugene Ionesco), the world premiere of Chalk
by Al Letson (co-commissioned with the Baltimore Theatre Project) and Our
Town. In 2009 he received the League Educator Apple Award from The
Broadway League.

In 2006, Hicken founded an international exchange program, unique for a
public city school. In its 10th year, the program brings acting students from
England to BSA for a week in October where they begin work on a play with
their American counterparts. BSA’s senior acting ensemble then goes to the U.K.
(currently the partnership is with Showdown Theatre Arts) in the spring when
rehearsals are continued and a full production is staged. The BSA students, most
of whom have never traveled abroad, also have the opportunity to visit London
theatres and other sites.

The BSA community of alumni and friends will have the opportunity to
honor and celebrate Hicken at gatherings in California and New York this
coming winter, as well as at a BSA event in mid-June. The school is launching a
national search for Hicken’s replacement.

Baltimore School for the Arts is a nationally recognized public arts high
school that provides its students with intensive pre-professional training in the arts
in conjunction with a rigorous academic curriculum. BSA graduates go on to the
most selective arts and university programs nationwide and achieve
prominence in theater, film, music, dance and visual arts. Additionally, BSA’s
highly acclaimed TWIGS program offers free after-school arts instruction to 750
city elementary and middle school children from schools across Baltimore, as
well as other outreach initiatives to thousands more. Founded in 1979, the school
is an integral and vibrant part of Baltimore’s educational and cultural
communities.

_Baltimore School for the Arts, where the arts change kids’ lives._

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