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Abingdon organizations win Virginians for the Arts Dominion ArtStars Awards

*William King Museum of Art and Barter Theatre program recognized
for excellence in arts education*

ABINGDON, VA - Virginians for the Arts (VFTA), in partnership with the Dominion Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Dominion Resources, Inc., has announced two local winners of the annual Dominion ArtStars Awards -- William King Museum of Art's Van Gogh Outreach Program and Barter Theatre's Project REAL.

William King Museum of Art's Van Gogh Outreach Program received the regional Shining Star award with a cash prize of \$5,000. The program takes art instruction directly to second-grade students in 12 school districts in southwest Virginia, reaching 156 classrooms and provides more than 12,000 contact hours.

Sixteen third-grade classrooms in Russell County were added in 2014 serving 322 students. The district has more than 12,000 children under the age of 17 living in poverty and over 50 percent of the enrolled school-age children participate in free or reduced lunch. Van Gogh's hands-on activities and lessons are based on the Virginia Standards of Learning in history, social studies and math. By incorporating mapping, direct observations and measuring into many projects the program is STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math) oriented.

"The Van Gogh instructors are always eager to work with us and provide excellent activities that enrich our students," said Stacy Grimes, a second-grade teacher at Fancy Gap Elementary School in Carroll County.

Also in Abingdon, Barter Theatre's Project REAL is the winner of a Rising Star award, with a cash prize of \$1,000. Project REAL – Reinforcing Education through Artistic Learning – uses theatre techniques to bring core subject matter such as math, science, technology and literature to life for students – to make them real. Since its beginning in 2012, Project REAL has served more than 4,000 students at eight schools in Virginia, West Virginia and Tennessee. Pre- and post-tests show an average gain of 33 percent in English, 37 percent in science and 40 percent in math, and schools consistently report greater student engagement and better attendance after REAL.

“Project REAL has been a catalyst for innovative learning in the classrooms of Washington County High Schools. It is apparent students who may not necessarily learn well through traditional classroom methods are responding positively to this program,” said Jeff Noe, assistant superintendent, Washington County Public Schools.

The 2015 awards celebrate arts and education in the community, recognizing arts organizations that best demonstrate and advance the synergy of arts and education. These awards emphasize the contributions of arts organizations through their partnership and collaboration with schools across the Commonwealth.

“This year, we were particularly impressed with the quality of the programs offered throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia,” said VFTA President John “Butch” Davies, III. “Every corner of the state, from the smallest towns to our larger cities, showcased programs dedicated to inspiring and enriching the lives of underserved students.”

Through the generosity of Dominion, a longtime supporter of the arts in Virginia, the cash prize of \$5,000 will be presented at William King Museum’s opening reception for our biennial From These Hills Exhibition on Oct. 15. The Rising Star award will be presented to Barter Theatre at an upcoming celebration event being held later this fall.

“We are honored to join VFTA in recognizing the contributions arts organizations in the Commonwealth are making to education,” said Hunter Applewhite, president of the Dominion Foundation.

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The Dominion Foundation is dedicated to improving the physical, social and economic well being of the communities served by Dominion companies, including Dominion Virginia Power. Dominion (NYSE:D) and the Foundation support nonprofit causes that meet basic human needs, protect the environment, promote education and promote community vitality. For more information about Dominion, one of the nation’s largest producers and transporters of energy, visit www.dom.com.

Virginians for the Arts, a non-profit founded in 1992, works to advance the arts in Virginia by increasing public awareness of the important contributions the arts make to the life, culture, and economy of the state. The organization works to increase the public value of and appreciation for the arts and advocates for public funding for the Virginia Commission for the Arts, which makes operating grants essential to the state’s arts organizations. For more information about VFTA, please visit its website at www.VaForArts.org.

