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FirstWorks 15th Anniversary Celebration Honors 15 Community Leaders with a Glitter and Glam Evening Featuring Complexions Contemporary Ballet

Providence, R.I. (May 15, 2019) – FirstWorks, a non-profit dedicated to connecting Rhode Island audiences to world-class arts, celebrated its 15th anniversary on Wednesday, April 17, 2019 at The Providence Performing Arts Center (PPAC). The Glitter and Glam Party honored the contributions of 15 community leaders as “founding pillars” of FirstWorks and included speeches from Congressman David Cicilline and Mayor Jorge O. Elorza. The festivities were followed by a performance of “From Bach to Bowie” by Complexions Contemporary Ballet for an audience of 1,600 people.

“FirstWorks was born with the idea that the vitality and power of firsts in the arts could strengthen Providence. Together, we have forged an organization that has reached over half a million people with firsts in the arts,” said Kathleen Pletcher, FirstWorks Founder and Executive Artistic Director. “The FirstWorks model brings world class arts to Providence and creates opportunities for local communities and our students to experience specially designed educational programs. This would not be possible without a whole ecosphere of partnerships starting with the City of Providence and the Department of Arts, Culture and Tourism.”

Melissa E. Darigan, Vice President of the FirstWorks board and recently appointed Rhode Island Superior Court judge, kicked off the celebrations by welcoming the 150 party guests and announcing the honorees.

Congressman Cicilline provided the first grant that created FirstWorks in 2004 while serving as Mayor of Providence. In his remarks he reminisced about Kathleen Pletcher’s original

vision for an arts festival that ultimately grew to include a robust education program that now reaches over 4,500 students.

“FirstWorks is not just a great organization, but a vital organization,” said Mayor Jorge O. Elorza during opening remarks to party guests. “I believe the arts bring different people together to celebrate each other, and to recognize our common humanity. This is why organizations such as FirstWorks are so important. In our partnership with FirstWorks, we brought over 100,000 people to Providence to dance in the streets, to dance with strangers and enjoy each other's company at PVDFest.”

From the stage, First Gentleman Andy Moffit presented FirstWorks' Executive Artistic Director and Founder, Kathleen Pletcher, with a citation from Governor Gina M. Raimondo honoring FirstWorks' role as an artistic and cultural beacon for Rhode Island.

The FirstWorks 15 founding honorees include:

Normand G. Benoit, retired, Partridge Snow & Hahn LLP

Norm Benoit served as Board President from 2010-2019, after six years as a founding FirstWorks board member. Under his leadership, FirstWorks launched the Artistic Icons Series, forged a formal role as founding partner for PVDFest, and undertook the implementation of three strategic plans.

Frederick K. Butler, retired, Textron Inc.

As FirstWorks' first Board President, Fred Butler led the turnaround of the one night First Night Festival into a vibrant, year-round performing arts organization. Thanks to his business acumen and leadership, FirstWorks' Arts Learning program became core to the organization's mission, and thousands of Rhode Island students have been exposed to potentially life-changing creative opportunities.

Letitia Carter, Carter Family Charitable Trust

Letitia Carter's significant support helped FirstWorks' most ambitious projects. With her partnership, FirstWorks made new strides connecting Rhode Island with world-class artists – an intergenerational collaboration with Sweet Honey in the Rock; the first Rhode Island appearance of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre; and FirstWorks' on-going partnership with Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra. Carter helped establish the FirstWorks Artistic Icons Series at The Vets and corresponding educational matinees.

Arnold “Buff” Chace Jr., Founder and Managing partner at Cornish Associates

Buff Chace's vision of change for Providence's downtown has been an inspiration and laid the foundation for the first FirstWorks Urban Carnevale on Westminster Street. Chace's partnership on FirstWorks' first National Endowment for the Arts “Our Town” Grant, a \$200,000 award, made the 2012 FirstWorks Festival on the Plaza a huge success.

Congressman David Cicilline, Mayor of Providence 2003-2011

The unique public/private partnership between newly created Providence Department of Art, Culture + Tourism and FirstWorks sprang from the arts platform of then Mayor David Cicilline in 2004. It was his initial grant that first started FirstWorks. Congressman Cicilline, along with the entire federal delegation, vigorously advocate for the National Endowment for the Arts which has provided support for 22 grants critical to FirstWorks' growth.

Robert A. DiMuccio, Chairman, President and CEO of Amica Insurance

Amica has been an important FirstWorks supporter since 2006, helping in the organization's early years with printing FirstWorks programs, and then sponsoring arts learning with world-class artists for Rhode Island students as well as providing a seed investment in PVDfest. DiMuccio's passion for supporting youth and his encouragement have been instrumental in establishing support for FirstWorks from the greater business community, including FirstWorks' “Adopt A School” program.

Mayor Jorge O. Elorza & The City of Providence

Mayor Elorza's vision for a city-wide celebration converged with the FirstWorks festival model to form the powerhouse that has become PVDfest. FirstWorks is honored to co-produce PVDfest with the City of Providence, and the Department of Art, Culture + Tourism and its director Stephanie Fortunato. PVDfest has become a defining emblem of the Creative Capital, attracting a record 100,000 attendees last year.

William Hatfield, Market President at Bank of America

Bank of America is an important sponsor of FirstWorks, going back to the organization's origins as First Night. Their grants and special sponsorships provided funding for the transformative Season of the Silk Road with Yo-Yo Ma in 2009, launching FirstWorks' formal arts learning program and a ground-breaking relationship with Wynton Marsalis and Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, which has provided learning tools to students and teachers across Rhode Island.

Christina Paxson, President of Brown University

Brown University – through the Creative Arts Council and now BAI (Brown Arts Initiative) - partnered with FirstWorks from the very beginning on far-reaching, visionary projects. This dynamic university/non-profit collaboration has been central to FirstWorks' excellence in arts innovation. BAI's Butch Rovin was the co-director of Pixilerations, a FirstWorks digital performance initiative. Joint projects with American Dance Legacy Initiative and Julie Strandberg have included the Mark Morris Dance for Parkinson's Disease Project and the extraordinary Paul Taylor Legacy Project.

Randall Rosenbaum, Executive Director of the Rhode Island State Council on the Arts (RISCA)

From the beginning, Randy Rosenbaum has counselled and supported FirstWorks, bringing a statewide perspective to the organization's growth and an understanding of the multi-pronged impact an arts presenter can have. RISCA has provided

opportunities to engage with local colleagues and has helped FirstWorks grow as an arts engager with pivotal opportunities including a 2006 American Masters grant.

J.L. “Lynn” Singleton, President of Providence Performing Arts Center (PPAC)

PPAC's early partnership and mentorship was critical to the success of FirstWorks, introducing audiences to dance and jazz, and supporting bold risk-taking. PPAC has been a steadfast partner of FirstWorks in bringing world-class performance to Rhode Island. Highlights of the partnership include collaborations to present Complexions Contemporary Ballet on April 17, 2019, Joffrey Ballet in 2012, The Silkroad Ensemble with Yo-Yo Ma in 2009, and Momix movement illusionists in 2005.

Rosanne Somerson, President of Rhode Island School of Design (RISD)

One of FirstWorks' earliest partners, RISD's collaboration fused the design and live arts communities with projects including conversations with legendary composer Philip Glass, student matinees with Yo-Yo Ma, local premieres with Aurea Ensemble, and projects with extraordinary Muslim artists through the *Caravanserai* project. RISD also led the collaborative Pixilerations digital performance and art festival for nine years, and hosted the FirstWorks Kids Festival on its campus.

Neil Steinberg, President and CEO of Rhode Island Foundation

Under Steinberg's leadership, the Rhode Island Foundation has helped FirstWorks to implement strategy and build capacity through counselling, training, and convenings of the Initiative for Non-Profit Excellence. Rhode Island Foundation's multi-year support for FirstWorks' strategic plan to “lift Rhode Island through the arts,” aims to create greater impact through arts learning, festivals as drivers for urban vitality, and projects with local, national, and international creators who engage the community.

Angel Taveras, Mayor of Providence 2011-2015, National Grid Foundation Board Member

Under former Mayor Taveras, FirstWorks and the Providence Department of Art, Culture + Tourism were awarded the first of three prestigious "Our Town" grants to produce the pilot FirstWorks Festival on the Plaza in 2012, and celebrated a joint 10th anniversary with a free Urban Carnevale celebration. Mayor Taveras' support enabled FirstWorks to implement the year-long *Caravanserai* project, building bridges between American audiences and Muslim artists.

John & Liz White, TACO/The While Family Foundation

The White Family's support, starting in 2005, helped FirstWorks to grow from a strategic idea to a 15-year old organization. TACO/The White Family provided the seed investments at critical moments that launched FirstWorks' education program and provided year-long themed programming. Together, FirstWorks and TACO, ran a ground-breaking summer arts camp for the children of TACO employees for over twenty years.

About FirstWorks

FirstWorks is a non-profit based in Providence, Rhode Island whose purpose is to build the cultural, educational and economic vitality of its community by engaging audiences with world-class performing arts and education programs. Since 2004, FirstWorks festivals, performances and programs have attracted more than 500,000 participants. The FirstWorks Arts Learning Program reaches more than 4,500 students from public and charter schools across Rhode Island with transformative, arts-based learning experiences. FirstWorks is Founding Partner for PVDfest, collaborating with the City of Providence to produce an international arts celebration held each June that in 2018 drew 100,000 visitors to Providence to experience music, art and spectacular performances. Visit firstworks.org to learn more.