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## **FLORIDA STUDIO THEATRE AND THE HAVEN PARTNER TO LAUNCH NEW PARTICIPATORY THEATRE PROGRAM**

(Sarasota, FL) —**Florida Studio Theatre** (FST) and **The Haven** proudly announce that the two not-for-profit organizations have launched a joint participatory theatre program for adults with disabilities. Together, FST and The Haven have designed an eight-month performing arts program that teaches adults with disabilities the fundamentals of acting and movement and gets them directly involved in the theatre-making process by creating an original piece of theatre. The program will culminate in May 2023 with a performance of a devised theatrical show written and developed by Haven participants with the support of FST's artistic and education staff. **Wendy and Bob Grady**, two dedicated supporters of FST, are the founding sponsors of this program.

Founded in 1954, The Haven operates under its mission to enhance the quality of life for people with unique abilities by encouraging independence, championing inclusion, and advocating for individual rights. Today, the organization has grown to serve 800 people daily.

Florida Studio Theatre is Sarasota's contemporary theatre, making professional, high-quality theatre accessible as affordable to as many people as possible over its 49-year history. Today, FST has grown to a village of five theatres and serves more than 200,000 live attendees each year across its diverse programs.

Together, the two non-profits are partnering to engage with The Haven's adult clients, who will experience firsthand the different elements that go into making theatre.

"For us, this program is personal," said Wendy and Bob Grady. "We have a daughter with special needs. We have seen how, with the right resources and support, people with all types of challenges can lead rich, fulfilling lives. When we learned about The Haven and their mission, we knew that we wanted to connect them with FST, another organization close to our hearts."

Since 1992, FST has offered theatre classes to individuals with physical, emotional, mental, and behavioral challenges, completely free of charge, through its VIP Performing Arts Program. For several years, the VIP Performing Arts Program has been at capacity and has not been able to admit new students. With the theatre's new partnership with The Haven, FST will be able to serve more students with special needs than ever before.

"With this new program, participants are not only learning the fundamentals of acting, but they are learning how to express themselves in ways they may never have before," said **Kate Alexander**, FST's Associate Director At-Large and Founder of The FST School. "The theatre is about creating an artistic home for your heart. You go to the gym to exercise your muscles, you learn how to drive, and you learn how to write, but where in the world do you go to learn about your heart? The theatre asks each one of us to take a lens, to look inside, and share our feelings. By doing this, we grow in empathy, compassion and in the ability to empathize with ourselves. *That* is what we work to share with our partners at The Haven."

Since October 2022, FST Resident Teaching Artists, **Genesis Perez-Padilla** and **Kate Walsh**, have traveled to The Haven's campus twice a week, leading classes in acting, music, and movement. Through these classes, participants/clients from The Haven have learned about hard work, persistence, and teamwork.

"I love being on stage," said **Alfred**, a 64-year-old client at The Haven engaged in this new program. "I enjoy learning new songs and being with the theatre staff like Kate [Walsh] and Genesis [Perez-Padilla]. I love being with my friends on stage. We have a lot of fun. We love it when people get up to sing with us and a lot of people come to the theatre to watch us perform. I can't wait for our performance in May."

From now through May 2023, members of FST's artistic staff—including Associate Artist **Ellie Mooney** and Cabaret Developer **Sarah Durham**—will join Perez-Padilla and Walsh in working with Haven clients to build on the skills they've developed over the past four months to create a wholly original, devised piece of theatre. This final theatrical work will be performed in FST's Keating Theatre for an invited audience in mid-May 2023.

For more information about FST and The Haven's new joint participatory theatre venture, please contact Lydia Baxter at [LBaxter@FloridaStudioTheatre.org](mailto:LBaxter@FloridaStudioTheatre.org) or Hallie Peilet at [HPeilet@thehavensrq.org](mailto:HPeilet@thehavensrq.org).

## **ABOUT FLORIDA STUDIO THEATRE**

Florida Studio Theatre (FST) is Sarasota's contemporary theatre. Founded in 1973, FST has grown to a village of five theatres located in the heart of downtown Sarasota. Each theatre is small in size and large in impact— providing intimate and engaging settings for high-quality, professional performances.

Today, FST has established itself as a major force in American Theatre. FST is the largest subscription theatre in the state of Florida and among the largest in the country, serving more than 200,000 live attendees each year across its diverse programs: Mainstage, Cabaret, Stage III, Children's Theatre, The FST School, New Play Development, and FST Improv.

Even with its growth, Florida Studio Theatre remains firmly committed to making the arts accessible and affordable to as many people as possible. Under the leadership of Producing Artistic Director Richard Hopkins, FST develops theatre that speaks to our living, evolving, and dynamically changing world. Hip and historical, entertaining and challenging, we are where everyone is welcome to engage in the art of theatre.

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