in·spired

1: filled with the urge or ability to do or feel something creative

2: to create a positive feeling in a person

3: of extraordinary quality, as if arising from some external creative impulse

for you, by you

report to the community 2015
Dear Friend of the Arts Center:

While Life, Look and The Saturday Evening Post may be fond memories, I invite you to page through the Arts Center’s homage to those weeklies from days gone by: our annual Report to the Community, a glossy magazine-ish retrospective of 2015, an important and memorable year in our young history.

Thanks to your support and advocacy, and the 24/7 efforts of our talented and dedicated family of arts and education professionals, NJPAC is cooking on all burners. The payoff on our mission and business has been marvelous.

While our financial, attendance and fundraising results were among the best we’ve posted in many seasons, I am especially pleased with how the Arts Center has utilized its position as the State’s anchor cultural institution to increase our role as a leader in creative arts learning and community engagement, both on and off campus.

We’ve done this in a variety of innovative ways:

We are providing the Drift in Your Community early childhood music education program, designed for 2- to 6-year-olds and their parents and caregivers, throughout the five wards of Newark. This effective and fun program gives toddlers their first crack at music-making, while simultaneously engaging the caring adults in their lives.

We partnered with the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers-Newark, WBGO and Congregation Ahavas Sholom in Newark to produce a series of concerts and conversations, as well as an exhibition at the temple’s Jewish Museum of New Jersey, on the relationship between African Americans and Jews, experienced through the lens of jazz.

NJPAC Stage Exchange and Jersey Moves! Festival of Dance are performance programs that allow NJPAC to turn up the volume on deserving theater and dance companies from throughout the State: a chance for creative non-profit companies to produce new work for themselves, and then have the chance to make new friends and fans by performing it in our theaters. It’s a win-win-win: for them, for us, and for audiences.

I’m proud that we create new and exciting content. The Hip Hop Nutcracker, which merged hip-hop, rap and Tchaikovsky, is an NJPAC property that sold out Prudential Hall, played 11 cities nationwide, then toured Russia under the auspices of the State Department. Very cool.

Next season, we’ll introduce Carefree, a collaboration with RKO Pictures, which provides a new take on the songs and dances of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. Look for it at NJPAC in November, and touring nationally after that.

Enjoy this Report to the Community. It is a snapshot of the vitality, creativity and positive activity that I am thrilled to experience every day on the job. And do share with me your good ideas and thoughts. As I hope you know by now, everybody at NJPAC is wide open to what’s next. You’re a valued stakeholder in our future, and we’re all ears.

With gratitude and affection,

John Schreiber

President and Chief Executive Officer

To NJPAC Friends and Supporters:

Your New Jersey Performing Arts Center was built to be many things to many people—concert hall, center of education, community-gathering place—but metaphorically it acts as a lighthouse.

The NJPAC campus and stages glowed with high-wattage events 62% of all of the days in FY15—that’s a 9% increase over the previous year—attracting more than 386,000 audience members to its doors.

This beacon doesn’t shine from some remote place. NJPAC is ambitiously engaged with the broader community through dynamic collaborations that epitomize the spirit of its mission and leadership. In these pages you’ll find many examples of partnerships that conjured remarkable experiences, from a jazz exhibit and dramatic play readings to free concerts and a traveling book series for children.

As NJPAC continues to intensify its momentum as an arts innovator and champion for the resurgence of the City of Newark, this nonprofit institution relies mightily on the generosity and forward-thinking ideas of its benefactors.

Many people are surprised to learn that only 60% of the overall operating budget is covered by earned business income (for example, ticket revenue and parking), while contributions and endowment represent 40%.

A terrifically proactive base of donors, members and corporate sponsors enables NJPAC to not only present more than 400 events each year, but to fund scholarships for promising young performers in need. They turn hopes into reality by placing students in studios with masters like bassist Christian McBride or providing musical instruments and instruction to underserved communities.

NJPAC’s radiance is clearly visible as you navigate this annual report. You’ll detect it in photos of laughing kids and artists of international stature behind-the-scenes stories about visiting dignitaries and loyal staffies… comments from people inspired by their connection to the Arts Center. This was the year that NJPAC shared hands and resources with Newark in anticipation of a citywide, 350th anniversary celebration; launched a U.S.-to-Russia tour for its astounding Hip Hop Nutcracker; and galvanized Disney to choose NJPAC and students in Greater Newark as one in a handful of outputs in the nation for the Disney-Musicals in Schools program.

Our beginnings were just a flicker of a notion that an urban center for the arts would bring immeasurable change for the good to the State. As NJPAC continues to touch more and more lives through cultural encounters, I know an even brighter future awaits us.

Sincerely,

John R. Strangfeld

Chair, Board of Directors
Jazz Connections
An unlikely alliance of very diverse institutions, organizations and congregations—all united by a passion for jazz—rallied support for the exhibit Jazz, Jews, and African Americans: Cultural Intersections in Newark and Beyond at the Jewish Museum of New Jersey at Congregation Ahavas Sholom in Newark. Co-produced by the museum, NJPAC, the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers-Newark, and WBGO Jazz 88.3FM, the consortium also included five houses of worship along Newark’s Broadway, New Jersey City University in Jersey City and the Newark Arts Council.

“This is a shining example of how the arts and faith-based groups can partner in a celebration of their mutual love of jazz,” said Donna Walker-Kuhne, Vice President of Community Engagement.

On display from October 15, 2015 – January 31, 2016, the exhibit chronicled the successful and sometimes contentious relationships between black and Jewish jazzmakers through photos and text, journeying from the 1920s to the present. Visitors packed the opening reception to survey more than 50 narrative panels and listen to the music of jazz violinist Aaron Weinstein & Trio.

Throughout the engagement of Jazz, Jews, and African Americans, a slate of free activities and events included screenings, live performances, a panel discussion, and a Romare Bearden collage workshop. The scheduling of the exhibition dovetailed neatly with the TD James Moody Jazz Festival and the Newark Celebration 350 Family Fun Festival and the Newark Arts Council’s Open Doors Citywide Arts Festival.
Sirius-ly Funny

By now, the ah-mahzing Seth Rudetsky—as he’s known to New York theater cognoscenti—probably has his own entry badge to the building. The SiriusXM Broadway host has been the musical director for two Spotlight Galas, and interviewed and accompanied Christine Ebersole on piano for American Songbook at NJPAC.

A multi-talented hyphenate (actor-singer-pianist-activist-author-humorist/etc.), Rudetsky also channels his energy into the Department of Arts Education, for which he has become a vocal advocate of aspiring vocalists. He coached younger students through the complicated lyrics of a Stephen Sondheim medley, which was a hit of this year’s Spotlight Gala.

Tour de Force

“This is 2,700 more people than I thought would be here,” wondered feature film director J.J. Abrams as he surveyed a packed, 2,800-seat Prudential Hall for the Montclair Film Festival’s annual fundraiser at NJPAC.

“C’mon, this is New Jersey! They all show up” gleefully sniped his interviewer, Late Show host Stephen Colbert.

Colbert was back for another brisk go-round with a subject he finds “most amazing”: This time it was the multiple Emmy-winning director, who had just caught the red-eye after completing the mix for Star Wars: The Force Awakens. The founder and chief of the production company Bad Robot, Abrams joined Colbert for a this-is-your-life journey through his career as a writer, creator and/or director of smashes like Lost and Felicity on TV and Star Trek, Mission Impossible 3 and Super 8 on the big screen.

Among the evening’s funniest revelations: In late ‘80s Chicago, Colbert had an unsuccessful audition for Taking Care of Business (a film co-written by Abrams, then titled Filofax). “Slusho,” an imaginary slushie drink, almost always makes a cameo in Abrams’ films (so does R2-D2). The filmmaker’s favorite Star Wars alien is Kardue’sai’Malloc from the Mos Eisley Cantina. (Thank you, man on the aisle, for reminding him of the character’s name.)

And, by the way, this was the first time Abrams had watched a screening of his Star Wars trailer before an audience—which was happier than a wookie in a fur vault.

All the Right Notes

It’s only a year old but already making enough noise to attract everyone’s attention: Arts Education’s Orff early-childhood music program reached capacity enrollment at Newark’s South Ward Community Center in the spring and was back by popular demand in the fall. The pilot launch put xylophones, tambourines and other small percussion instruments in the hands of eager tots, who explored music-making, movement and storytelling under the guidance of a teaching artist.

The South Ward Community Center is one of nine buildings designated as “Centers of Hope” by Newark Mayor Ras J. Baraka to expand cultural and educational programs for young people.

Jacques Lacombe and NJSO meet Branford Marsalis

The NJSO and Music Director Jacques Lacombe kicked off the 2015–16 season with an opening-weekend program featuring saxophonist Branford Marsalis. Q-on-Stage reported: “This was a thoroughly satisfying evening whose highest praise is it leaves us hungry for what the new season holds.”

Extraordinary Moments

1: finding pleasant things that are not looked for
2: an aptitude for making desirable discoveries by accident
3: luck or good fortune
NJPAC Alumnus in Hamilton

“I’ve done most of my growing as an artist at the PAC,” says former Arts Education student Okieriete (“Oak”) Onaodowan, (far left), who later became a Teaching Assistant in the Summer Youth Performance Workshop (now the Young Artist Summer Intensive). If you want to see what he’s been up to recently, just try to get a ticket to Broadway’s hip-hop juggernaut, Hamilton, in which he portrays President James Madison and Hercules Mulligan. Powerful in size, voice, talent and heart, “Oak” was a member of the original Hamilton cast during its premiere engagement at The Public Theater and also appeared on Broadway in Rocky and Cyrano de Bergerac.

Newark Turns 350

The year 2016 marks the 350th anniversary of the founding of the City of Newark, but the party had an early start time. Newark Celebration 350 (NC350), an alliance that NJPAC President and CEO John Schreiber serves as Programming Chair, metaphorically lit the candles in October with a free Family Fun Festival in scenic Military Park. In the weeks prior to that, Schreiber, NC350 Chair Junius Williams and Executive Director John Johnson Jr. together visited each of the city’s wards to brainstorm with residents and workers on ways to best honor the occasion. Newark Mayor Ras J. Baraka announced the first slate of 100-plus events soon afterward at a City Hall press conference: everything from parades, festivals and performances to a “$3.50 for 350” promotion at NJPAC and free tickets to Devils games at Prudential Center. She may be three and a half centuries old, but the Dowager of Essex is still the younger sibling of New York (1664) and Boston (1630).

Cinema Scores

The NJSO performed the live orchestral scores to two films at special screenings in 2015: Singin’ in the Rain in February and Home Alone in December. Manhattan Digest writes of the former that the NJSO “has not only reminded us how fun a night of light-hearted screen music can be and what an absolutely joy-filled film Singin’ in the Rain is; they’ve also reminded us that the power of live symphonic music—when played to this level of excellence—is a vital treasure.” Cinema Retro writes of the latter: “Not only do these shows allow audiences to relish the thrill of hearing a live orchestra but it also exposes many people to the merits of worthy movies that they may not have been familiar with... preceded by the NJSO’s welcome practice of encouraging audience members to show up an hour early for [pre-concert festivities].”

More Preludes

At NJPAC, the refrain “Let’s all go to the lobby” is sound advice for music lovers. Preludes concerts, held in Prudential Hall lobby before curtain at select performances, are like appetizers to patrons who want to keep an ear out for up-and-coming talent. Although the lobby is a familiar, nearly “stage” for students in Wells Fargo Jazz for Teens and the Brick City Jazz Orchestra, it is a showcase for other ensembles in New Jersey. This year they included the student orchestra of Elisabeth Morrow School in Englewood, which performed prior to André Watts’ concert in May, and the TeenTown Jazz Big Band of the JCC Thurnauer School of Music in Tenafly, which warmed up the crowd before the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra performance in November.
The search committee to find a new executive director for the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers-Newark, co-chaired by NJPAC CEO John Schreiber, had finger-snapping good news in the spring, when Wayne Winborne was named to the post. The former Vice President for Business Diversity Outreach at Prudential Financial wasted no time in fostering new partnerships with the Arts Center. The institute screened rare archival footage of Billie Holiday as one of the programs it contributed as a first-time partner to NJPAC’s Day of Swing during the TD James Moody Jazz Festival. And it took a lead role in curating and creating the exhibit Jazz, Jews and African Americans: Cultural Intersections in Newark and Beyond with NJPAC at the Jewish Museum of New Jersey. Winborne, who now supervises the largest jazz library and archive in the country, was welcomed during a November 11 reception at the Arts Center.

Great Outdoors

The third annual Family Fair at Theater Square, held on July 25, was the place where creative types of all generations got in touch with their inner dancer/artist/musician/Batman. Besides an appearance by the Caped Crusader himself, a new attraction this year was a tented area for classes—where you could find Jennifer Weber, choreographer of The Hip Hop Nutcracker, busting moves with the kids or Richard Reiter leading a drum circle. Mainstage performances spanned Bollywood dance with Mystic India to West African dance with Umoja Dance Company, with lots of jazz and world music in between. Inside NJPAC’s doors, grown-ups discovered deep discounts at the box office for little ones to experience live theater on a return visit.

Jazz Jam Sessions

Nothing beats a Jazz Jam Session like a series of Jazz Jam Sessions—especially when they’re free! When the Jazz Advisory Committee of NJPAC’s Advisory Council came up with the idea of presenting one session, music fans and instrumentalist drop-ins couldn’t get enough. Committee member James Austin, Jr., an ace pianist, curates and leads the sessions with a strong assist from Wells Fargo Jazz for Teens students and faculty. They’ve bebopped around, from Paramus and Jersey City to Duke’s Southern Table in Newark and our own NICD Kitchen + Bar, following Tony Bennett’s performance.

Extraordinary Moments

New Jazzman Wayne Winborne
Ticket buyers had more of an opportunity to “shop by genre”: Movie-goers could choose from a trio of screening-conversations, and fans of astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson were offered two enlightening events on different topics. Those who couldn’t wait for the Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival’s 2016 return attended special programs and readings that kept the verses flowing in March, April and May. In addition to many performances devoted to standards, American Songbook at NJPAC was back for Season Three with two tapings for public television, starring looky-here names from Broadway and cabaret like Stephen Schwartz and Christine Ebersole.

Similarly, dance companies represented various corners of the globe, from Russian productions of classical ballets and AXIS Dance Company, composed of differently abled performers, to Lula Washington Dance Theatre from the West Coast and Ballet Folkórico de México. Dance Theatre of Harlem and Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater made return visits for Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mother’s Day weekends, respectively. The Jersey Moves! Festival of Dance and Jersey (New) Moves! (for emerging choreographers) showcased the best of the Garden State’s diverse ensembles.

On NJPAC’s stages, internationally recognized orchestras, Broadway stars, top comedians and a world of dance were experienced by an estimated 380,000-plus people who applauded a performance during the year.

When staging a new work like The Hip Hop Nutcracker, every department keeps on its toes

by Valerie Sudol

When the lights dim and the curtain goes up, audiences expect a grand harmony of sets, costumes, lighting, music and performance, all working together to create a unified experience. That’s the magic of great theater.

There’s an even more complex collaboration that goes on behind the scenes before any new show debuts. If an arts center makes the theatrical production its own—commissioning, producing, presenting and touring—it—the full weight of the institution is cast behind making the project a success. This, too, is a kind of performance art, requiring careful and balanced coordination of staff, facilities and resources.

When NJPAC decided to back a brash new version of a venerable holiday classic, The Hip Hop Nutcracker, a tightly organized strategy was set in motion. Here’s the backstory...

Opening acts

Choreographer Jennifer Weber had already made a name for herself in an unconventional role—director of a hip-hop dance troupe, the Brooklyn-based Decadance/theatre, bringing a gritty street art to the proscenium stage. After successful seasons in New York City, a 2012 Bessie (New York Dance and Performance Award) for “Outstanding Emerging Choreographer,” and national and international tours, Weber was ready for a new challenge.

The spark was lit in 2013 at United Palace of Cultural Arts (UPCA) in Manhattan’s Washington Heights neighborhood, where Executive Director Mike Feitelson, discussing a commission for Weber, said four fateful words: “What about a Nutcracker?”

“I knew about The Nutcracker, but I didn’t know it, didn’t grow up on it—so for me, it was all new,” Weber says. “I did think it might be shifted to a contemporary urban setting and given a new spin.”

In Weber and Feitelson’s sneaker-shod version, set in New York City, the Nutcracker is a chestnut seller, the fiendish mouse army is a street gang and the journey to the Land of Snow is an interlude aséro travel to the ’80s-vintage “Sweets” nightclub. Yes, there is a growing Christmas tree, a snowflake waltz, a conjuring Drosselmeyer. And yes, the entire Tchaikovsky score is used, with some sampled and remixed bits to mark scenic changes and showcase legendary rap artist Kurtis Blow, backed by electric violin.

“There are parallels between hip-hop and ballet. Both are very much about gesture, storytelling and competitive bravado. Head spins or fouettés, it’s the same drive to outdo. After we created a short sample, I thought ‘This could work!’”

Meanwhile, Andy Donald, NJPAC’s Producer of Artistic Development and Community Programming, caught wind of Weber’s project and saw the possibilities.

“What we had here was a popular sell for a range of audiences—families, young people, dance people, hip-hop and classical music audiences,” Donald recalls. “We didn’t yet have an evergreen holiday show unique to us as an urban arts center. By becoming co-commissioners (with United Palace), I felt this was something we could produce and send out into the world under our banner.”

The Hip Hop Nutcracker had its world premiere in 2014 in Washington Heights and Newark and a new holiday staple (“a classic rebooted”) was launched.

Backstage logistics

On board as a co-producer, Donald had some suggestions for the show’s second season, mainly having to do with strengthening links to the traditional Nutcracker in costumes, scenic design and storytelling. Audiences would be intrigued “by recognizing the old and seeing how we twist it into something new,” he told Weber.

“These details help clue the audience in,” Weber agrees. “At the premiere, we had mice in the audience with small ears. This season they’re in baseball caps with large ears you can’t miss.”

In more upgrades, the video sets have been refined to deftly picture the narratives. Scenes. Six of the 11 original cast members were replaced this season in Weber’s quest to identify hip-hoppers who can make the leap from a club setting to a big stage.

“With a stable and creative institution as a partner, so much is possible,” says Weber. “The show just gets better and better”

Every theatrical production is also a hard-headed economic venture, a balance of profit and expense. The buck stops at the desk of NJPAC’s Chris Moses, Senior Director of Production, who is charged with getting the show onstage—on time, on budget and in top form.

“The pendulum swings between art and money,” Moses says. “We want the show to look fantastic, but even when we’re co-producers, we don’t bend the rules. If we can’t make it on the income side, we have to make it up on the expense side.”

Moses’ department is responsible for getting productions loaded in and out, for coordinating sound and light teams, assigning stagehands, running technical rehearsals and performances and managing backstage amenities. Are the dressing rooms clean? Do performers have the food they’ve specified? Moses insists on detailed note-keeping, building an institutional memory that never forgets.

He’s serious about the in-house economic impact of each show, wanting every one to be a plus for his NJPAC community. On average, that community runs to 300 people, including house managers, backstage help, parking attendants, housekeeping staff, kitchen and restaurant workers, ushers and security personnel.

“This is not just about making art and sustaining the arts center,” Moses says. “It’s about sustaining our people and keeping them in work.”

(continued next page)
Another way to build those all-important patron relationships is to take the cause beyond the walls of NJPAC. Donna Walker-Kuhne, NJPAC’s Vice President of Community Engagement, understands the task.

“We work at building a local constituency of every race, ethnicity, geography and class because we really believe the arts are for everyone,” says Walker-Kuhne. “In the case of dance, many people don’t know much about it, so we demystify it with free dance classes in community venues, taking it where people live.”

Through advisory councils, newsletters and social media, her efforts build and strengthen support for stage performances of every kind. The idea, she says, is to make everyone feel welcome.

This philosophy is front and center from the moment patrons approach NJPAC to the moment they step across the threshold, “Moments are the magic of the house,” said Lauren Vivenzio, Manager of Operations, take Lauren Vivenzio. “It’s our secret weapon.”

“We handle the ushers, lobby activity, including merchandising, the membership table, the social media lounge—everything audience members experience from the moment they step across the threshold,” says Jones. “Are there enough slots for wheelchair chairs? Enough ushers? Have repairs been made and housekeeping chores done? It’s a big jigsaw puzzle we tackle every day.”

What Jones plans and supervises, Vivenzio executes, managing logistical support for often overlapping events. On December 19, when The Hip Hop Nutcracker was booked, there were also performances by the Forces of Nature Dance Theatre, a Kwanzaa marketplace in the lobby, a children’s festival at the adjacent Center for Arts Education, a pizza party for a group of subscribers at the in-house NICO Kitchen + Bar, and artist receptions planned.

How do they keep every detail straight? “Our Arts Vision database, where all schedules, personnel and notes about front-of-the-house activity are logged,” says Vivenzio. “It’s our secret weapon.”

Going places
Taking the show on the road, NJPAC is sole producer of The Hip Hop Nutcracker on tour, serving as general manager and booking agent. This season the production visits 11 U.S. locations and two Russian cities—Moscow and Kaliningrad—taking this Nutcracker back to its homeland.

The 2013 tour was concentrated along the East Coast, Miami to Schenectady, N.Y., but negotiations are under way to add West Coast dates in 2016. While it was a tricky sell in some markets, where state ballet companies were entrenched, sold-out shows have proven that the hip-hop version can be a complementary, rather than competing, holiday offering.

“This is a show that travels well and is easily suited for small theaters and big halls,” Donald notes. “The international language barrier is irrelevant since it’s a globally known story and the updated version makes sense.”

One portable piece of community engagement in the works involves inviting community members in every venue to audition for minor roles, a time-honored tradition for the standard Nutcracker. “It virtually guarantees that family members will be out front in the seats,” said Donald.

The Russian dates were a coup that has Weber “thrilled to pieces.” Donald probably puts his finger on it with a more practical calculation: “If anyone is sick of the traditional Nutcracker, it’s the Russians.”

Stand by and stand back. There’s a new Nutcracker in town—and it’s a show with legs.

Valerie Sudol was dance critic for The Star-Ledger for 20 years. As senior cultural issues reporter, she covered the development and opening of NJPAC. Gardening has been her beat more recently. Valerie’s Garden Diary is on the web at valeriedudol.com

Community outreach, audience care
We didn’t yet have an evergreen holiday show unique to us as an urban arts center. I felt this was something we could produce and send out into the world under our banner...” —Andy Donald

“We were a new urban arts center in town—and it’s a show with legs. ●

Valerie Sudol was dance critic for The Star-Ledger for 20 years. As senior cultural issues reporter, she covered the development and opening of NJPAC. Gardening has been her beat more recently. Valerie’s Garden Diary is on the web at valeriedudol.com

Filling the house
As impresario Sid Hurak famously said, “If the public doesn’t want to come, you can’t stop them.” NJPAC pays meticulous attention to spreading the word about programming and making sure that everyone—regardless of their cultural background—will find something they recognize.

“The Hip Hop Nutcracker met critical points of our mission to acknowledge diversity and draw people in,” says David Rodriguez, NJPAC’s Executive Vice President and Executive Producer. “More than anything, we have an ongoing concern to present programming that resonates with all segments of our audience.”

That directive is especially well-served by a hip-hop production that speaks to young urban patrons, as well as more traditional theater-goers. Like every major arts venue, NJPAC is eager to counter the aging of audiences for classical arts. Melding a 122-year-old ballet staple with today’s hip-hop culture defines “fresh perspective.”

Working with Rodriguez to get that message across are Katie Sword, Vice President of Marketing, and Nathan Leslie, Marketing Manager.

“In 2014, the challenge was selling a new show with no track record,” Leslie says. “We did that on a minimal budget, focusing on the New York market. This season, the budget jumped by a factor of four to $17,500, allowing for more online, television and radio spots as well as direct-mail advertising.”

As the production becomes better known, it’s easier to attract press attention, Sword points out. And with successful runs behind it, word-of-mouth advertising becomes an exponential asset.

In 2014, NJPAC booked The Hip Hop Nutcracker in its smaller Victoria Theater, selling out two shows to 900 patrons. For the 2015–16 season it moved to Prudential Hall, the 2,800-seat main stage, and went out on the road on its first tour (more on that later).

Not to be discounted is NJPAC’s personal approach to regular patrons in phone calls managed through the office of Erik Wiehardt, Director of Ticket Services—it’s a concierge approach to building relationships. Through its own box office and through a rigorously trained staff of Ticketmaster personnel, ticket purchasing is made deliberately pleasant, easy and efficient.

“It’s all about people,” says Wiehardt. “Everyone here always keeps that in mind.”

NJPAC is sole producer, general manager and booking agent for The Hip Hop Nutcracker on tour; so far, the production has visited 11 U.S. locations and two Russian cities...
To a certain extent, organizers of NJPAC’s fourth annual TD James Moody Jazz Festival knew how show-stopping moments will play out, but have no way of predicting all that jazz. Fans cross paths on stage or along Sarah Vaughan Way in front of the building.

As President and CEO John Schreiber put it, in an homage to Duke Ellington, fortune smiles on “being right at the right place at the right time, doing the right things with the right people.”

Schreiber himself was part of an unbilled quartet that was seen frequently and in all the right places from Nov. 4-15. His mates included jazz aficionado Nick Micali, Market President of TD Bank, the festival’s title sponsor, Linda Moody, widow of the famed Newark saxophonist for whom the festival is named, and NJPAC Jazz Advisor and Grammy-winning bassist Christian McBride, whose duties took him on stage and behind the scenes. (Even busy NJPAC staff will go out of their way to listen in when he conducts a master class at the free family event, Day of Swing, this year commemorating the Billie Holiday centennial.)

And not all of these reunions and special interactions among artists and their supporters occurred in front of audiences. Here are some instances of diaspora that could only happen at Moodyfest:

- Following the festival’s opener of the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, the orchestra’s trumpeter and Artistic Director, Wynton Marsalis, as well as most of his musicians, met backstage with a group of jazz students to talk about artistic values like camaraderie and work ethic. “He gave the kids a life lesson they’ll never forget,” says Micali, who observed the session.

- Two powerful vocalists, Dianne Reeves and Sharon Jones and The Dap-Kings, were booked together for a Jazz, Soul & Funk concert on Nov. 14, where the unstoppable Jones strutted around the Prudential Hall stage while belting “New Shoes.” Setting a wistful tone, Reeves sang “Beaucouf” in solidarity with a stricken Paris, while audience members held up their phone torches.

- Newark’s Bethany Baptist Church, where the Rev. Dr. M. William Howard, Jr. spreads the good word on jazz for NJPAC, by hosting a free concert every year, welcomed the Oliver Lake Organ Quartet on Nov. 7. Lake, on alto saxophone, performed a selection of original compositions such as ‘Move Groove’ which incorporates his spoken word remembrance of the late Newark poet Amiri Baraka. The quartet’s appearance ended on a note of praise with the rousing “I Want Jesus to Walk with Me.”

- The first of three special events at NJPAC this season to celebrate Frank Sinatra’s centennial, The Real Sinatra Songbook showcased tunes written or commissioned by the Chairman of the Board, sung masterfully by Kevin Mahogany, Sue Raney and Tom Wopat. But three members of the sextet also lent their voices to the occasion: Music Director Ken Peplowski, trumpeter Bria Skonberg (with a suitably rendition of ‘Empty Tables’), and bassist Nikki Parrott.

- Speaking of Sinatra, the “voice of God,” announced for Tony Bennett: back-to-back concerts on Nov. 12 and 13 was the voice of Frank, clipped from a year-ago stage introduction for the “greatest singer in the world.” Bennett returned the favor by evoking Sinatra with Arlen-Mercer’s “One for My Baby (and One More for the Road”).

- A couple of rarities. The 89-year-old jazz statesman sang the first number he ever recorded (Al Dubin and Harry Warren’s ‘Boulevard of Broken Dreams’) and pulled out a little soft-sole for “Steppin’ Out with My Baby.” Off his recent ‘Cheek to Cheek’ hit album of duets with Lady Gaga, Bennett encouraged the audience to pick one up because “She really needs the money.”

- McBride’s conversation series, One on One with Christian McBride, began earlier this season at NJPAC in a sit-down with Pat Metheny. On Nov. 12, pianist and singer-songwriter Bruce Hornsby recounted his escapades with McBride (they met while opening for Bonnie Raitt at Radio City) and spoke about the influence of modern classicalists like Anton Webern and Elliott Carter on his compositions. To illustrate, he performed Preacher in the Ring,”“Crazy Out Here,” and other examples in duets with McBride on bass.

- Jazz: a man’s world? Not according to the women whose presence at the festival was felt mightily, beginning with the Judy Carmichael Trio on Nov. 7.

- A surprise appearance by pianist Bill Charlap’s mom, acclaimed Songbook interpreter Sandy Stewart, had the audience buzzing at Charlap’s live re-creation of Miles Davis’ Birth of the Cool on Nov. 14. Charlap’s nonet performed tracks from the iconic album by the pioneering bebopper (“I’m,” “Venus de Miel,”“Israel”), along with related material, while Stewart chose a 1939 song by Jimmy Van Heusen and Eddie DeLange, “Damn That Dream.”

- Earlier that day, at the Newark Museum, some of the greatest jazz love stories ever told were shared by wives and widows at the panel Jazz Wives/Jazz Lives, moderated by Linda Moody. The sisterly, insider gab revealed just as much about the women’s careers as artists, attorneys, businesswomen, caregivers and road managers as it did about their spouses’ pursuit of the spotlight. “Newark First Lady of Jazz” Dorthaan Kirk of festival co-founder presents NJBIO Jazz BFA, who was married to multi-instrumentalist Rahsaan Roland Kirk, joined Brenda Feliciano (saxophonist) Paquito D’Rivera; Cecilia Foster (saxophonist-composer Frank Foster; Sandy Jackson (vibraphonist Milt Jackson), and Laurelyn Douglas (trumpet player Jon Faddis) to illustrate, he performed “Preacher in the Ring,”“S**t’s Crazy Out Here,” and other examples in duets with McBride on bass.

- Newark’s Sarah Vaughan, “The Divine One,” probably would have said Arianna Neikrug, 22-year-old singer. The 22-year-old pianist from Los Angeles took the grand prize in the Sarah Vaughan International Jazz Vocal Competition (The SASSY Awards) on the final day of the festival, besting more than a thousand applicants. Neikrug performed two of her Grammy-nominated hits, “God Must Have Spoken” and “My One and Only Love,” and the jazz standard “After You’ve Gone” in the final round. First runner-up was pasta Bella Hagenbach and second runner-up was Nicole Zurasiti.

As President and CEO John Schreiber put it, in an homage to Duke Ellington, fortune smiles on “being right at the right place at the right time, doing the right things with the right people.”

Schreiber himself was part of an unbilled quartet that was seen frequently and in all the right places from Nov. 4-15. His mates included jazz aficionado Nick Micali, Market President of TD Bank, the festival’s title sponsor, Linda Moody, widow of the famed Newark saxophonist for whom the festival is named, and NJPAC Jazz Advisor and Grammy-winning bassist Christian McBride, whose duties took him on stage and behind the scenes. (Even busy NJPAC staff will go out of their way to listen in when he conducts a master class at the free family event, Day of Swing, this year commemorating the Billie Holiday centennial.)

And not all of these reunions and special interactions among artists and their supporters occurred in front of audiences. Here are some instances of diaspora that could only happen at Moodyfest:

- Following the festival’s opener of the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, the orchestra’s trumpeter and Artistic Director, Wynton Marsalis, as well as most of his musicians, met backstage with a group of jazz students to talk about artistic values like camaraderie and work ethic. “He gave the kids a life lesson they’ll never forget,” says Micali, who observed the session.

- Two powerful vocalists, Dianne Reeves and Sharon Jones and The Dap-Kings, were booked together for a Jazz, Soul & Funk concert on Nov. 14, where the unstoppable Jones strutted around the Prudential Hall stage while belting “New Shoes.” Setting a wistful tone, Reeves sang “Beaucouf” in solidarity with a stricken Paris, while audience members held up their phone torches.

- Newark’s Bethany Baptist Church, where the Rev. Dr. M. William Howard, Jr. spreads the good word on jazz for NJPAC, by hosting a free concert every year, welcomed the Oliver Lake Organ Quartet on Nov. 7. Lake, on alto saxophone, performed a selection of original compositions such as ‘Move Groove’ which incorporates his spoken word remembrance of the late Newark poet Amiri Baraka. The quartet’s appearance ended on a note of praise with the rousing “I Want Jesus to Walk with Me.”

- The first of three special events at NJPAC this season to celebrate Frank Sinatra’s centennial, The Real Sinatra Songbook showcased tunes written or commissioned by the Chairman of the Board, sung masterfully by Kevin Mahogany, Sue Raney and Tom Wopat. But three members of the sextet also lent their voices to the occasion: Music Director Ken Peplowski, trumpeter Bria Skonberg (with a suitably rendition of ‘Empty Tables’), and bassist Nikki Parrott.

- Speaking of Sinatra, the “voice of God,” announced for Tony Bennett: back-to-back concerts on Nov. 12 and 13 was the voice of Frank, clipped from a year-ago stage introduction for the “greatest singer in the world.” Bennett returned the favor by evoking Sinatra with Arlen-Mercer’s “One for My Baby (and One More for the Road).”

- A couple of rarities. The 89-year-old jazz statesman sang the first number he ever recorded (Al Dubin and Harry Warren’s ‘Boulevard of Broken Dreams’) and pulled out a little soft-sole for “Steppin’ Out with My Baby.” Off his recent ‘Cheek to Cheek’ hit album of duets with Lady Gaga, Bennett encouraged the audience to pick one up because “She really needs the money.”

- McBride’s conversation series, One on One with Christian McBride, began earlier this season at NJPAC in a sit-down with Pat Metheny. On Nov. 12, pianist and singer-songwriter Bruce Hornsby recounted his escapades with McBride (they met while opening for Bonnie Raitt at Radio City) and spoke about the influence of modern classicalists like Anton Webern and Elliott Carter on his compositions. To illustrate, he performed Preacher in the Ring,”“Crazy Out Here,” and other examples in duets with McBride on bass.

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Back as host for Season Three was Broadway insider Ted Chapin, President and Executive Director of Rodgers & Hammerstein: An Imagen Company. The concert-and-a

- conversation series, which now has a Mid-Atlantic Emmy nomination on the wall, boasts top-tier entertainers: Marilyn Maye, Stephen Schwartz & Friends and Jessie Mueller & Jarrod Spector, to name just a few, and fellow artists like Marlene VerPlanck can often be spotted in the house. As performances were recorded over two days before audiences in the intimate Victoria Theater, viewers at home could catch up with the previous season’s episodes on NJTV, WNET and WLIW21.

On Oct. 26, a session with KT Sullivan & Jeff Harnar singing all-Sondheim, Catherine Russell (performing standards, and blues, and Christine Ebersole revisiting her Broadway hits, gave music lovers three memorable concerts in one.

Long before autumn, NJPAC’s American Song series, presented in part through the support of the Blanche and Irving Laurie Foundation and Sylvia and David Steiner, gathered many Broadway luminaries for such programs as ‘The Sound of Their Music: Rodgers & Hammerstein and Portraits of Joni: Jessica Molaskey Sings Joni Mitchell with host Jonathan Schwartz.

Two American Song concerts in March were accorded ‘encores’ at the Arts Center. Jessie Mueller and Jarrod Spector’s portrayal of The Carole King Musical, which didn’t let the elements derail their performance when March blew in like a lion, were back seven months later for American Songbook at NJPAC.

Wicked composer Stephen Schwartz, who accompanied friends Debbie Gravitte, Scott Coulter and Kelli O’Hara on the piano for his Defying Gravity concert, rejoined them, along with Michael McCorry Rose, at American Songbook.

Support for the 2015 American Songbook at NJPAC broadcast was provided by the Joan and Allen Blinder Family Fund.

Two-time Tony winner Christine Ebersole

Jeff Harnar and KT Sullivan

Catherine Russell

It sounded as good as it looked—and looked as good as it sounded: Thanks to NJPAC’s new broadcast equipment, made possible by Panasonic and Prudential, American Songbook at NJPAC was recorded for public TV with nearly a dozen high-definition cameras and a pair of fly packs (mini-studios).

NJPAC celebrates the timeless genius of Frank Sinatra with a trifecta of concerts, each paying tribute to the greatest of all popular singers in a unique and special way—each unfolding at the primary performing arts center of the Chairman’s home state.

"They tell about the big terrible things they’ve done and the big wonderful things they will do. Their hopes, and their regrets, and their loves, and their hates. All very large, because nobody ever brings anything small into a bar.”

Mary Chapin Carpenter wrote that line in her classic play Harvey, and it seemed particularly resonant in the year of Frank Sinatra’s 100th birthday. After all, Sinatra loomed larger than any other figure in American popular culture, in every medium from radio to recordings to movies to television to the internet, and his life and music are crammed full of the big wonderful things (the kind he sings about in “I’ve Got the World on a String”), as well as the big terrible things that people bring into bars. (That’s why he also specialized in what he called “saloon songs”)

Because nearly everything about Sinatra was larger than life—even larger, in fact, than Elwood P. Dowd’s semi-imaginary friend—the difficulty in celebrating his centennial is trying to do justice to him without his actual presence. Symphony orchestras can play Mozart without Amadeus himself being there, and Broadway theaters can revive Annie Get Your Gun minus Ethel Merman in her iconic role, but how do you celebrate Sinatra without Sinatra?

NJPAC, the primary performing arts center of the Chairman’s home state—situated within spitting distance of Hoboken, where Sinatra was born and raised—found several varied and stimulating answers to that question.

So far, NJPAC has presented two major Sinatra centennial events, and a third is scheduled for spring 2016. Each is different and pays tribute to the greatest of all popular singers in a unique and special way; none makes the obvious move, for instance, of hiring an imitator to stand up on stage, singing recreated orchestrations and mimicking his mannerisms.

The first show, on November 9, was titled The Real Sinatra Songbook, and was focused on a specific part of the Chairman’s canon—those songs that were written expressly for him, by him, and which wouldn’t exist if not for him. The headliner was Tom Wopat, a reigning star of both the Broadway and jazz worlds, along with veteran vocalist Sue Raney and Kevin Mahogany, in a sparkling revue under the musical direction of Ken Pepelovski and co-produced by Sinatra specialist Will Friedwald.

The big event of the Sinatra Centennial occurred on the actual day—Saturday, December 12—at NJPAC. This was a spectacular concert starring Michael Feinstein, who is widely regarded not only as the greatest contemporary interpreter of the Great American Songbook—Sinatra’s music—but also its leading historian and archivist.

Feinsteins insists that ‘It would be folly to copy Frank’s vocal style because it would sound like parody at worst and a flat imitation at best.” Rather, he emphasizes, “When I sing a song connected with him, I try to emulate his sensibility and approach, and then interpret it my own way. The emphasis on telling a story is supremely important as is the rhythmic equation. He knew how to phrase!”

The third concert will take place on May 28, 2016, and is again co-produced by Pepelovski and Friedwald. This time they’re shifting the focus to another important aspect of Sinatra’s voluminous canon, his film career. The songs will be selected from the dozens of movie musicals that Sinatra starred in, from the 1943 Higher and Higher to the 1964 Robin and the 7 Hoods. The cast hadn’t been firmly set in stone at press time, but rest assured it will consist of the finest performers from the worlds of musical theater, jazz and pop music.

As Feinstein puts it, a proper tribute to Sinatra should be anything but generic or by-the-numbers. As he explains, “It’s a grand celebration but also a highly personal approach to Sinatra. People might be most surprised by some of the song choices, because I try to really mix it up and have unusual repertoire next to the beloved warhorses.” As a parting shot, he adds, “The appeal of Old Blue Eyes will never leave us.”

Amen to that.

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Great Performances 23
The year in classical music was defined by a first (L’Orchestre de la Suisse Romande), a happy return (Philadelphia Orchestra), and a rare debut (Lang Lang as solo recitalist).

The Bank of America Classical Series at NJPAC also made it possible for audiences in acoustically fine-tuned Prudential Hall to thrill to the London Symphony Orchestra with pianist Yefim Bronfman, and pianist André Watts with the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra.

Opening on January 29 with Beethoven’s Symphony No. 5, the Philadelphia Orchestra’s Conductor Laureate, arrived with L’Orchestre de la Suisse Romande and pianist Nikolai Lugansky on February 20 in an NJPAC debut featuring a program of early 20th-century masterpieces. (The Swiss orchestra, by the way, was recently under the musical leadership of Neeme Jarvi, former music director of the NSO).

The celebrated Watts, performing with the NSO under the baton of Peter Bay, made a welcome return to the hall in springtime with a showcase of works by Grieg, Beethoven, Stravinsky and Mozart.

Lang Lang, who has appeared before millions at the 2014 World Cup in Rio and at the 2015 GRAMMY® ceremony, was appreciated in more intimate surroundings in September when he interpreted pieces by Bach, Tchaikovsky and Chopin.

Stravinsky’s complete score to The Firebird ballet was the centerpiece of the October engagement of the London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Valery Gergiev. Bronfman played Bartok’s Piano Concerto No. 3, which he performed with the New York Philharmonic the previous year in a rendering described by The New York Times as “brilliantly charismatic.”

Other classical events:
- As in 2014, a performance of Handel’s oratorio Messiah with the New Jersey Symphony Chamber Orchestra, the Montclair State University Singers and guest soloists gave music lovers an uplifting and magnificent start to the holiday season.
- Maestro George Marriner Maull of the Discovery Orchestra continued the popular tradition of entertaining and educating concert-goers at free Bank of America Classical Overtures conversations held an hour prior to curtain.
- Metropolitan Opera Rising Stars, a Sunday afternoon recital series presented by NJPAC and the Metropolitan Opera, allowed NJPAC audiences to be among the first to hear some of the great voices of tomorrow. Artists on the cusp of extraordinary careers through their association with the Met or its Lindeman Young Artist Development Program performed Bill Canto Showpieces and Romantic Treasures.

How do you take your summer music? Horizon Foundation Sounds of the City serves it scrumptious hot: a blend of Motown, hip-hop and world music mixed with that special ingredient, a dance party of classic hits spun by WBGO on-air personality Felix Hernandez.

As is the tradition, the 18th annual series got rolling with Hernandez’s Rhythm Revue under starry skies and before a convivial crowd that numbers into the thousands on Thursday evenings in July and August. This year’s slate of eight free concerts included the always flamboyant George Clinton & Parliament Funkadelic, NJPAC and Bank of America Discovery Orchestra.

Ah, those summer nights

Ah, those summer nights! The Firebird

Beyond four walls

While talk about NJPAC’s high standard of live performance continues to spread, via word-of-mouth to the latest in broadcast technologies, 2015 was the year that select co-productions also allowed the Arts Center to raise awareness of its assets—but at other venues.

A half-dozen strategic partnerships with arenas like the nearby Prudential Center (“The Rock”) served NJPAC by providing a larger canvas for programming visions. A “co-pro” of the RMM Combinación Perfecta: A Night with Black Violin George Clinton included Hot for the Holidays Featuring Busta Rhymes & Friends and A Great Performance, both at “The Rock.”

“The arenas are colleagues, not competitors,” explains Executive Vice President and Executive Producer David Rodriguez. “Tours designed for arenas are not interested in performing in 2,800-seat houses and vice-versa. However, NJPAC has built a reputation for success in the R&B, Latin and select fine arts areas. Many artists now trust NJPAC and make it their first call in the market, regardless of the size of the venue.”

Black Violin

George Clinton
“Great performance” is what we expect from artists of international stature. At NJPAC, it’s also an exclamation that commonly follows a show or concert presented by Arts Education students.

Springtime is when students at the elementary and high school levels give culminating stage performances to showcase their newfound accomplishments in music, dance, acting, singing and more. Even summer residencies are focused on rehearsing for that special final production before beaming friends and family members. The flurry of presentations is an indication of the success of such programs as the Young Artist Summer Intensive (YASI), the Hip-Hop Institute, Recorder Arts for Musical Pathways (RAMP) and Music Advancement for Newark Area Youth (MANA).

Here are highlights of a few others:

- The fourth annual Dancing Classrooms® Colors of the Rainbow Team Match, a social dance competition for fifth-graders, was held on May 28 in the Victoria Theater, where the decibel levels were tested by hundreds of cheering, pennant-waving spectators. Six schools chose six couples to dazzle the audience with their footwork and impress with their respect for teamwork and social graces. Under the sharp eyes of three judges, the teams swirled through merengue, foxtrot, rumba, tango and swing dances. Even though each group had a specialty dance, students rehearsed twice-weekly for 10 weeks to learn all five proficiently.

- On June 2, an audience watching the original musical Destiny Fulfilled in Victoria Theater were also seeing The Johnny Mercer Foundation at work. For the third year, the NJPAC-Mercer Musical Theater Program set up residencies in five schools during the academic year to introduce students to the American musical by creating a show, from page to stage. The script for Destiny Fulfilled, a Cinderella story about Beyoncé Knowles’ stormy tenure with Destiny’s Child and her rise as a solo artist, was written by students, along with lyrics to five original songs. Participating schools were BRICK Peshine Academy and Harriet Tubman School. Both in Newark, Cicely Tyson Community School of Performing & Fine Arts and Whitney Houston Academy, both in East Orange, and Heywood Avenue School in Orange. Johnny Mercer, the composer and lyricist who reminded us to “accentuate the positive,” was a champion of the art of songwriting and its value in educating the young through creativity and self-expression.

- A jazz session wrapped the weeklong All-Female Jazz Residency for 24 young women musicians on the Montclair State University campus. The intensive, held for the second year in July and supported by the Women’s Association of NJPAC, attracted 13- to 25-year-olds from throughout the country and as close as Newark. Students received the rare opportunity to play side-by-side with some of the best in the music business, like jazz pianist and composer Geri Allen, the residency’s Artistic Director. In between classes on jazz theory and improvisation were field trips to the studios of WBGO Jazz 88.3FM and the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers-Newark. Students also led a jam session at Duke’s Southern Table in Newark. “They’ve formed bonds that will last throughout their careers,” said Alison Scott-Williams, NJPAC’s Vice President of Arts Education. “It is so wonderful to see these young ladies of jazz create a community with one another and thrive under the mentorship of Geri and the magnificent faculty. Jimmy Cobb, Kenny Davis, Bruce Williams, Connaught Miller, Ingrid Jensen, Shamie Royston and Нуэл Fuller gave them a foundation filled with the history and legacy of this American art form.”

- Chicago’s famed The Second City, the people who brought us Tina Fey, Stephen Colbert and Key and Peele, was back in the house for the second year this summer, dispatching four faculty members to conduct sketch comedy workshops for teenagers, adults, and students on the autism spectrum. (In 2014, Newark became the fourth U.S. city to host this residency.) The two-week Teen Camp and residency for adults culminated in a performance before an audience. Second City’s methods may look like madness, but in addition to strengthening qualities like self-assuredness and team play, they teach campers how to pick up unspoken signals, think creatively and jump fearlessly into the action on stage. It’s an in-the-moment art of expecting the unexpected.

Najah Hetsberger, an advanced musical theater student, participated in last summer’s Young Artist Summer Intensive
Four high-profile directors of dance companies in New Jersey worked largely behind the scenes for Jersey (New) Moves! Emerging Choreographers, a modern dance performance that capped a new mentorship at NJPAC for up-coming dancemakers.

Established choreographer Nai-Ni Chen, Carolyn Dorfman, Randy James and Claire Porter were each matched to a protégé and advised him or her throughout workshops and rehearsals, which culminated in a June 19 performance in Victoria Theater. The young artists, selected through an online application process, were Robert Mark Burke of Elmwood Park, Lauren Connolly of Bayonne, Kyle Georgia Marsh of Jersey City and Arielle Petruzzella of Hoboken. Their 20-minute segments were performed by small ensembles of professional dancers.

Jersey (New) Moves! was presented in association with Dance New Jersey, the service organization for dance in the state, and supported by the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation. It was an offshoot of NJPAC’s 5-year-old Jersey Moves! Festival of Dance which also offered an evening with Carolyn Dorfman Dance in March. Happily for future choreographers, Jersey (New) Moves! will be back at the Arts Center on June 17, 2016.

New Jersey Symphony Orchestra named internationally renowned Chinese-American conductor Xian Zhang its 14th music director (more on page 33). NJSO is proud to be the resident orchestra of NJPAC.
in remembrance

The Scottish poet Thomas Campbell famously said, “to live in hearts we leave behind is not to die.” We take comfort in these words as we mourn the loss of five incredible people, who will be remembered for their friendship, passion, vision, and the legacy they leave behind.

A beloved, respected and generous member of the NJPAC Board of Directors since 1997, Allen Bildner was a founding member of the Human Resource Committee. Along with his wife, Joan, Allen created the Bildner Family Foundation Ticket Subsidy Fund, which each season makes tickets to Arts Center events available to underserved members of our community. Allen Bildner was the former Chair and CEO of Kings Super Markets, a family-owned company for 52 years until it was sold in 1999. In a resolution, the Arts Center’s board and management extended heartfelt gratitude to this visionary pacesetter for his contributions and guidance, NJPAC successfully installed John Schreiber as the Arts Center’s second President and CEO and completed an ambitious strategic plan. Among his many other accomplishments were tenures as a member of the Executive Committee and Chairman of Theater Square Development Corp. In a resolution, the Arts Center’s board and management extended heartfelt gratitude to this visionary pacesetter for his devotion to NJPAC.

The resignations of two board members—Michelle Y. Lee and Ann M. Limberg—were accepted with a note of appreciation for the time and talents they brought to leadership.

Women’s association developments

Following four years of exemplary service and leadership to the Women’s Association of NJPAC, Christine C. Gillifan retired as Board President at the IA annual board meeting held on December 2. She will be succeeded by Mary Beth O’Connor. Gillifan is President of the WJC’s Aridor Foundation, her family’s foundation in Morristown, which supports organizations committed to helping those less fortunate by promoting harmony and understanding, furthering education and workplace skills, and improving the overall quality of life. O’Connor is a founding member and managing partner of Lucky VII, an independent film, television, and theater production company. With partners Shaquille O’Neal and Michael Pals, Lucky VII is focused on cultivating a continuing pipeline of viable productions and industry-leading content creators to its Newark-based company and strategic partners.

The new cabinet announced for the coming year includes Tenange Girma-Jeffries and Archie Gottesman Co-Executive Vice Presidents; Terri MacLeod, VP, Marketing and Promotions; Suzanne M. Spero, VP, Fund Development.

In 2015, the most significant restructuring of management since the arrival of President and CEO John Schreiber four years ago enhanced NJPAC’s leadership and vision for achieving future goals. Executive Producer Chad Spies and President and Chief Operating Officer Bobbie Arbesfeld, a senior manager since 1999, retired in June, setting in motion new appointments for two veteran NJPAC executives. Executive Producer David Rodriguez became Executive Vice President and President, with oversight of Programming, Broadcast, Marketing, Production Rentals, Community Engagement and Production. Vice President and Chief Financial Officer Warren Tranquada was named Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, reporting to him are Finance, IT, Operations and Real Estate, Human Resources, Ticket Services and Special Events. Lisa Hayward, who had been employed for many years at the Metropolitan Opera, where she was Director of Patron and Individual Giving, arrived at NJPAC in April as the new Vice President of Development. Leonard Register, former CEO and Senior Vice President of Racing Operations for the New Jersey Sports and Exhibition Authority, was on board the following month as the Arts Center’s new Vice President and Chief Financial Officer. Ross S. Richards joined NJPAC in 1997 as Production Manager, rising through the ranks to become Senior Vice President of Operations and Real Estate. Richards bid a throat-catching farewell to his friends and co-workers at the Arts Center in October, upon accepting the role of Senior Vice President of Operations and Facilities at the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts in Philadelphia.

Ross has set an unbeatable standard of excellence for the quality of the NJPAC experience for customers, artists, and staff,” Schreiber said. “Under his leadership, our campus and its facilities have always looked fantastic, sounding amazing, and were staffed with superb team members.”

Other senior leaders receiving promotions included Katie Sword now Vice President of Marketing, and Chad Spies, Vice President of Operations and Real Estate, who bid a farewell to Richards’ former role.

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At last count, Princeton University enrolled 5,275 undergraduate students, representing about 7 percent of total applicants. It’s a lot tougher to get into NJPAC, where 1,700 individuals recently applied for jobs. Of the 1,250 individuals hired—that’s about 1.5 percent accepted.

Guest services positions and 25 ushers were among the 1,250 jobs. It’s a lot tougher to get into NJPAC, where 1,700 individuals recently applied for jobs. Of the 1,250 individuals hired—that’s about 1.5 percent accepted.

At the time of this interview, the River Vale resident was brushing off the road dust from his drum set and trying to keep his hat on in the wind. He had completed a Sound of Redemption: The Frank Morgan Story (a feature documentary about another master saxman), Spike Lee’s Malcolm X, Story of a Lifetime, and Scorsese’s Vinyl. He has performed with the Brick City Jazz Orchestra and Wells Fargo Jazz for Teens.

After Roe’s departure, the NJSO inaugurated multiple initiatives that focused on audience engagement, empha- sizing participation, interaction and relevance to both individuals and communities. The orchestra’s signature series of audience engagement programs, NJSO Accents, is the cornerstone of those efforts. The NJSO also made continued progress toward achieving a balanced operating budget through key fundraising initiatives, including a burgeoning major gifts program.

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Hurricane glass surrounded hundreds of decorative candles and #hurricaneJoaquin was imprinted on the cocktail napkins, but Joaquin was a no-show at the Women’s Association of NJPAC’s Spotlight Gala 2015, held on Oct. 3 in tribute to composer Stephen Sondheim’s 85th birthday.

The more than 900 guests encountered only a fine mist by the time they entered the Prudential Hall lobby, which was dressed to the nines as a swank Manhattan nightspot, with orchids in centerpieces and jewel tones splashed dramatically from floor to domes via lighting and projections. As Sondheim wrote in the song “Rain on the Roof” from Follies, the byword was: “Let’s have a drink and shelter from the showers.”

The 20th anniversary Gala, NJPAC’s largest single fundraiser and one of the state’s luxe social gatherings, generated nearly $2 million for arts education programs and general operations.

Christine C. Gilfillan, who retired on December 31 as President of the Board of the WA after serving four years, proudly told attendees that the WA had raised some $46 million for the Arts Center since its inception in 1994.

Sophisticated, but never stuffy, the celebration allows New Jersey dignitaries, business leaders, arts advocates, students, Arts Center senior staff and the Newark community to mingle and network in festive surroundings. Guests chatted while waiting their turn to mug at the photo booth or while busting a move on the dance floor, captained by DJ D-Nice.

The evening’s award recipients were Nicolas Berggruen and Ron Beit (Chambers Award for Service to the Community and to the Arts), the late Dr. Robert Curvin and Patricia Hall Curvin (Ryan Award for Commitment to NJPAC and Leadership in the City of Newark), and United Airlines (Vagelos Award for Corporate Commitment to the Arts), accepted by Jim Compton, Vice Chairman and Chief Revenue Officer for United.

While Sondheim doesn’t always end things on a sweet note, the Gala does. Theater Square Events, which earlier served guests a seafood tasting plate and lamb chops with black garlic rub, filled buffet tables with trays of miniature desserts like passion fruit macaroons, salted caramel chocolate cake and berries marinated in Grand Marnier, topped with whipped cream.
They’ve been called “the Mount Rushmore of NJPAC”—former Gov. Thomas H. Kean, Newark philanthropist Raymond G. Chambers, NJPAC Founding President Lawrence P. Goldman and former Newark Mayor Sharpe James—and they know what it takes to build a monument.

Present at the Creation: How a Dream Came to Be was a frank and often sentimental recounting of the events leading up to the raising of an Arts Center in a derided city. Held on Feb. 23 in the Chase Room, this free community discussion, featuring the four visionaries mentioned above, offered the inside story of how ideas, creativity and courage were crucial to the center’s successful debut and future growth. James nodded to NJPAC’s early commitment to diversity in hiring practices and artistic performance by borrowing from the adage “the best music is played with black and white keys.” When questioned by an audience member whether that mission is being fulfilled today, Goldman replied, “The short answer is yes. And the long answer is hell, yeah!”

The event’s format included an evening of free family activities, a dance panel, a “camp-out” with nearly 200 Girl Scouts and their chaperones in the lobby, and a play reading. Then there were itineraries within itineraries: For example, what to do with a small army of Scouts? You invite them to the ballet, offer snacks at a meet-and-greet with dancers, rouse them the next morning for yoga and hip-hop workouts, and bring them to Embodiment the Dream.

At NJPAC’s annual MLK Celebration, walk and marches are interpreted through rhythm, words of inspiration are translated into children’s vivid cut-outs of butterflies, and all roads lead to music.

An ever-multiplying schedule of events, anchored by performances of the Dance Theatre of Harlem (DTH), included the return of Arts Education’s Embodiment the Dream afternoon of family free events. An evening of free family events, a dance panel, a “camp-out” with nearly 200 Girl Scouts and their chaperones in the lobby, and a play reading. Then there were itineraries within itineraries. For example, what to do with a small army of Scouts? You invite them to the ballet, offer snacks at a meet-and-greet with dancers, rouse them the next morning for yoga and hip-hop workouts, and bring them to Embodiment the Dream.

Soul-shaking anthems by Grammy Award-winning Rev. Steff and Jubilation set the tone for this year’s awards reception with the Newark Chapter of the NAACP in the Chase Room. Jan. 16. The reception and subsequent appearance by DTH were sponsored by PSEG Foundation. Tai Cooper, Chief Policy Advisor for Newark’s Office of the Mayor, received NJPAC’s Visionary of the Future Award and Marilyn “Penny” Joseph, Vice President of Community Relations and Corporate Outreach at Panasonic, North America, accepted the Steward of the Dream Award.

The Rev. Jerry M. Carter, Jr., pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Morristown, gave the keynote address prior to curtain for Dance Theatre of Harlem. The company, founded in 1969 by New York City Ballet dancer-architect Arthur Mitchell in response to Dr. King’s assassination, performed on Jan. 16. The ballets also were seen as noontime by more than 2,000 Newark Public School students, through the support of the NJM Insurance Group.

Bookending the MLK Celebration calendar of events were a dance panel on Jan. 13, titled Views from the Mountaintop: Dance Theatre of Harlem and the Civil Rights Era, and a reading of Rajendra Ramoon Maharaj’s Little Rock: An American Play on Jan. 17, as the second presentation of the NJPAC Stage Exchange series. Both programs were free.
What was the genesis of NJPAC's Development Committee and its primary goal?

NJPAC has been here almost 20 years and has always run itself in a very fiscally sound way. All cultural institutions rely on both earned income and contributed income, and having an effective development organization has always been key to NJPAC. We saw an opportunity to get the Board more fully engaged, and we believe an active Development Committee at the Board is just what we need to help take NJPAC to the next level. NJPAC has played a vital role in Newark's revitalization, as the state's and urban cultural institution, by presenting diverse, high-quality performing arts, extensive arts education programs since it opened; providing over 400 excellent, diverse cultural events for New Jersey families annually, and acting as a cultural pillar in Newark, helping drive urban transformation.

What is the role of the arts in defining a quality education for children?

I believe in education of the whole child—and maybe that's a trite phrase, but arts education is one of the first things cut when budgets are tight. And we have seen that happen in our inner cities in New Jersey. As a child, I grew up playing musical instruments. I love music and it’s part of who I am. For some children, the arts can be a broadening experience, and for others it can be the inspiration that leads to a career. I think it is criminal that the arts are cut from our public schools. There is much evidence that shows student learning in the arts leads to a wide spectrum of academic and social benefits. So I think NJPAC plays a really important role in serving children in inner cities with arts education.

How do you persuade a potential donor to invest in NJPAC?

You first want to get to know the individual. Anyone who’s going to get involved in philanthropy wants to make a difference in the world. And they usually have specific interests. For example, if they have a child who plays an instrument, they may care about musical training. If they grow up in Newark, they may get excited about how to smartly help with the revitalization of Newark. When you know what they care about, you can discuss NJPAC's work in the area they care about. People like to make a difference with their lives and their money, and partner with like-minded individuals or organizations. Donors also want to know if their gifts are in responsible hands, and NJPAC’s strong leadership, sound financial management, and track record of excellence speaks for itself.

in the Vanguard

Members of the Vanguard Society are visionaries who believe that by investing in NJPAC today, they’re paving the way forward for future generations. Their support ensures that not only will the brick and mortar still stand, but children will receive every opportunity to become the arts patrons and performers of tomorrow.

Vanguard Society contributors know that another great ‘return’ is the consistent return of artists of international caliber to NJPAC’s stages. By continuing to burnish the Arts Center’s world-class stature, donors can count on programming that showcases the most prestigious orchestras and dance companies, singers like Tony Bennett and Diana Ross, rock’n’roll bands like Earth, Wind & Fire, and comedians like Jerry Seinfeld. This annual giving society makes it possible for NJPAC to succeed and thrive. Seventy percent of Arts Education’s budget is shouldered by Vanguard donors, who know that as the state’s largest provider of arts education, NJPAC prioritizes the role of culture and the arts in young students’ lives.

The following Vanguard Society members prove by their generous spirit and dynamic presence at NJPAC that philanthropy may take many forms, but follows a single path to bettering our world.
Why dedicate time, money, talent—or all of the above—to the Arts Center? Our loyal friends have made participating in an event a part of their lives. They have been engaged ever since. The Arts Center is indeed a special place. It inspires and elevates the soul of the state. The Arts Center was a mass of girders, but predicted that in the years following construction, the lives of generations of children would be changed. In 2008, he increased his longtime membership support to the Vanguard Society. By teaching kindergarteners to high school seniors how cultures inform academic subjects, Wallace himself learned about the positive impact of the arts on his students’ journeys of self-discovery. ‘Literature, music and art. I find that they add to every single thing you do in life,’ he said. If you didn’t have that education…there would be a hole in your life.’

“when you give to NJPAC?”

“When NJPAC was under construction I took a tour with Larry Goldman, I think that was the moment that I knew NJPAC was going to be very special. My wife, Paula, and I, as well as Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey, have been involved since the PAC opened—we were there on opening night, which was really spectacular and have been there ever since. The Arts Center has just gotten better and better.”

—Larry Goldman

“NJPAC is an anchor institution in Newark, offering food for the soul through performance art that is crucial to the city’s resurgence. Supporting NJPAC is nothing short of life-giving.”

—The Rev. Dr. M. William Howard, Jr.

“The No. 1 reason? NJPAC is the heart of the City of Newark and the soul of the state. The Arts Center reaches out to so many people with so many interests—you’ll never be bored. I’ve been going to concerts at NJPAC since the doors first opened. We’re lucky to have it.”

— Judy Bernhaut

“NJPAC is an innovator, a source of the arts in our state. We are very fortunate to have such a great center for diverse community engagement and world-class arts and cultural programming. It makes living in New Jersey special!”

—Nina Wells

“NJPAC Board Member and Trustee of the Women’s Association of NJPAC

“NJPAC is underwritten by lead sponsors, Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey and the Horizon Foundation for Public Health.”

—Nina Wells

“My father was a social worker, and my mom was a teacher. She brought me to the arts, and I’ve been a musical enthusiast since childhood. I’ve been a member of NJPAC since the day it opened, and I give as much as I can.”

—Alan Bildner

“Supporting NJPAC is nothing short of life-giving.”

—The Rev. Dr. M. William Howard, Jr.

“When families are unable to afford to see a live performance, a child has never received the opportunity to explore his or her artistic nature, the Joan and Allen Bildner Family Fund steps in to turn that emptiness into a fulfilling, often life-changing experience.”

—NJPAC Board Member James I. Bildner and his brother, Robert L. Bildner, co-executors of the fund, announced in 2015 that a $2 million estate gift would be made to NJPAC to carry on the philanthropic mission of their late parents, both of whom were esteemed advocates and contributors to the Arts Center. (Allen Bildner was a member of the Board from 1997 until his death on February 5.) The Bildners seeded NJPAC’s early years with innovations such as a robust Ticket Subsidy Fund, which offers $6 tickets in prime seating located to community-based organizations, and support of the Campaign for NJPAC. The estate gift will be used to invest in catalytic projects that support the mission of the Arts Center and the interests of Joan and Allen. For example, the bequest will provide stable funding to underwrite five seasons of the public television production of American Songbook at NJPAC. The bequest has also seeded an Innovation Fund, matched by the Judy and Josh Weston Fund, for supporting initiatives with potential to create ongoing revenue streams for NJPAC and the Joan and Allen Bildner Catalytic Opportunity Fund to support pre-development expenses related to real estate projects in the Newark arts district.}

“loyal family”
The magic of Disney in Jersey

In August, NJPAC was the recipient of a $100,000 grant from Disney to bring the Disney Musicals in Schools program to Greater Newark. The Arts Center is one of only four arts organizations in the nation and the only one in New Jersey selected in 2015 to collaborate with Disney Musicals in Schools.

NJPAC chose five public elementary schools from eligible applicants for the 2015–16 academic year. Branch Brook School, Luis Muñoz Marin School and Mount Vernon School; all in Newark; Rose Parks Community School in Orange, and John Marshall School No. 20 in Elizabeth. The Disney Musicals in Schools program is free to these schools.

The after-school program is an outreach initiative developed by Disney Theatrical Group to create ongoing theater programs in elementary schools. Each of the schools takes part in a 17-week musical theater program with the schools’ educators. Three of the schools chose The Lion King KIDS and the remaining two selected Aladdin KIDS. The programs culminate in a performance at each school. On February 8, 2016, NJPAC hosted a Student Share Celebration, where each school presented a selection from its show in Prudential Hall for an audience of fellow students, family members and friends. Because the $100,000 grant will support two years of programming, another five schools will be announced in 2016.

Disney KIDS musicals, created in partnership with Music Theater International (MTI), are about 30 minutes in length and have been adapted from such classic Disney films as THE DOLMAMONS, THE ARISTOCRATS, CINDERELLA, THE JUNGLE BOOK, SLEEPING BEAUTY, and WALTZ THE POOH. Disney Musicals in Schools was launched in response to Disney Theatrical Group’s concern that low-income students in urban public schools were not afforded equitable access to the arts. After successfully offering the program in New York City schools, Disney Theatrical Group began partnering with organizations in other communities around the United States.

New Jersey Speakers Series

The second season of the New Jersey Speakers Series at NJPAC continued to provide thought-provoking entertainment from some of the country’s most influential leaders. Presented by Fairleigh Dickinson University, the seven-program series let subscribers hear “news” straight from Dan Rather and historic insights from David McCullough. The latest edition opened with former CIA Director Leon E. Panetta and continued with CNN Chief Medical Correspondent Dr. Sanjay Gupta and documentarian Ken Burns.

Place of business

The participation of high-profile leaders from the realms of finance and life sciences made the Business Partners Roundtables particularly robust and newsworthy in 2015. This early-morning series in the Chase Room typically draws more than a hundred executives from major corporations and private firms throughout the metro area.

Mike Pedersen, President and CEO of TD Bank, opened the Roundtables in March with a review of recent innovations at his company that focus on environmental stewardship and the rehabilitation of urban areas. He pointed to employee loyalty and client satisfaction as two missions that steadied the company during times of economic upheaval. TD Bank, the founding sponsor of the TD James Moody Jazz Festival at NJPAC, serves more than 8 million customers and ranks as the fifth largest bank in North America.

In a return appearance at NJPAC in April, William C. Dudley, President and CEO of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, offered his candid views of the national and regional economies. It was his first major address of the year and coincided with a tour to assess the pace of economic development in northern New Jersey. The Roundtable was expanded into a panel, Life Sciences and New Jersey’s Innovation Ecosystem, introduced by New Jersey Lt. Gov. Kim Guadagno on June 23. Moderated by Dean Paranicis, President and CEO of the HealthCare Institute of New Jersey, the speakers included Vincent Forlenza, Chairman, President and CEO of Becton, Dickinson & Co.; Christopher Molloy, Senior Vice President of Research and Economic Development at Rutgers University; and Brenton Saunders, CEO and President of Allergan plc. Creating a dynamic environment for scientists, academics and local start-ups in New Jersey—the “medicine chest of the world”—was a chief point of the dialogue.

Before taking the stage in Prudential Hall for his bank’s nationally streamed Town Hall on July 23, Wells Fargo & Co. CEO John Stumpf eased into the morning by visiting the Roundtable. His buoyant address to the Business Partners was delivered a little more than a day after a headline in The Wall Street Journal abouted the “Earth’s Most Valuable Bank” nearing $300 billion in market capitalization. That mark moved Wells Fargo ahead of Industrial & Commercial Bank of China Ltd. and set a new high for a U.S. bank.

The Business Partners Roundtable is sponsored by PNC Bank. NJPAC’s Business Partners is composed of more than 90 multinational corporations and privately-held businesses that support the Arts Center.

One on One: Singular Sensation

Fans of cerebral, ear-catching music are able to listen to their top-of-mind artists as part of a new live series, One on One with Christian McBride, in the cozy surroundings of the Victoria Theater. Bassist McBride, who is NJPAC’s Jazz Advisor, settles into each program like an old friend jamming and jawing with a fellow musician—and that’s a true-life scenario.

McBride’s conversations with his pals are easygoing and inside-out, punctuated with illustrative musical interludes and duets. The audience has its say during Q&As. In September, 29-time Grammy-winning jazz guitarist Pat Metheny, a DownBeat Hall of Famer, shared the stage with McBride. Two months later, during the TD James Moody Jazz Festival, pianist and singer-songwriter Bruce Hornsby chatted with him about musical influences and past collaborations.
Something’s in the Air

In addition to broadcasts of American Songbook at NJPAC and One-on-One with Steve Adubato at NJPAC, the Arts Center’s many appearances on the air created new audiences who didn’t have to be in the building to see first-class entertainment.

For the most recent edition of Jonathan’s Choice: An Evening of Music and Conversation, WNYC host and Songbook champion Jonathan Schwartz interviewed Broadway singers Jessica Molaskay, who performed her interpretations of best-loved numbers by Joni Mitchell, SiriusXM Broadway host Seth Rudetsky interviewed Arts Education musical theater students on his satellite radio show. And stay tuned for “Women Who Set the Agenda” with the former New York City schools chancellor in March, and returned for a discussion at NJPAC—and enjoyed rendition of the national anthem.

Women Supporting Women

Grameen America President and CEO Andrea Jung spoke before 450 guests at the Women’s Association of NJPAC’s Annual Spring Luncheon and Auction on May 5, telling the Arts Center’s principal volunteer fundraisers that women can become “economic engines” given capital and financial aid, and can succeed “not with a handout, but with a hand up.”

In seven years, Grameen America, founded by Nobel Prize winner Muhammad Yunus, has empowered more than 47,000 women in 11 cities to create their own businesses through a program of micro-loans and financial training. The former chief of Avon Products, Inc., Jung occupies a high rung on the female executive power lists of Forbes and Fortune magazines and the Financial Times. She reported that 99% of Grameen America’s borrowers completed payback of their loans, which provide the capital for such enterprises as flower shops, hair salons and cleaning services. The organization currently has a New Jersey presence in Union City.

The panelist represented dance issues of varied ethnic backgrounds. They included Nai-Ni Chen (Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company), Carolyn Dorfman (Carolyn Dorfman Dance), Jennifer Weber (Decadance/theatre), Karen Love (Umoja Dance Company), Virginia Johnson (Dance Theatre of Harlem) and Natasha Thomas (Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater); some also serve on NJPAC’s Celebrate Dance Committee.

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Topical Talks

Scott Simon, one of the country’s best-known commentators, held a pair of conversations with thought leaders Joel L. Klein and Arianna Huffington during the Trending with Scott Simon series presented by U.S. Trust.

The host of NPR’s Weekend Edition Saturday discussed “Lessons in Education Reform” with the former New York City schools chancellor in March, and returned for “Women Who Set the Agenda” with the media mogul two months later. Both speakers also signed copies of their latest books and engaged the audience with lively Q&As.

The opportunity for the mayor to speak to the voters in a format and unfiltered way is what our democracy is all about,” said NJPAC President and CEO John Schreiber. “NJPAC is proud to host these important gatherings.

In February, a purposeful forum centered on economic development, followed in April by an unblinking assessment of education. The programs concluded in June with an examination of health by experts from Rutgers, the City of Newark and East Orange General Hospital.

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Topical talks

Scott Simon, one of the country’s best-known commentators, held a pair of conversations with thought leaders Joel L. Klein and Arianna Huffington during the Trending with Scott Simon series presented by U.S. Trust.

The host of NPR’s Weekend Edition Saturday discussed “Lessons in Education Reform” with the former New York City schools chancellor in March, and returned for “Women Who Set the Agenda” with the media mogul two months later. Both speakers also signed copies of their latest books and engaged the audience with lively Q&As.

The opportunity for the mayor to speak to the voters in a format and unfiltered way is what our democracy is all about,” said NJPAC President and CEO John Schreiber. “NJPAC is proud to host these important gatherings.

In February, a purposeful forum centered on economic development, followed in April by an unblinking assessment of education. The programs concluded in June with an examination of health by experts from Rutgers, the City of Newark and East Orange General Hospital.
Ask Them Anything

Have question? Will answer. NJPAC’s volunteers assisted 5,823 patrons at the customer information center during the year, a task made easier by equipping roaming volunteers with tablets and “Ask Me Anything” buttons. Want to know where to find the rest rooms, how to become a Member, what’s coming up at NJPAC, or if NJ Transit is running on schedule? The first responder to your query is likely to be a volunteer.

In fact, volunteers logged more than 4,680 administrative hours in the last fiscal year. Off campus, they promote NJPAC at train stations, libraries and festivals in your communities. They were seen line-judging at the Women’s Association of NJPAC’s Ping Pong in the Park, taking care of the children auditioning for Annie Jr. in Arts Education, and participating in plans for the launch of the Newark 350th anniversary celebration. For above-and-beyond service, however, John Sowell takes the prize. He volunteered to be splattered with 1,000 paintballs fired by MythBusters celebration. For above-and-beyond service, however, John Sowell takes the prize. He volunteered to be splattered with 1,000 paintballs fired by MythBusters Jamie Hyneman and Adam Savage in the experiment, but still wound up picking flecks of paint from his teeth. ●

In Our Own Backyard

The Arts Education Department has been advocating for the children of Newark and their schools in significant ways.

- NJPAC is actively participating in a grant-funded study by the Newark Arts Education Roundtable on developing common tools to evaluate the collective impact of the work of Newark’s arts providers on the city’s children.
- Arts Education was also approached by Newark City of Learning Collaborative, a collective at the Cornwall Center at Rutgers University dedicated to increasing the percentage of residents with postsecondary degrees, to represent the arts as a career choice. In response, NJPAC offered some 800 students the opportunity to attend arts workshops at Essex County College.
- A database project in progress, Newark Thrives, will provide parents with listings of resources, activities and programs outside of school time with just a few keystrokes. NJPAC is one of the principal organizations on board for pollinating the calendar with after-school and weekend programs. ●

Holiday celebrations

Whenever holiday weekends are celebrated, Community Engagement steps up to enhance the main event with related attractions. Leading up to NJPAC’s Ping Pong in the Park, a whole lot of fun “camped out” in Prudential Hall lobby and rose the next morning to breakfast, Ping Pong in the Park. Among those tuned up and turned on were NJPAC’s own Executive Vice President and COO, Warren Tranquada, and his wife, Alexine, a futurist who last performed 15 years ago with a community flute choir at Berklee College of Music. The classical music patrons listening in the lobby reportedly couldn’t tell the difference between the NSO singers and Warren on his borrowed tenor sax. ●

NJSO’s Orchestra You

The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra describes it as “livelier than ever.” He volunteered to be splattered with 1,000 paintballs fired by MythBusters Adam Savage and Jamie Hyneman on stage. Sowell wore a 150-pound armored suit for the experiment, but still wound up picking flecks of paint from his teeth. ●

Women’s Association Strategic Plan

In September, the Women’s Association of NJPAC finalized a 2015-16 strategic plan that reaffirms its mission to “fund, promote and advocate” for the Arts Center and support its arts education programs. Two new committees grew from this evaluation: Marketing and Promotions (Tenagne Girma-Jeffries, Chair) and Programming (Mikki Taylor and Tai Beauchamp, Co-Chairs). The first committee focuses on the overall branding of the organization, especially its presence on social media and web platforms. While Programming will study new ways to create “info-taining” events for the WA, which places its membership at 2,000-plus. As the WA enters its third decade as the single largest annual funding source for NJPAC, it intends to take a closer look at increasing its fundraising potential, broadening its base of supporters, and enhancing the benefits of WA membership, among other goals. ●

Shall We Dance?

When it comes to promoting dance programming at NJPAC, Community Engagement is the cheerleading squad captain. Books on the Move, its children’s reading series, chose a biography of choreographer Alvin Ailey to share at libraries and community centers. Art members of the department’s Dance Advisory Committee, seasoned dancemakers all, were integral to the Jersey (New) Moves! creation process and performance. Liturgical dance classes and other free workshops were presented on and off the Arts Center campus throughout the year. ●

Ping Pong in the Park

At this gathering, a backhanded compliment was a good thing. Spectators’ darting eyeballs were fixated on the table-tennis team from New Jersey Institute of Technology at the Ping Pong in the Park tournament on April 16, a first-time event produced by the Cultural Legacy Committee of the Women’s Association of NJPAC and in collaboration with the Military Park Partnership. Sure enough, NJIT took first and second places in the Military Park tournament, with Essex County College taking third place. Other attractions included an eclectic lineup of food trucks, music by DJ Sienna Chanel, prizes, and student discounts to NJPAC performances. ●

Views from the Mountaintop: Dance Theatre of Harlem and the Civil Rights Era, a panel at the Montclair Public Library. For DTH’s performance, nearly 200 Girl Scouts ‘camped out’ in Prudential Hall lobby and rose the next morning to breakfast, Ping Pong in the Park. Among those tuned up and turned on were NJPAC’s own Executive Vice President and COO, Warren Tranquada, and his wife, Alexine, a futurist who last performed 15 years ago with a community flute choir at Berklee College of Music. The classical music patrons listening in the lobby reportedly couldn’t tell the difference between the NSO singers and Warren on his borrowed tenor sax. ●

NJPAC, briefly

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NJPAC/M. John Richard Community Service Award

The NJPAC/M. John Richard Community Service Award—a Thanksgiving tradition at the Arts Center—is conferred on staffers who work to make the world a better place. The honoree at the eighth annual ceremony was Brian Remite, Database Analyst, Customer Care Systems, who dedicates himself to Extra Life, a 24-hour gaming marathon in support of the Children’s Miracle Network. Locally, this benefits Children’s Specialized Hospital in Mountainside.

In a full-circle moment, John Richard, NJPAC’s former Executive Vice President and COO, recalled serving as Board President of Children’s Specialized Hospital in the ‘80s. Remite, a seven-year fundraiser President and COO, recalled serving as Board President of Children’s Specialized Hospital for the network, introduced a $2,000 donation for the network, is President of the Specialized Hospital Foundation in the ‘80s. Remite, a seven-year fundraiser President and COO, recalled serving as Board President of Children’s Specialized Hospital in Mountainside.

Fiddle-and-Fa-La-Fest

More than 300 students from six El Sistema-inspired music-instruction programs across New Jersey dazzled family, friends and audience members at El Sistema New Jersey Alliance’s second annual Fiddle-and-Fa-La-Fest at NJPAC on June 6. The student musicians of NJSO CHAMPS (Character, Achievement, and Music Project), the Paterson Music Project, Sister Cities Girlchoir, Sonic Explorations, Union City Music Project and El Sistema-Trenton each performed a featured piece before combining for a special finale—a mash-up of Bob Marley’s “Three Little Birds” and Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy.”

M.A.N.Y. Benefits

M.A.N.Y. (Music Advancement for Newark-Area Youth), a partnership with the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra’s education department, earned an ovation for its 2015 debut. The program, which provides students with quality instruction on instruments, exceeded expectations in numbers alone: The symphonic band and youth orchestra ensembles were expected to enroll about 15 players each and the final tally reached 19-plus for each ensemble, totaling 70 students. M.A.N.Y. builds leadership skills and musical proficiency in beginning and experienced students, while grooming them for acceptance into community programs and ensembles.

eTicket Delivery

With NJPAC’s mobile entry option, introduced in 2015, smartphone users who select the eTicket delivery option when buying tickets can always have them in their pocket—no more “Arggh! I left them on the dresser!” Mobile entry allows patrons to go directly to a guest services staff member to be scanned into NJPAC’s theaters. It also provides instantaneous transfers of purchased tickets to other people. Just download the Ticketmaster app, available for iOS or Android from the iTunes App Store or GooglePlay.

Exceptional Leaders

A team of six NJPAC staffers was chosen for the esteemed American Express Nonprofit Leadership Academy, held in New York. Addressing a shortage of rising leaders in the nonprofit sector, American Express teams up with the Center for Creative Leadership, a top-ranked provider of executive education, to train participants in the skills needed to take their organizations into the future. The program offers slots competitively to individuals who hold manager-level positions and show strong career momentum. NJPAC was proudly represented by (l-r) Andy Donald, Debra Volz, Evan White, Allison Scott-Williams, Mary Jaffe and Chad Spies.

International Summer Arts Camp

Arts Education faculty shared an unforgettable week with refugee children and teens from five different countries at a summer arts camp hosted by NJPAC at Kean University in Union. Working hand-in-hand with the International Rescue Committee—a humanitarian and organization for refugee families in crisis—and Kean’s Human Rights Institute, NJPAC Teaching Artists led sessions in creative movement, poetry and dramatic storytelling. Parents and IRC staff were invited to a culminating performance and reception at the institute’s splendid art gallery.

Community Art Party

In a project designed to engage the imagination and the neighborhood, families from throughout Greater Newark turned out in the Ironbound section on May 23 for a Community Art Party, featuring noted Brazilian muralist Alexandre Kto. The artist, who chose Newark as his only New Jersey stop on a multi-city tour, created a striking mural that evokes the historical links between the African diaspora and Brazil. The event’s success was attributed to a coalition that included NJPAC Community Engagement, Harlem Arts Alliance, Ironbound Community Corp. and Yendor Productions.

Rap on the Map

Hip-hop artists from China, India, West Africa and the U.S. gathered at Essex County College in Newark on February 2 to unite cultures through the international language of rap and spoken-word performance. Planet Rock: The Afro-Asiatic Origin of Hip Hop Past. Present and Future was moderated by hip-hop expert Dr. Jahjah Shakur and co-presented by NJPAC in YOUR Community! Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company, the Africana Institute and True School University. Special guest was bamboo rapper Ma XingYe, who was visiting New Jersey under the auspices of the Consulate of the People’s Republic of China.
Whether it’s programming or marketing, arts education or development or day-to-day operations, NJPAC’s enthusiastic, professional team shares a genuine passion for making the Arts Center experience world-class, every time. In this year’s Report to the Community, we shine the spotlight on three of the outstanding staff members who embody the NJPAC mission.

There aren’t many people on staff who can say that they’ve worked at NJPAC from the ground up, but Jessie Jimenez is one of them.

“People love it,” she says. “They can just call someone who knows them. They build relationships with the representatives, who monitor their accounts and know what they like. They know the rep will call them when something is about to go on sale and guarantee them the better seats. And the fact is, they don’t have to go through answering machines, vocennals or phone prompts. It’s like having their own personal shopper!”

One of her favorite activities is a night out with the girlfriends, sampling various of martinis. “I must say, the clue of women I hang out with are women that I’ve met and supervised at NJPAC. I truly can call them my sisters and it’s because of the job.”

Jimenez is mom to two boys, ages 21 and 13, and a pair of Chihuahuas: Pebbles and Bam Bam. She visits her own mom and relatives in Puerto Rico every year.

“I met my husband, Dean, in Puerto Rico and it turned out we were from the same area in Newark and hung out with the same people, in the same places, but never knew each other. He wanted to come back to New Jersey and I said. ‘If you want to come back, then it has to be Newark.’”

As Senior Director of Programming, White books artists and coordinates performances closely with Executive Vice President and Executive Producer David Rodriguez—that accounts for 50-plus shows each season on his playlist. He began his 13-year tenure with NJPAC as a programming coordinator for three producers, then segued into booking musicians for Horizon Foundation Sounds of the City.

“Programming is all about audience development,” he explains. “It’s about reaching out to audiences and providing shows they can relate to. There are different levels of programming. There are the things audiences expect to see at NJPAC, and the artists and events we offer to entice them to come.”

Raised in Chatham Township, White’s early exposure to music was through his mother, a Woodstock alum who gifted him with an old acoustic guitar and a cassette by Spanish classical guitarist Andres Segovia. (“I didn’t know it was possible to play like that,” he remembers.) At Eastman School of Music, he majored in music and classical guitar performance.

Because “they don’t reach you in music school how to make money,” White continues, he performed in rock bands and at weddings and coffeehouses before taking a job at the Community Theatre in Morristown (now the Mayo Center for the Performing Arts) as an assistant to the artistic director. There, he learned the A-to-Z of theater operations and bookings—skills that he put to use at NJPAC about seven years ago when asked to build a summer concert series featuring Smokey Robinson, Diana Krall and others.

“NJPAC is one of the only places in New Jersey where you can be creative and produce, rather than just present,” White says. “I’ve been at NJPAC a long time and a reason for that is I really admire its mission. I believe in bringing Newark back and have confidence that it will happen.”

Who We Are

Call it the Dixon Effect. In just one case, a patron felt extra special when Dixon brought her a wheelchair at curbside and escorted her to a box seat. She and her husband shared their gratitude by becoming donors.

And because the lifelong Newarker mostly considers this part of his duty, such admirable stories are heard only from his colleagues and those he assists.

Dixon reports to Chief of Security John Hook and supervises about 14 officers. They control the NJPAC environment and its accessibility—that includes NICO Kitchen + Bar—and meet with other departments to ensure readiness for any possible scenario. In his 18 years at the Arts Center, Dixon has encountered just about all of them, from illness and accidents to staying on the premises until an overenthusiastic performer’s after-party concludes in the wee hours.

(Scout over, Kevin Costner. He’s even been Whitney Houston’s bodyguard.)

As a young man, Dixon was employed as the security supervisor at Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey, also in Newark, when he decided to take a position with the new Arts Center. Feeling badly about leaving, he ribbed his bosses that he hoped to “help the children” at his new job.

One day at NJPAC, totally by chance, Dixon crossed paths with his former board chairman. “He said to me, ‘Where are all the kids you work with?’” Dixon recalls, laughing.

He’s “Pop-Pop” to five grandchildren and enjoys taking them to Branch Brook Park near his home. Dixon himself is in the house on performance nights, and although he raves about the variety of shows at NJPAC, he rarely gets to see them. He’s busy keeping a watchful eye on gatherings as large as the crowds outside for Horizon Foundation Sounds of the City as well as intimate meet-and-greets with artists.

His motto could be “Always Have a Solution.” But given the choice, held probably say, without a trace of pretense, “We Work Together as a Team.”
The FY13–15 Strategic Plan took its final bow on June 30, but not before hitting or surpassing its marks in such crucial areas as programming, arts education and financial sustainability.

The plan’s targets included expanding audiences through more diverse and distinctive programming, enhancing the positive impact of arts education programs, and improving long-range fiscal vitality. NJPAC’s $40.5 million operating budget for FY16 is 30% larger than it was prior to the plan, and FY15 showed the strongest financial results since FY08.

NJPAC reaches out to even more households each year, more than double the number before the plan was implemented. Its customer base has grown in diversity, reflecting the spectrum of New Jersey’s unique communities. And the Arts Center now draws more visitors from out of state than it has at any point in its history.

NJPAC hosted 415 performance and non-performance events last year and has seen a significant uptick over the past six years. Performances each season that are considered regionally or nationally distinctive also have more than doubled.

The number of individuals served by the Arts Education Department has increased by nearly 50% over the past three years, attributed in large part to initiatives that embrace the most compelling trends in arts education. For example, The Johnny Mercer Foundation’s Mercer Musical Theater Program with NJPAC mirrors the Maker Movement, as students create and produce an original musical that gives voice to their experiences.
New Jersey Performing Arts Center thanks each and every one of its Members for making a commitment that helps to ensure the future well-being and success of your Arts Center…

The New Jersey Performing Arts Center reserves special accolades for its Shining Stars, the generous visionaries, luminaries and great dreamers who made everything possible. This list includes contributors whose cumulative giving to NJPAC totals $1 million and above. As of January 15, 2016

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