

# HEART & SOUL CAMPAIGN UPDATE

## HEART & SOUL CABINET

Please reach out to any of my fellow Campaign Cabinet members about our organization or this project:

Doris Johnson,  
*Chair*

Gerri Aaron,  
*Honorary Chair*

Marian Moss,  
*Board Chair*

Marvin Albert  
Cheryl Anderson  
Chris Caswell  
Michael Gardiner  
Sy Goldblatt  
Shelley Goldblatt  
Christine Jennings  
Linda Knox  
Alan Kurland  
Margie Nellum Lee  
Carolyn Michel  
Howard Millman  
Dr. Randall Morgan  
Eva Slane  
Lois Watson  
Bernard Watson

## MESSAGE FROM THE CAMPAIGN CHAIR: DORIS JOHNSON

**DRUM ROLL, PLEASE:** Thanks to a \$1 million lead gift from Gerri Aaron, a match of that amount from our entire Board, and now an additional \$2 million from many generous members of the community, we are pleased to announce that we have raised \$4 million of our \$6 million goal!

The dream of transforming our 2.5-acre, two-building campus into a cohesive, theatre arts center and creating an endowment fund to ensure WBTT's future is fast becoming a reality. Recently we broke ground on our Education and Outreach Building, one of two buildings on the site.

If you have any questions about the **Heart & Soul Campaign**, please contact me or Julie Leach, executive director. I can be reached at [doris06999@aol.com](mailto:doris06999@aol.com) and Julie can be reached at [jleach@westcoastblacktheatre.org](mailto:jleach@westcoastblacktheatre.org). We'd love to tell you more about it!




## INSPIRATIONAL PHILANTHROPIST

Originally from Philadelphia, Pa., **GERRI AARON** and her late husband were attracted to Sarasota more than 40 years ago because of the many amenities, particularly the arts and theatre. One of Gerri's passions was WBTT. In gratitude for her leadership gift of \$1 million, the theatre building will be named the Gerri Aaron and the Aaron Family Foundation Theatre Building. Gerri also serves as the **Heart & Soul Campaign's** honorary chair.

### Why did you decide to give such a generous and important gift to WBTT?

"My original interest was inspired by Nate Jacobs. He is an exceptional person with an uncanny ability to recognize raw talent. I've been captivated watching how he mentors and trains the kids to always be the best they can be. Also, I'm impressed with his innate artistic and performing talents. Under Nate, this Troupe



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## LOCAL FOUNDATION STEPS FORWARD

One of the very generous gifts that brought our totals closer to our goal came from the **WILLIAM G. AND MARIE SELBY FOUNDATION**. We are grateful and honored to have received a \$250,000 grant from the Foundation.

Dr. Sarah Pappas, past president of the Selby Foundation, remarked, *“Our board was very impressed with the large number of community partners who also contributed to this project. We continue to be inspired by the cultural diversity that the Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe has added to our arts community and are happy to support its education and outreach programs with this grant.”*

We know how carefully the Selby Foundation makes its granting decisions and we are so pleased with the vote of confidence this support represents. To show our gratitude for this generous gift, the second floor of the Education and Outreach Building will be named the William G. & Marie Selby Foundation Administrative Wing.



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## INSPIRATIONAL PHILANTHROPIST from page 1

has flourished. In addition, I believe WBTT is on the cusp of something greater; they have much more to offer our community and the world.”

### **What would you tell other donors who might consider supporting WBTT and this campaign?**

“I am hoping my gift will inspire others. Once you see these electrifying shows, you will have an understanding of the excellence and meaning of this group .... and the need.

WBTT is a model of creativity and innovation. The young artists receive mentorship and support from Nate and they see his tenacity at work every day. That is a very meaningful life lesson and is beyond talent and entertainment. To me, this is what is special about WBTT. Another reason to support this incredible Troupe is that it is local, in our own community. We all should be so proud of them.”

### **How will you feel when the new campus project is finished?**

“I will be absolutely elated to see the final product. The theatre building was in such terrible condition when we first purchased it; it was hard to see how it could be adequately used at the time. The plans for both buildings and the campus are truly spectacular.”

***“I believe WBTT is on the cusp of something greater; they have much more to offer our community and the world.”***

A 6,000 square-foot rooftop garden terrace will be available for theatre or private functions



## PHASE 1 Groundbreaking

In Phase 1 of our construction, the historic Binz building will be renovated to become the headquarters for WBTT's administrative offices, weekday Box Office, and education and outreach programs. Flexible space will transform four education classrooms into a large area for up to 200 dining guests.



Other enhancements include a welcoming courtyard that unites the theatre and Binz buildings, expanded parking, and better lighting to assure patron safety



WBTT Board of Directors join Founder/Artistic Director Nate Jacobs and Executive Director Julie Leach in shoveling the dirt to begin Phase 1



Students from Stage of Discovery, our summer musical theatre intensive program, performed an original song written by Nate Jacobs for the groundbreaking ceremony



Far left: Board member, Marvin Albert, lead donor Gerri Aaron, and Julie Leach celebrate this milestone

Near left: City Commissioner Willie Shaw, Vice Mayor Liz Alpert, and Commissioner Jen Ahearn-Koch (not pictured) attended and congratulated WBTT on our invaluable contribution to Sarasota's cultural scene

[www.westcoastblacktheatre.org/gift-opportunities](http://www.westcoastblacktheatre.org/gift-opportunities)

## HEART & SOUL DONOR SPOTLIGHT

For the last five years, since discovering WBTT, **SY AND SHELLEY GOLDBLATT** have become some of WBTT's most ardent supporters. Sy serves as a WBTT Board member, and he and Shelley both serve on the Heart & Soul Campaign Cabinet. "We saw WBTT perform about eight years ago when they didn't have a permanent home. It's easy to appreciate the entertainment and talent. But there is so much more: WBTT provides a unique platform for people of color to showcase their gifts as actors, singers, dancers, musicians, choreographers, and directors. This does not exist elsewhere in Florida. The Campaign is the most meaningful way to ensure there is a suitable theatre for the audience to enjoy professional shows while, right next door, young artists can grow personally and professionally through mentorships and training.



such a joy to see many of the young performers grow into poised, talented artists. We've decided to participate in the capital campaign because the buildings desperately need these renovations. Our gift is naming the Library, which is meaningful to us because Lois worked as a librarian." The Library will house WBTT's collection of archived productions, books and resources for researching new productions, and a media center for students, creative staff and performers to do online research.

**MIKE AND KAREN GARDINER**, residents of Longboat Key and Los Angeles, have been active sponsors of WBTT for over seven years and Mike has been a long-time Board member.



*"Our involvement began when we saw a Motown show at the Arts Center. We were instantly captivated by their energy, talent, and passion. Since then it has been our pleasure to participate in their fairytale rise from a struggling theatrical group to one of Sarasota's signature companies. Being contributors to the Heart and Soul Campaign means that we will be a part of their future successes including: offering continual exposure of the African-American experiences and arts through their musical and dramatic performances; Stage of Discovery for aspiring teenagers; and the Young Performers Showcases. We strongly encourage everyone to help make Nate's dreams prosper and flourish."*

For years, **LOIS AND BERNARD WATSON** enjoyed theatre in New York City and Philadelphia. "When we first started spending our winters in Sarasota in the mid-'90s, we were overjoyed to find a vibrant Black theatre company here. We knew immediately that we wanted to be involved with WBTT. It is



**Check out the renderings and floor plans of our new facilities and watch a video of the dream unfolding: <http://westcoastblacktheatre.org/capital-campaign/heartandsoul>. Our Campaign webpage also lists all our generous donors to date.**

### BE PART OF THE HEART & SOUL CAMPAIGN

We invite you to join us by considering a special campaign contribution. Pledges may be payable over five years. WBTT is happy to accept options in addition to cash, such as securities, gifts of property, life insurance, and other assets. For more information, please contact Julie Leach at (941) 366-1505, ext. 103 or [jleach@westcoastblacktheatre.org](mailto:jleach@westcoastblacktheatre.org).