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Recipients for 12th Annual Medal of Honor in the Arts Represent Region's Creative Talent

Winthrop University

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Recipients for 12th Annual Medal of Honor in the Arts Represent Region's Creative Talent

Quick Facts

- The Medal of Honor in the Arts honorees are: Fortune Feimster, S.C. Sen. Wes Hayes, Mary Jackson and Si Kahn.
- The 8 p.m. event includes an evening of performances by faculty and students, and a reception in Johnson Hall to honor this year's recipients.
- Tickets for the April 24 event are \$50 each and can be purchased online at <https://www.winthropalumni.com/events/moh>.

*Fortune Feimster*

ROCK HILL, SOUTH CAROLINA – Winthrop University's **12th annual Medal of Honor in the Arts ceremony** on April 24 will recognize a rising comedic star, an arts-minded state senator, a celebrated sweetgrass basket weaver and an influential musician involved in civil rights struggles.

The 8 p.m. event includes an evening of performances by faculty and students, and a reception in **Johnson Hall** to honor this year's recipients:

- **Fortune Feimster** - A stand-up comedian from North Carolina who wrote and appeared on E! Network's "Chelsea Lately" show and is now working on a sitcom produced by Tina Fey.
- **S.C. Sen. Wes Hayes** - A Rock Hill legislator who is one of the most faithful and effective advocates for the arts in the General Assembly.
- **Mary Jackson** - A Charleston master fiber artist whose intricately coiled vessels preserve the centuries-old craft of sweetgrass basketry.
- **Si Kahn** - A Charlotte, North Carolina, resident who has spent 45 years working as a musician and in civil rights, labor and as a community organizer.

*S.C. Sen. Wes Hayes*

Winthrop's Medal of Honor in the Arts event has acknowledged individuals and groups since 2001 who have made a significant contribution to the arts, as well as those who have positively impacted the quality of the cultural life in communities across the Carolinas.

Tickets for the April 24 event are \$50 each and can be purchased online. A portion of Medal of Honor event proceeds goes to a scholarship fund which helps support talented students who have an interest in pursuing careers in the visual arts, dance, music or theatre at Winthrop.

*Mary Jackson*

The Medal of Honor scholarship will be presented during the evening to **Leianne Nicole Johnson**, a junior choral music education major from Gaston, South Carolina.

More on the honorees:*Si Kahn***FORTUNE FEIMSTER**

* **Fortune Feimster** is a Belmont, North Carolina, native and Peace College graduate who taught English for a year in Sevilla, Spain, and then headed in 2003 to Los Angeles. She worked as an

entertainment journalist for the syndicated newspaper column Beck/Smith. By 2005 Feimster was taking improv and sketch classes at the Groundlings Theatre to meet people. After four years of intense training, she was selected to be in the Groundlings' prestigious Sunday Company and performed a new sketch show every week for a year-and-a-half.

Feimster made her national TV debut on NBC's "Last Comic Standing" where she finished as a semi-finalist. She auditioned twice in front of Lorne Michaels for "Saturday Night Live," but she got her lucky break from Chelsea Handler who hired her as full-time writer and performer on the E! Network's popular show, "Chelsea Lately."

Feimster has opened for Chelsea at Caesar's Palace in Windsor and performed in front of 15,000 people as part of Dave Chappelle and Flight of the Conchord's "Oddball Fest." Her standup was also featured on HBO Canada's "Funny As Hell."

She'll be appearing in an upcoming episode of Comedy Central's storytelling show "This Is Not Happening" and can currently be seen in the Jim Belushi movie, "The Secret Lives of Dorks." Feimster also has made recent guest appearances on current television shows, such as "Glee" and "Two Broke Girls."

WES HAYES

* **Robert Wesley (Wes) Hayes Jr.** has represented District 15 in the S.C. Senate since 1991, and previously served from 1985-91 in the S.C. House of Representatives. He now chairs the Senate's Banking and Insurance Committee.

Born in 1952 in Rock Hill, Hayes attended the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, where he was elected president of his class and served as a battalion commander. After graduating in 1975, he was stationed at Fort Bragg from 1976-80 as a master parachutist and ranger, and received the Legion of Merit Award.

Upon leaving active service, Hayes became a member of the S.C. Army National Guard from 1980-2005, in which he held the rank of colonel. A University of South Carolina School of Law graduate, he first practiced at Harrelson, Hayes and Guyton, and later founded his own firm in Rock Hill.

Hayes has been very active volunteering with his church and organizations in York County, particularly with the Boy Scouts of America. The S.C. Arts Commission considers him a champion for the arts because of his tireless dedication and support, his collaboration with arts leadership, and his push for art budget increases and sponsorship of arts legislation.

MARY JACKSON

* A descendent of the Gullah community of coastal South Carolina, **Mary Jackson** was born in 1945 in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina. She learned the art of making baskets at the age of four from her mother and grandmother, a skill brought to the United States by their West African ancestors. She did not take up basketmaking as an adult until 1973 when she began producing baskets full time, and has since taught her daughter the art form.

Jackson's work is exhibited widely in national juried shows and is represented in galleries, museums, and public and private collections throughout the United States and abroad. A 2008 recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship, also known as the "genius award," she has been recognized with many other awards such as the Lifetime Achievement in Craft Arts award from the National Museum for Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C., and the S.C. Arts Commission's Elizabeth O'Neill Verner Award in 2011.

Jackson is a founding member of the Mount Pleasant Sweet Grass Basket Makers Association. She is a leader in efforts to protect threatened sweetgrass habitats, thus ensuring that there will be access to these resources for future generations of basket makers.

SI KAHN

***Si Kahn's** family and his own work history are lively and extensive. He has relatives who have been soldiers in the Czar's army, shoe factory workers, gas station operators, rabbis, civil rights leaders, pick and shovel laborers on the Canadian Pacific Railroad, Jewish faith healers, illegal immigrants, bootleggers, World War I soldiers, Talmudic scholars and a driver for Al Capone.

Kahn has spent 40 years as a composer, lyricist and book writer for musical theater. As a musician, he has performed at concerts and festivals in Portugal, the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England, Northern Ireland, Canada and the U.S.

He has toured with Pete Seeger, Andy Irvine, Cathy Fink & Marcy Marxer and John McCutcheon, and has shared festival and workshop stages with artists ranging from Ani DiFranco to the Fairfield Four. His musical body of work includes 16 albums of original songs; a CD of original songs for children, Good Times and Bedtimes; and a collection of traditional labor and civil rights songs recorded with Pete Seeger and Jane Sapp.

One of Kahn's favorite musical experiences was being asked by publisher Harper-Collins to set to music and record the classic children's books "Runaway Bunny" and "Goodnight Moon." He has composed original music and lyrics for half a dozen films and videos, including labor videos.

During the civil rights era, Kahn began his organizing career in 1965 in Arkansas with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, more popularly known as SNCC, the student wing of the Southern Civil Rights Movement. Kahn also served in the U.S. Army Reserves during the Vietnam era (1965-71). As a member of the 317th Military History Detachment, he co-wrote the official U.S. Army histories of Fort McPherson, Georgia, and Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and of the XVIII Airborne Corps in World War II.

He received his A.B. degree magna cum laude from Harvard College in 1965 and in 1995, received his Ph.D. in American studies with a specialization in cultural studies from The Graduate College for Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences of The Union Institute.

Medal of Honor medallion:

Plural Studios is a design collaboration between husband and wife team **Michael Gayk** and Winthrop faculty member Courtney Starrett. They create unique wearable and sculptural objects inspired by nature and architecture on a micro-level, with a focus on transitions, connections, intersections and details.

Starrett, who joined the Winthrop faculty in 2006, is now on sabbatical as an associate professor of jewelry and metals. Gayk now teaches metals/digital design and fabrication at SUNY New Paltz.

For more information about Medal of Honor in the Arts contact **Amanda Kibiloski** at 803/323-2399 or e-mail her at woolwinea@winthrop.edu.

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