

# Rainero creates opportunities in the arts

Mary Beth Rainero grew up in the Midwest steeped in the arts thanks to innovative programs at local universities. She took music and ballet, but then her mother enrolled her in elocution class, which opened a door into the performing arts. "That little spark changed my life," she says.

"After moving to Evanston, Illinois, when I was 9, I was among the first group of children enrolled in the Children's Theatre Program at Northwestern, where I was exposed to every aspect of stagecraft. From my very first role as Peter in 'Peter Rabbit,' I fell in love with the theater and have been an active participant and passionate advocate for the arts ever since," Rainero says.

After she moved to Bristol, she wanted her daughter to have the same arts experiences she had enjoyed. "I took my daughter Mimi to what was then the Bristol Children's Theatre's first public performance, 'Tom Sawyer.' After the show, I went backstage and asked Cathy DeCaterina how I might get involved. She put me right to work, and in addition to a lot of performing and some directing, I became a board member and then an employee to what had then become Theatre Bristol, as their director of development," she says.

Rainero enjoyed working for Theatre Bristol, and it began her long involvement in working backstage and onstage in the arts. Onstage, she acted in many plays at Theatre Bristol. Offstage, she has worked tirelessly to promote the arts in Bristol.

"The town's long history of support for the arts was an inspiration to me. Back in the 1960s, The Community Concert Association brought world-class performing artists to Bristol. When the Paramount Foundation was formed to rescue the theater, I got involved as project coordinator, helping with the fundraising effort to match a \$1 million grant from the state of Tennessee.

"One thing leads to another, and I got involved in the effort to restore the train station. The Paramount Theatre and the train station are both historic buildings and along the way, I developed a deep appreciation for the importance of historic preservation," she says.

She volunteered for or was recruited to nearly every arts organization in Bristol, serving as a trustee of Theatre

Bristol, The Bristol Ballet, the Virginia Highlands Festival and the Bristol Chapter of the Virginia Museum, among others. She was a charter member of the Bristol Concert Choir. She has also served Symphony of the Mountains, Arts Alliance Mountain Empire, the regional panel of the Virginia Commission for the Arts, and in 1985, was honored as being one of the recipients of the "Virginia Governor's Awards for the Arts."

After nearly three decades of service to The Paramount Foundation, she was recently honored by the Paramount Board as Director Emeritus. In January, The Virginia Commission for the Arts recognized her critical role in the community by naming her a recipient of the Commission's "50 for 50 Arts Inspiration Awards."

The recognition has not stopped her from continuing to work to promote the arts. "I am doing more of the same – getting people together and getting them excited about projects that benefit our community. I enjoy seeing projects move from beginning to completion.

"The arts foster creativity and innovation. I remember seeing 'Peter and the Wolf' with a symphony orchestra and thinking – what a great idea to tell a story with music. The arts have the power to soothe and heal us, and bring us together. The arts have economic value as well – by driving tourism and revenue to local business. A vibrant arts scene is the sign of a healthy community.

"I know from my own experience that art can lead to so many things – I found my voice on the stage – and it changed my life for the better. It has been wonderful to see a new generation, including my own children, continue this legacy, as champions of the arts, and stewards of the institutions that the community worked so hard to save," she says.

Nancy DeFriece says, "Through her teaching and volunteer efforts in the community, Mary Beth has created opportunities for young people to discover, as she did, the joys and rewards of a life enriched by the arts. By doing so, she hopes to inspire a new generation of arts advocates who will carry forward a tradition of preserving our region's cultural gems for posterity."

Rainero gives the credit for her work to the community.



**Mary Beth Rainero says the theater changed her life. She repaid the theater by creating opportunities for young people to discover, as she did, the joys and rewards of a life enriched by the arts.**

"I am honored to be a recipient of this year's Arts Achievement Awards, but it really is the community that should be congratulated. We are fortunate that so many people in our town are excited about seeing projects like

The Paramount, Theatre Bristol and the Train Station reach their full potential. I am grateful to have so many friends who have been very generous with their support. Preserving these cultural gems is a big part of what makes Bristol 'a good place to live.'"A!