

Spoletto Festival USA Honors 2024 Mary Ramsay Civic Award Winners

Three South Carolina residents recognized for philanthropy, service, and community stewardship

April 30, 2024 (Charleston, SC) — Spoleto Festival USA is proud to announce the 2024 Mary Ramsay Civic Award winners are Kit and Joel Smith and Dr. Mary Thornley. Established in 2012, the Mary Ramsay Civic Award recognizes extraordinary contributions of civic and charitable leadership within the Charleston community. This year’s three recipients were honored at a luncheon on Friday, April 19 at the Governor Thomas Bennett House.

“We are proud to celebrate these deserving recipients who honor our highest values and are resolute in their love of their fellow citizens,” stated Spoleto Festival USA Board Chair Alicia Gregory. “This annual award allows us to reflect upon what we can achieve, together, when we lead with dignity, love, and grace.”

“Spoleto's commitment goes beyond concert halls and theaters to serve as a catalyst for cultural change,” underscored Spoleto Festival USA General Director & CEO Mena Mark Hanna. “The Mary Ramsay Award has long been awarded to those committed to innovation, education, and human welfare, and the work of these recipients adds a new chapter to the remarkable legacy of this annual honor.”

Kit & Joel Smith

Kit and Joel Smith are pillars of the Lowcountry and Spoleto communities. Joel, Dean Emeritus of the USC Darla Moore School of Business and former Bank of America Executive, served as Spoleto Board Chair from 1997 to 2000. Kit, a former Richland County Council member, has made civic contributions that span from leading Planned Parenthood in 1978, to founding the Palmetto Trail in 1994, and addressing current issues like alcohol abuse and COVID-19 vaccine enrollment. Together, Kit and Joel have played key roles in initiatives including conservation, land use planning, and advocating for education as a critical component of a strong democratic society.

Dr. Mary Thornley

Since 1991, Dr. Mary Thornley has worked tirelessly as president of Trident Technical College to cement higher education’s role in strengthening our communities. She knows first-hand how the gift of education can enrich one’s life and has endeavored to share the

value of education with her students, many of them from marginalized communities. Dr. Thornley is a driving force in Charleston with a decade of service on the board of directors of Roper St. Francis Health Care and The Medical Society of SC. Dr. Thornley has received countless awards for her leadership in access and equality, as well as economic development.

Named after Mary Croghan Ramsay (1921–2009), who worked tirelessly to elevate causes including the performing arts, urban development and improvement, higher education, and human welfare, the award celebrates commitment to improving the Lowcountry and seeks to honor others who follow in Ramsay’s path. Past recipients include Mike Lata (2023), John Hagerty (2022/2020), Sallie M. Duell, Susan W. Ravenel, and Kathleen Rivers (2019); Wayland H. and Marion Rivers Cato (2018); Joseph H. and Evelyn McGee (2017); Mayor Joseph P. Riley, Jr. (2016); Martha Rivers Ingram (2015); Dr. Raymond S. Greenberg (2014); Charles S. Way, Jr. (2013); and John and Norma Palms (2012).

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SPOLETO FESTIVAL USA

Spoletto Festival USA was founded in 1977 by Pulitzer Prize-winning composer Gian Carlo Menotti, who sought to create an American counterpart to the annual Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto, Italy, which he had founded in 1958. Now in its 48th year, Spoleto Festival USA is internationally recognized as America’s premier performing arts festival. For 17 days and nights each spring, Spoleto Festival USA fills Charleston’s historic theaters, churches, and outdoor spaces with performances in opera; theater; dance; and chamber, symphonic, choral, and jazz music. Spoleto’s mission is to present programs of the highest artistic caliber while maintaining a dedication to young artists, a commitment to all forms of the performing arts, a passion for contemporary innovation, and an enthusiasm for providing unique performance opportunities for established artists. Beyond its role as a launching pad for young talent, Spoleto also serves as a catalyst for cultural change and has aided in Charleston’s flourishing as a top arts and culture destination. With General Director & CEO Mena Mark Hanna at its helm, the 2024 season takes place from May 24 to June 9 in various locations on the downtown peninsula. Spoleto Festival USA is a 501 (c)(3) charitable organization.

IMAGES: A selection of high-resolution images can be found in the online gallery.

MORE: Visit the [virtual press room](#).