



# League of Historic American Theatres

PRESS RELEASE

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## CHICAGO'S AUDITORIUM THEATRE HONORED AT LEAGUE OF HISTORIC AMERICAN THEATRES 2019 NATIONAL CONFERENCE IN PHILADELPHIA

*Michigan Theater's Russ Collins also honored for his  
extraordinary contributions to the field*

**Philadelphia, PA (July 14, 2019)** – The League of Historic American Theatres (LHAT), the nation's leading historic theatre advocate, recognized outstanding achievement within the industry when it announced that Chicago's **Auditorium Theatre** is the 2019 Outstanding Historic Theatre in America. Additionally, **Russ Collins** with the Michigan Theater in Ann Arbor was given the 2019 Outstanding Individual Contribution Award.

The Auditorium Theatre took home the 2019 Outstanding Historic Theatre Award during the League's Annual Conference, the largest gathering of historic theatre professionals in the nation. The conference took place in downtown Philadelphia and was attended by over 330 historic theatre operators and service providers from across North America and the United Kingdom.

*"The Historic Auditorium stood out among an impressive list of nominations to claim the award this year,"* said **Ken Stein**, LHAT President and CEO, as he presented the award to Auditorium's Interim CEO **Rachel Freund**. *"Considering it is one of the great historic preservation projects in the nation, I am surprised it has taken us this long to bestow this award on the Auditorium,"* Stein continued. The Outstanding Historic Theatre Award is given each year by LHAT to a historic theatre that has demonstrated excellence in community impact, quality of programs and services, and quality of physical restoration.

The Auditorium Theatre, an Illinois not-for-profit organization, located at Roosevelt University, is committed to presenting the finest in international, cultural, community, and educational programming to Chicago. It is both a National Historic Landmark and a designated Chicago Landmark with a seating capacity of 3,900.

The theatre is internationally known for its perfect acoustics, innovative architecture, and stunning sightlines. The 1960s restoration of the Auditorium Theatre is often considered

the cultural event of that decade in Chicago, and the first large-scale historic preservation project in America. More recent work has included the installation of LED lighting adhering to the color temperature of the building as it would have appeared at the time of its unveiling, restoration of original Louis Sullivan stencils in the second floor Dress Circle lobby, and replacement of drapery and carpeting. The theatre brings in performers and speakers from around the world – in the past, the Auditorium hosted luminaries from Booker T. Washington to the Ziegfeld Follies to Diaghilev’s Ballet Russes, and was the original home of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. In recent years, the Auditorium has hosted Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater to Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg to Neil Young.

The theatre also offers extensive community engagement programs to schools and community organizations across Chicago, most notably through its ADMIT ONE initiative, which provides performance tickets, transportation, and workshops to community groups at no cost.

#### LHAT OUTSTANDING INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTION AWARD

The Outstanding Individual Contribution Award was given to Russ Collins, the Executive Director of the Michigan Theater Foundation in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Given annually, this award recognizes an individual who demonstrates vision, dedication, selflessness and excellence through his or her contribution to historic theatres and their communities. Collins was responsible for the restoration/rehabilitation and now, the daily operation of the State Theatre, a 1940s Cinema Style theater and the Michigan Theater, a 1920s Movie Palace. Beginning his tenure in 1982, Collins has overseen multiple capital campaigns that led to the award-winning restoration of the Michigan Theater (receiving LHAT’s Outstanding Historic Theatre in America award, 2006) and more recently the adaptive reuse/historically sensitive renovation of the State Theatre. Today both venues are open 365 days a year and host over 350,000 patrons annually.

When asked about the nomination, **Stephanie Silverman**, LHAT’s Board Chair and Executive Director of the Belcourt Theatre in Nashville said, *“Russ’ unparalleled commitment to protecting Ann Arbor’s historic theatres, building them into iconic cultural centers in the heart of one of America’s most vibrant college communities, and using those lessons learned to help strengthen a whole field of art houses makes him one of the best and most valuable theatre operators working today.”*

Russ Collins is a not-for-profit arts administrator with an entrepreneurial approach to management. As a University of Michigan graduate student, he established a successful theatrical production and presentation company in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Collins has grown the Michigan Theater Foundation into an internationally recognized community-based, mission-driven theater preservation organization and exemplary presenter of diverse arts programs.

*“Russ is almost as iconic within the League as many of our theatre marqueees are in their communities,”* exclaimed Ken Stein during the ceremony which was attended by film and

theatre peers from across the nation. *“He is just one of those people who you can call on at any time for advice and know that you are going to get the right answer at the right time.”* Stein was quick to add, *“He’s also good for a laugh when you need that too.”*

In addition to taking on leadership roles within the LHAT throughout most of its existence, in 2008, Collins founded the Art House Convergence (AHC) , in association with the Sundance Film Festival. Art House Convergence is a professional association dedicated to advancing excellence and sustainability in community-based, mission-driven cinemas. Interestingly, Collins’s experience with LHAT inspired his vision for the Art House Convergence, that of a national organization serving a specialized group of community-based, mission-driven arts institutions.

Collins was chosen to receive the LHAT Outstanding Individual Contribution award because of his leadership and vision, his ability to marshal resources, his skill in building consensus, and his commitment to mission and community service. He has had an immeasurable impact on the preservation and operation of the Michigan and State Theaters, on the vitality of Ann Arbor’s downtown, as well as on the advancement of historic theaters nationally and the promotion of community-based, mission-driven cinema exhibition around the world.

#### ABOUT THE LEAGUE OF HISTORIC AMERICAN THEATRES

The League's annual conference is the largest annual gathering of historic theatre professionals, community leaders, and service providers and suppliers, attracting participants from across the U.S., as well as Canada and the United Kingdom, for idea sharing and network building. Professionals, volunteers and devotees join together for four days of networking and peer information exchange, tools & techniques sessions, and tours of local historic theatres, plus events, banquets and receptions.

By defining our field, creating a shared vocabulary and identifying best practices, the educational components of the League's annual conference strengthen efforts to sustain historic theatres of various sizes, operating structures and programming philosophies. During theatre tours, docents emphasize how each venue has dealt with the specific challenges of sustaining their operations to serve their communities, now and in the future. The conference takes place in different locations across North America each year.

For additional information, contact Ken Stein, LHAT President and CEO, at [kstein@lhat.org](mailto:kstein@lhat.org)

You can find more information online on the award and LHAT at [lhat.org](http://lhat.org).

Supportive photography available upon request.

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