



MONTANA ARTS COUNCIL

AN AGENCY OF STATE GOVERNMENT

Strengthening the Creative Economy of Montana

*Governor's
Arts
Awards*



The six Governor's Arts Awards honorees will be celebrated from 3-4 p.m. Friday, Dec. 2, in the Old Supreme Court Chambers (Room 303) of the Capitol in Helena, followed by a reception in the Rotunda. Everyone is welcome!

Jack Gladstone, Lyric poet and musician

Jack Gladstone's art form blends Native and Western Americana through lyric poetry, music, and spoken word narrative, emphasizing moral consideration within a shared biosphere. He shares his art in both performance and recorded formats.

Gladstone, an enrolled citizen of the Blackfeet Nation, was inducted into the University of Washington Alumni Hall of Fame in 2013 for his "contributions and innovations in the field of communications." Earlier that year, he became the first Montanan (and American Indian) to receive the C.M. Russell Heritage Award, honoring his contributions to the "legacy, culture, life, and country of Russell's West."

Gladstone was honored with the Governor's Humanities Award in 2015 and the Montana Arts Council's Artist Innovation Award last December. In the winter of 2016, he garnered national acclaim from The First Peoples Fund, receiving a Community Spirit Award for "honoring the 'Collective Spirit' – which manifests self-awareness and a sense of responsibility to sustain the cultural fabric of a community."

Gladstone has consistently contributed programs (often pro bono) to Montana's youth, offering cultural narratives that address larger concerns, such as land stewardship and compassion. In anti-bullying assemblies, for example, he demonstrates "strength in unity" through the story of an arrow, which breaks quite easily by itself, but gains great strength when bundled with others.

Seeley Lake teacher Patti Bartlett, who nominated Gladstone for the Governor's Art Award, praises his "long-standing relationship with Montana's students and his enduring public presence interpreting Native and Western culture to travelers from around the world."

"During the past three decades, he has emerged as a positive role model, both culturally and athletically, to students in virtually all of Montana's school districts," she adds.

Gladstone shares Montana's indigenous heritage through both story and song, inspiring students of all ethnicities to reflect upon their own background and encouraging them to trace the heritage of their own families. On the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, he is engaged in promoting healthy choices for students and young adults in regards to suicide and addiction prevention.

As a heritage keeper, he has written dozens of epic ballads addressing historical events and recognizing Native heroes, from "Navajo Code Talkers" to "Remembering Private Charlo." His most recent album, *Native Anthropology*, was named Best Historical Recording by the Native American Music Association.

Gladstone co-founded Glacier National Park's acclaimed lecture series, "Native America Speaks," in 1985, and has participated every year since in the longest continuously running indigenous speaker series in national park history.

Gladstone has also promoted wildland conservation, adding his support to the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act; advocating protection of the Badger Two Medicine Cultural District (south of Glacier National Park) from resource exploitation; and encouraging buffalo restoration on the Northern Great Plains through the Innii Initiative.

"As a musician, Jack is respected by all, and elevates any concert or recording by his skill, commitment and art," writes acclaimed Montana pianist and composer Philip Aaberg. "He is a strong spokesman for unity and clear thinking, and there is no greater calling than that."

Neal and Karen Lewing, Actors, directors and educators

Since 1983, Neal and Karen Lewing have provided Mission Valley residents with the opportunity to participate in live performance, devoting their hearts and souls to this endeavor.

The Lewings have each contributed to the art form with original works, highlighting Montana's unique place in American history. Their original "Valley Full of Diamonds" production honored Polson's blended native and non-native cultures, and featured hundreds of local people of all ages. It was met with standing room-only audiences in Polson's largest auditorium.

Their theatre company – the Post Polson Players – offers all individuals the opportunity to become part of theater, from drama and suspense to musicals and comedy. They customarily create roles for everyone wishing to participate, including those with special needs.

For those not comfortable on stage, they provide other creative opportunities such as costumes, lighting and sound, set building and painting.

"My first live theater experience was in 1986 in a community production of 'Oklahoma.' I was very pregnant with my third child. Lewings added a cameo role

for me, and coached me to sing in the chorus,” recalls nominator Carmine Mowbray. “I still have close friends from that large community production.” Mowbray has continued to perform occasionally and paints backdrops for many productions.

“I do not know of two more consistently hardworking, passionate people who have retained their energy and dedication to their mission,” she says. “They have passed up more lucrative opportunity in order to stay in our community and continue to share their love of live theater.”

The Lewings also established the Old Prison Players, which brought community and summer-stock theater to Deer Lodge, enriching that community with opportunities to perform and watch live theater.

The couple has a longstanding relationship with Polson schools, producing plays in the high school auditorium featuring students of all ages. Participants learn focus, teamwork, discipline and correct diction; and memorizing lines and performing on stage increases their mental abilities and enhances self-confidence.

Several young actors have pursued the art form, with some achieving a level of professional accomplishment.

The Port Polson Players just completed their 41st season. The typical season offers 8-10 productions, including comedies, musicals, dramas, mysteries and children’s theatre. They produce popular works, champion original pieces and value both contemporary and classical plays.

Most of the Players’ productions are staged in a 1938 WPA log building on the Polson Golf Course. Once slated for demolition, the Lewings helped found the nonprofit Mission Valley Friends of the Arts to fund its salvation and maintenance. The Port Polson Players have called the beautiful theatre on the lake “home” for more than three decades.

Neal is also well known across the state for his original productions pairing history with music. These include “Singing the Westward Legacy – Folk Music and the Opening of the West,” “Christmas with Lewis and Clark,” and “Meagher of the Sword – Irish Rebel to Montana Governor,” a musical tribute to Thomas Francis Meagher. He also writes and records original folk music, and performs traditional and original Celtic tunes across the state with the Montana ShamRockers.

Polson attorney and former state legislator John Mercer has written an original play that was produced for the Port Polson Players, and performed with his son, Mike, in two shows. “These two treasures of Montana have devoted their lives to making average citizens a part of the arts,” he writes. “Their unlimited patience, guidance and encouragement have resulted in untold (numbers of) amateurs realizing the dream to perform, and often doing it family style.”

Rick Newby, Poet, publisher & essayist

Rick Newby is one of those rare individuals who fulfills all three roles recognized by the Governor’s Arts Award: artist, organization, and educator, observes Ken Egan, director of Humanities Montana, in nominating the Helena resident. The following profile is largely excerpted from his nomination:

Newby is a gifted Montana poet who has responded lyrically, thoughtfully, deeply to Montana's history, landscape, and contemporary lives. His poetry blends a down-home Montana sensibility with a highly sophisticated sensitivity to European, Asian, and other traditions. The ease with which he blends these seemingly conflicting voices speaks to a playful, confident writer who knows that a Montanan can be every bit as cosmopolitan and profound as a writer from New York, Paris, or Beijing. His collections include *A Radiant Map of the World* (in which he writes, "My tongue is a weapon, a tool, a gift"), *Old Friends Walking in the Mountains* and *The Suburb of Long Suffering*.

Newby has also established the Drumlummon Institute to nurture, publish, and promote significant literature and history centered in his home state. The list of publications issued from Drumlummon includes a book dedicated to the history and current condition of the Little

Shell Tribe (*The Whole Country was ... 'One Robe'*); a visually and verbally stunning study of Butte and Anaconda (*Coming Home: A Special Issue*); revelation of a neglected major Montana talent (*Notes for a Novel: The Selected Poems of Frieda Fliegelman*); astute criticism on an important artist (*Long Lines of Dancing Letters*); and much more.

But this remarkable list only touches the surface of Newby's impact through his nonprofit cultural organization. He continues to seek out, encourage, and publish new voices, new visionaries.

Finally, Newby is an exceptional educator. He teaches through his voluminous writing and editing efforts dedicated to Montana literature and art. Working collaboratively with many gifted thinkers, Newby edited and contributed to an extraordinary collection of essays on Montana literature, *Writing Montana: Literature Under the Big Sky*, a wide-ranging collection that welcomes writers from all over the state, with a special commitment to including voices from "east of the divide."

In 2003, using these same editing skills and sensitivity to Montana's changing literary scene, Newby produced *The New Montana Story: An Anthology*, introducing readers to emerging writers. This book is typical of Newby's commitment to bringing forward new voices, even as he celebrates and critiques the Montana literary canon.

He has also served the educator's role by introducing and editing many forgotten volumes of Montana writing, such as the works of Grace Stone Coates, a too-long neglected writer from central Montana, and the novels of Thomas Savage, a major novelist who located his best fiction in the Dillon area.

If all this were not enough, Newby has been recognized as the most important contemporary critic of Montana's visual arts. Artist and former Yellowstone Art Museum curator Gordon McConnell calls him "the finest art writer in Montana."

Rick Newby is a model of effective collaboration ... and is a tireless, persistent, exacting, playful, inspired cultural force.

In the words of James Clifford, which Newby has adopted as his personal motto, "To know who you are means knowing where you are. Your world has a center you carry with you."

Rick Newby lives out that credo, and in the process he makes us all better readers, writers, and Montanans.

M.J. Williams, Vocalist, composer and jazz musician

Jazz vocalist, composer and trombonist M.J. Williams was lauded as “a discerning, improvising artist of the highest order” by bass-player Kelly Roberti, who poignantly nominated her before he died last spring (he was a Governor’s Arts Awards recipient in 2010).

Roberti performed with Williams (affectionately known as "Willie") for 38 years and witnessed, as well as learned from, “a commitment that is both unique and inspiring. Her quest is one of true originality ...”

In a letter of support for Williams, poet Melissa Kwasny describes her trajectory to a world-class jazz artist:

As the daughter of a beloved Helena bandleader and trombonist, Williams began her musical career early, sitting in with her father and at local clubs from the age of 16.

After stints in the Virginia City Players and a few years playing music and studying art in San Francisco, she returned to Montana in the ‘70s, founding such iconic Montana bands as Cheap Cologne ... and the Jane Finnigan Quintet, an all-women’s Latin jazz band.

In 1986, with help from a Montana Arts Council fellowship, she spent three months in New York City, studying with Sheila Jordan at City College. In 1987, she performed at the New York City Women in Jazz Concert at the Universal Jazz Coalition.

She enrolled in Seattle’s Cornish College, where she studied with Jay Clayton and Julian Priester and was a regular feature of the Seattle jazz scene, performing with Randy Halberstadt and Phil Sparks.

Williams returned to Montana in 1991, immediately forming bands and performing with some of the state’s finest musicians, including bassist Roberti, pianists Ann Tappan and Bob Packwood, drummer Brad Edwards, guitarist Blackie Nelson, and many more.

Her CD credits since then include *What We Had in Mind* (1996), *Taking the Hook* (1997), *I Can Hear Your Heart* (1999), *Driving at Night*, (2002), *Drifting Along in Space* (2004), *Dancing to the Edge* (2007), and *It’s About the Song ...* (2013).

For the last three years Williams has performed in Paris at Le Sept Lezard, a legendary jazz club, with The Jobic LeMasson Trio and The Joe Makhholm Quintet, a collaboration that resulted in the CD *Trance Atlantic* (2010).

In addition to her gifts to the music scene in Montana, Williams is also the co-founder of the Montana Artist Refuge, a residency program in tiny Basin, which hosted over 300 artists from around the world for 18 years. The Refuge, as it was called, also featured an annual Indian Artists Residency Program that brought in such nationally known native artists as Kay WalkingStick, Sherwin Bitsui, and Bentley Spang, and eventually sponsored the Indian Artists Symposium.

The refuge “not only bolstered a community in an original way but reminded

artists to stay the course constantly,” noted Roberti. “... It also restored a beautiful Montana town that was on its knees for lack of renewal and change.”

“M.J. is a Montana legend,” writes pianist, composer and MSU music professor Eric Funk. “Her artistry is nothing short of stunning. A true improviser, eloquent, versatile, and always new and honest, she’s a musician any true professional wants to perform or record with.”

Patrick Zentz, Sculptor

Montana-born artist and rancher Patrick Zentz creates sculptures, public art installations, and, increasingly, electronic works of visual art that bridge the sometimes-specious gap between art and science. His works often have a machine-like appearance and make unseen forces visible.

Zentz grew up on a cattle ranch in south-central Montana, studied biology at Westmont College in Santa Barbara and pursued his graduate degree in art at the University of Montana before his return to ranching in the eastern reaches of the state.

Laura Millin, director of the Missoula Art Museum, suggests that his ranching background fostered many of his strengths as an artist, “such as an intimate knowledge and love of land and nature, an acute mechanical ability, and highly evolved woodworking and construction skills, along with a tendency to tinker.”

“Patrick’s work is unlike any other,” she writes. “Always demonstrating a high level of integrity, intellectual rigor, and an acute desire to communicate ideas, Patrick is generous to a fault when presenting his art work or ideas ... He is inherently an educator.”

Zentz has created major public works within and beyond Montana, including Spokane, Seattle, and Washington, D.C., and has works in the permanent collections of many major institutions (including a dozen at the Yellowstone Art Museum). He continues to strike out along new paths, integrating data and visual forms generated by computers into his ongoing investigations of land and our relationship to it.

One of his earliest works, which catapulted him to international recognition in the world of ecological artists, is “Creek Translator” (1985), a spidery construction that is essentially a musical instrument designed to be “played” by the running water in a small creek.

In the decades that followed, Zentz has continued to create beguiling works that are activated by wind, water, and even passing pedestrians. They are responsive to their environments and, as such, help viewers become more aware of their surroundings and the natural forces at play. His parallel vocation as a rancher makes him cognizant of the cyclical nature of life and this, too, appears as a motivating force in his work.

Zentz’s work merges art and science in defiance of the educational system’s artificial separation of these subjects; it provides aesthetic engagement and prompts scientific understanding.

Yellowstone Art Museum director Robyn Peterson, who nominated Zentz for the award, says she was aware of his work when she arrived in Montana in 2006, and already a fan.

During the ensuing years, “I have found Pat to be an unending source of cerebral exercise,” she writes. “His passion combines with his agile intellect to ensure that his art delivers more with each viewing, as all of human history’s best art does.”

She also praises his emphasis on craft. “Pat is the kind of thinker that the future will increasingly reward: interdisciplinary. He solves problems and ponders realities by jumping the rails to make unexpected connections,” she writes.

“As a person, he is the best kind of conversationalist and teacher, i.e., one who sweeps out the cobwebs and builds in his listeners a joy in discovering ... He tries to change the world not by criticism but by showing a different and delightful way forward. If the world isn’t set to rights yet, it is only because he has not been able to talk to every person yet.”

[High-resolution photos and photo credits are available here.](#)