



NATIONAL FEDERATION OF STATE HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATIONS

NEWS RELEASE

Kansas Theatre Teacher Lola M. Wade Named 2022 Recipient of National High School Heart of the Arts Award

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: James Weaver

INDIANAPOLIS, IN (March 15, 2022) — The National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) has selected **Lola M. Wade**, a theatre instructor at St. Mary’s Colgan High School in Pittsburg, Kansas, as the 2022 National High School Heart of the Arts Award recipient.

Wade is the ninth honoree to be recognized with the National High School Heart of the Arts Award, which was instituted by the NFHS in 2014 to commend those individuals who exemplify the ideals of the positive heart of the arts and represent the core mission of education-based activities.

Lola M. Wade began her eminent career as a high school theatre teacher in 1972. Now in her milestone 50th year in the profession and her sixth teaching junior high and high school theatre classes at St. Mary’s Colgan, Wade will direct a total of three productions for the school community that will be added to the more than 200 she has administered over five decades of work – many of which she also wrote.

Wade has also appeared as a “guest teacher” in St. Mary’s classrooms to mentor students on public speaking and delivering speeches, and she collaborated with several teachers this past summer to organize a theatre camp that was attended by more than 30 students.

Wade’s dedication to theatre has impacted and enhanced countless students’ lives both inside and outside the auditorium. In 1991, she applied for a grant that she used to establish an organization

called “Leaders of the Pack,” which brought together a group of high school students that traveled the country performing 45-minute drama programs centered on making good life choices in the face of teenage adversities.

After 10 years in existence, the Kansas State Department of Education stepped forward to sponsor Leaders of the Pack. While the group was renamed “Kansas Kids, Leaders of the Pack” and was expanded to include young performers from all over the state, Wade continued to do all the program directing, as well as the script writing. In the 2000-01 school year, Kansas Kids, Leaders of the Pack featured a 35-piece cast that presented 40 shows across 12 states.

Wade’s influence has permeated her community as well, as she wrote another grant in 1992 that set the foundation for the Cherokee County Arts Association, a local outfit based in Cherokee, Kansas, that provides community theatre, visual art and music opportunities for all ages and is still going strong 30 years later. She also spent time directing a group program at her church called ‘Hearts With a Purpose’ that performed at various church camps and youth services.

Perhaps the greatest indicator of Wade’s legacy, however, is seen in her former students. While some of them are now performing on Broadway or with other theatre companies around the country, others have come back and taught with Wade as co-directors or choreographers, looking to instill the same passion for theatre that Wade once ignited in them.

“Lola Wade’s impact on students would, without a doubt, be the storyline if there was a screenplay written about her. Whether we are talking about her first year teaching or this, her 50th year, she has had a positive impact on her students. Some joke that you could line up all the teachers she’s ever worked with, and without knowing her, you would be able to pick Mrs. Wade out because of her vibrant personality and expressive, heartfelt devotion to her students and theatre.”

Wesley Streeter

St. Mary’s Colgan High School Principal

About the Award

Joining Lola M. Wade as the national award recipient are five students and one additional activities leader who were chosen for section awards by the NFHS National High School Heart of the

Arts Award Selection Committee. The 2022 National High School Heart of the Arts section award recipients are found below.

Section 1 – Luke Schwartz, student, Wilton (Connecticut) High School (WHS)

Despite being diagnosed with dysautonomia – an autonomic nervous system disorder – at age 13, followed by medullary thyroid carcinoma (MTC) during the pandemic, Schwartz has been a vibrant fixture within the Wilton High School performing arts community. A skilled photographer and videographer, Schwartz produces segments and is supervisor of still photography for Wilton’s Morning Warrior Club news broadcasts and films school sporting events, art shows, the WHS film festival, and administrator training videos. He is a mentor for new members of the WHS M.A.V.E. (Music, Audio, Visual, Enrichment) Club and helps freshman students adjust to the high school environment as a Link Crew Leader. His work has earned him several performing arts awards, as well as the Robert J. Jacobs Award, which is presented annually to Wilton students who “leave their mark for others to see.”

Section 2 – Victoria O’Tool, student, Yorktown (Virginia) Tabb High School

In addition to Key Club, debate and membership in several national honor societies, O’Tool has been a three-year stalwart for Tabb’s forensics team, with two regional titles in Dramatic/Serious Interpretation and multiple top-three finishes at super regionals and the state competition. She is currently Key Club secretary and an executive board member of the National English Honor Society and has ascended to the role of team captain for both the debate and forensics teams. In doing so, she organizes weekly meetings, designs posters, recruits new members and runs social media accounts for both teams, while also finding time to assist forensics teammates with their piece selection, voice projection and/or stage placement. Outside of school, O’Tool is the warehouse manager for a nonprofit called The Heart of Giving, where she conceptualized a free clothing closet for the Newport News area.

Section 3 – Will Hamlin, student, Charleston (South Carolina) Philip Simmons High School

Visually impaired and unable to understand English, Hamlin faced long odds for musical success after his adoption from China in 2018. He had no formal music training, but had an interest in the keyboard, which led his adoptive family to get him involved in middle school band. Though he joined late in the year as a trumpeter, his work ethic earned him a role in the band’s top performance ensemble as well as the All-County Beginner Honor Band, and he has now made All-County and All-

Region bands in every year since. With no music available in Braille, Hamlin learns songs entirely by sound; working to emulate the recordings he receives from his band director. Hamlin is guided by a system of jingle sounds during marching band field shows and has become so skilled in this operation that judges are often unaware of his visual impairment.

Section 4 – Vance Hertter, student, Golconda (Illinois) Pope County Community High School (PCCHS)

Hertter has not allowed retinitis pigmentosa – a condition that has rendered him legally blind – to impede his robust activities involvement at Pope County Community High School. Hertter, who is on track to graduate valedictorian this spring, has recorded two Illinois High School Association regional titles, five overall victories and 12 top-three finishes while competing in three events for the speech team. The senior class president is a four-year member of PCCHS' National FFA Organization chapter and a two-year member of the competition choir and has played roles in the drama club's productions of *Frozen: The Musical* and *Moana: The Musical*. He is also captain of the scholar bowl team and a founding member of both the e-sports team and The Coalition of PCCHS Clubs Annual Service Project – a collaborative school improvement project that includes members from each school club.

Section 5 – Lola M. Wade, theatre teacher, Pittsburg (Kansas) St. Mary's Colgan High School

Section 6 – Adam Ray Mewhorter, director of bands, Moore (Oklahoma) Southmoore High School

Mewhorter has established a culture of excellence as head director of bands at Southmoore High School. A winner of multiple local- and state-level 'teacher' and 'bandmaster of the year' awards, Mewhorter consistently guides his ensembles to 'Superior' ratings, has led three Oklahoma Music Educators Association honor groups, and has turned the Southmoore marching band into a regular finalist at the Oklahoma Bandmasters Association State Championship. For the past two years, however, Mewhorter has taken his servant leadership to the next level in helping create an authentic high school marching band experience for a trumpeter with spinal bifida. Rather than resigning the student – who must use a wheelchair – to playing from the sidelines, Mewhorter pushes the student's wheelchair around the field during performances and works with choreographers to design routines that ensure the student has ample space and is synchronized within formations.

Section 7 – Emily Roundy, student, Green River (Utah) High School

A junior at Green River High School, Roundy has been highly involved in debate, choir and robotics and has been part of the student government, serving as president of her sophomore class. While she has reached the state robotics competition, her most extraordinary success has come as a participant in Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA), for which she has twice qualified for nationals. Unfortunately, due to financial constraints brought on by her mother's cancer diagnosis, Roundy was unable to attend either of her rightful national competitions, and instead has been tasked with a larger portion of the caretaking responsibilities for her three siblings. Through all of that, she has maintained her 4.0 GPA as well as her dedicated extracurricular involvement and even joined Pro Start, a culinary-focused activity affiliated with FCCLA.

Nominations for this award were generated through NFHS member state associations and reviewed by the NFHS National High School Heart of the Arts Award Selection Committee composed of state association staff members. While the national winner will be recognized June 29 at the NFHS Summer Meeting in San Antonio, Texas, the section winners will be recognized within their respective states and will receive awards before the end of the current school year. Including this year, nine individuals, one band and one theatre group have been chosen national award recipients.

Below are the previous recipients of the National High School Heart of the Arts Award:

2014 – Leia Schwartz, student-athlete/performing arts student, Miami (Florida) Coral Reef High School

2015 – Ethan Gray, performing arts student, Chicago (Illinois) St. Rita of Cascia High School

2016 – Midland City (Alabama) Dale County High School Marching Band and Band Director Sherri Miller

2017 – Josephine Ross, student, St. Paul (Minnesota) Benilde-St. Margaret's High School

2018 – Cecelia Egan, student, Riverside (Rhode Island) St. Mary Academy-Bay

2019 – LaRaine Fess, drama teacher at Beaufort (South Carolina) High School and the Beaufort High School Theatre Department

2020 – Cailin Martin, student, Newport (Rhode Island) Rogers High School

2021 – Kylene Running Hawk, student, Morris Area (Minnesota) High School

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About the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)

The NFHS, based in Indianapolis, Indiana, is the national leadership organization for high school sports and performing arts activities. Since 1920, the NFHS has led the development of education-based interscholastic sports and performing arts activities that help students succeed in their lives. The NFHS sets direction for the future by building awareness and support, improving the participation experience, establishing consistent standards and rules for competition, and helping those who oversee high school sports and activities. The NFHS writes playing rules for 17 sports for boys and girls at the high school level. Through its 50 member state associations and the District of Columbia, the NFHS reaches more than 19,500 high schools and 12 million participants in high school activity programs, including more than 7.9 million in high school sports. As the recognized national authority on interscholastic activity programs, the NFHS conducts national meetings; sanctions interstate events; offers online publications and services for high school coaches and officials; sponsors professional organizations for high school coaches, officials, speech and debate coaches, and music adjudicators; serves as the national source for interscholastic coach training; and serves as a national information resource of interscholastic athletics and activities. For more information, visit the NFHS website at www.nfhs.org.

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