Chautauqua Symphony Orchestra Moves the Needle on Diversity

Each season, Chautauqua’s Schools of Performing and Visual Arts bring an increasingly diverse group of students to the grounds. Though they come from many backgrounds and nationalities, these young artists all share an intense drive and passion, hoping to reach professional status as instrumentalists, singers, visual artists, actors, or dancers. At the professional level, however, the greater inclusion of diverse populations has been especially challenging nationwide. As The New York Times recently put it, “Racial diversity has been slow to come to American orchestras, which are looking less and less like the cities in which they play.”

A 2016 study by the League of American Orchestras confirmed that the proportion of non-white musicians represented in our country’s orchestra workforce is extremely low, particularly in the case of African American and Latino musicians. Even though the study revealed that the proportion of diverse musicians appearing on U.S. stages increased four-fold between 1980 and 2014, the non-white musicians who joined the industry in that period primarily came from Asian and Pacific Island backgrounds. Of course, the challenges are formidable for any individual to earn a seat in America’s top orchestras, but aspiring musicians of color encounter additional barriers. Role models for young students are rare. Access to lessons and instruments can be financially prohibitive, and the conservatory pipeline in this country is still dominated by whites who serve as conductors, executives, staff and board members of the top orchestras. This challenge is not lost on Deborah Sunya Moore, Vice President of Performing and Visual Arts. In August 2017, on the morning after the racially charged conflict in Charlottesville, Virginia, Moore was taking her usual morning jog around the grounds. She was reflecting on the ways Chautauqua might take a greater leadership role in the achievement of racial equity in the arts.

““We have a chance as an institution to be a pivotal force in the national movement to diversify classical music and better represent the multicultural nature of this country.”

— Deborah Sunya Moore
As part of Cook Ross’ work, Dr. Johnnetta Betsch Cole, former president of Bennett College and Spelman College, visited the grounds in July to initiate an early community conversation.

Entrepreneur and small business coach Ernie Mahaffey and global business executive Sheila Penrose came to Chautauqua some 18 years ago. They were impressed, but noted the lack of diversity among the players in the Music School Festival Orchestra. After a few summers, the couple offered to create two full scholarships for minority students to join the MSFO, including funding for their families to stay on the grounds for a week. Thanks to other Chautauquans who support scholarships, diversity in the MSFO and other Schools of Performing and Visual Arts has been enhanced.

Naturally, Sheila and Ernie were thrilled this year when Deborah Sunya Moore told them about her similar plan for the CSO. “Deborah is creative in more than the arts,” Ernie said. The pair also praised President Michael E. Hill for having the inspired idea of partnering more closely with the AADH.

As firm believers in lifelong learning, Ernie and Sheila say they come to Chautauqua because of “the indescribable mix” of arts and lectures, and the synergy created by such combinations. In addition to their support of diversity initiatives, they were also instrumental in underwriting the remarkable performance of “The Abyssinian Mass” in the Amphitheater in 2016, featuring composer Wynton Marsalis, the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, and Chorale Le Chateau. Ernie said his dream is that Chautauqua will provide “a full diversity experience” on the grounds and in the Amp, “which we’ll know by who is around us — all kinds of people that represent our global community, I hope. Right now, we live in silos and Chautauqua is a solution. We all benefit as that changes,” he said.

“We’ve got to lean into tomorrow,” Sheila added. “We should be swimming faster than others if we want to lead.”

Diversity fellows performed at the 2018 President’s Address on the Arts Quad.

House at Chautauqua (AADH) were also in residence.
Each fellow received private lessons, daily practice space and mentorship from a CSO member as a part of the experience.
Fellow Weyi Shao, a violinist originally from China, said that learning to be a better orchestra member and playing Verdi’s “Requiem” for the first time at Chautauqua were among her favorite parts of the summer experience.
Fellow Ian Saunders, already a seasoned music educator with a doctorate in musical arts from the University of Maryland, has served as principal bassist with the Penn Centre Orchestra, Nittany Valley Symphony, and Altoona Symphony. Saunders noted that working with Owen Lee as his mentor was a profound experience. Lee, who is Chautauqua’s principal cellist, is also a member of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and helped Deborah Sunya Moore in the development of the collaboration between the organizations.
Violist Emilio Carlo grew up in a musical family in the Bronx. He has studied at the Aspen Music Festival and Japan’s Pacific Music Festival and received the Brewster Award for young artists from the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. He has recently won a section position with the Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra.
Diana Flores of Costa Rica began her cello studies at the age of nine and went on to study at the Longy School of Music in Boston where she also performed with the Boston Pops, the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra, and was selected as a fellow at the Tanglewood Music Center. Playing with a new orchestra, she said, is both thrilling and full of pressure. Flores quickly learned that being able to stay on the grounds, immersed in the daily life of this community, was going to be a special experience; she was delighted to be studying with Chautauqua’s principal cellist, Jolyon Pegis.
Fellow Vijeta Sathyaraj is deeply committed to expanding the reach of Western classical music to new audiences and aspiring students. Born in Macau, China, she was a violin prodigy and began taking lessons at age 3. By 6, she was performing on radio nationwide in the Philippines. With a Bachelor of Music degree from Oberlin Conservatory and a Master of Music degree from Lynn Conservatory, Sathyaraj has performed widely in the United States and was struck by “the close environment” of Chautauqua. She has won a one-year position with the National Symphony Orchestra.
“Because members of the CSO work with and represent more than 20 other symphony orchestras around the country, as mentors they provide a ready-made network for young musicians finding their way in the system,” Moore said.
On the day after the CSO’s final concert, Music Director Rossen Milanov was ecstatic with the outcome of having these young musicians on stage. “This was a season in which the CSO reached new peaks and connected in even more meaningful and powerful ways with the Chautauqua community,” he said. “The high level of artistic energy and teamwork were on display every time the orchestra was not only on stage but also in rehearsals. The addition of five Diversity Fellows contributed to the sound of the strings and taught us important lessons about the role we could play individually in making a difference. “The CSO is the connective tissue of the performing arts at Chautauqua,” Milanov continued. “As we turn toward the 90th anniversary season of the CSO in 2019, we will strive to celebrate that important milestone with even more diverse, exciting, meaningful and powerful performances.”
Small Changes, Big Enhancements

In the 2017 and 2018 seasons, Chautauquans began to notice a number of changes around the grounds — small shifts in amenities that, taken as a whole, reflect a renewed energy and institutional pride. The Sports Club added air-conditioning and the availability of pontoon boats to rent. The Brick Walk Café began serving breakfast, which quickly created a popular early morning meeting place for friends and for volunteers who serve on various Institution committees. A new lounge graced the lobby of the Athenaeum Hotel for evening gatherings. The increased presence of local youth from Chautauqua County on Education Wednesdays this past season was a happy consequence of the new Poetry Makerspace in the Colonnade. Pop-up opera and dance events continued on Bestor Plaza and drew new fans to these programs. CHQ&A, a new podcast hosted by Director of Strategic Communications and Community Relations Jordan Stoves, received high marks from the guests who were interviewed and those who tuned in.

All of these small enhancements, and more, have come on the heels of the completion of the largest construction project in our history and the coincidence of a new president installed into office in 2017. Some enhancements this season were also momentous. The doubling of Chautauqua’s chamber music programming delighted audiences in Elizabeth S. Lenna Hall. The creation of the new Dr. Robert R. Hesse Welcome and Business Center permitted Chautauqua’s many professionals to continue to work long distance during their summers here and maintain connections to their office environments more easily.

“What hasn’t changed is our commitment to the core mission and the very particular, distinguishing characteristics that make Chautauqua like nowhere else.”

The introduction of Club Plus provided new opportunities for Chautauqua’s young citizens (Pages 6–7). The design of an app for use by visitors to the grounds afforded a technological response to many requests for information over the years. All of these initiatives reflect Chautauqua’s renewed commitment to adapt to a changing environment and to new patterns of engagement, from first-time guests to the families who have been coming here for generations.

What hasn’t changed is our commitment to the core mission and the very particular, distinguishing characteristics that make Chautauqua like nowhere else — a community where people walk and ride bikes, where auto use is restricted and where children are free to roam safely, and where the lake is a valued recreational asset. No one wants to lose these aspects, but not our core reason for being.

Together, we have been working hard for the past four decades to sustain and expand our community, and to recapture the national voice that Chautauqua projected in its formative years. With these fundamental goals in mind, and with many new and younger faces in the Colonnade, we are trying a number of new projects even as we are in the middle of a multi-dimensional strategic planning process designed to seize and act on bigger themes and initiatives (Pages 6–7).

As CEO of the Chautauqua Foundation, I am continually struck by the passion of so many Chautauquans who come forward with significant gifts to advance the Institution. As this issue of PILLARS attests, we have received five gifts totaling nearly $5 million in the past few months (Pages 4–5). The late David Lincoln has permanently endowed the Institution’s investment in applied ethics programs. Herb Siegel and Sydelle Sonkin established a new endowed chair for the artistic director of the visual arts, the sixth such chair created for senior-level positions. Thanks to the Heinzelman family, the artistic advisor position in the Piano Program is now endowed, and we are also able to extend the Piano Program’s season.

A new gift from Jack Bailey will support and deepen the Institution’s capacity to engage renowned jazz artists and support residencies of top jazz musicians. The primary expression of this gift will be seen on the Amphitheater stage but may, over time, also include additional master classes and small lectures from jazz greats.

Finally, I am pleased to report that Tom Hagen’s challenge gift of $1.5 million to fully fund an endowment for the capital maintenance of the Amphitheater is ever nearer to being matched. As of this writing, 72 families have come forward with gifts of $15,000 or more and will be recognized with a custom, engraved plaque on an Amp bench. We need 28 more gifts of this size to exhaust Tom’s extraordinary match.

We welcome your consideration and support of the Amp Endowment which will protect and maintain our most treasured space on the grounds for generations to come. We only have until the end of the calendar year to meet Tom’s challenge. Please contact me for details on how you can secure your own bench with a commemorative plaque. A three-year gift, payable in annual installments, can make it simple for your family to contribute to Chautauqua’s growing momentum heading toward our 150th anniversary.
Piano Program is Focus of New Endowment

George Heintzelman and Margaret Clarkson have endowed the position of Artistic Advisor and Artist-in-Residence in Chautauqua's Piano Program, currently held by Alexander Gavrylyuk. Gavrylyuk's position has been named the Heintzelman Family Artistic Advisor of the School of Music Piano Program, as he continues to work closely with co-chairs of the program, Nicola (Nikki) Melville and John Milbauer. The Heintzelman family's gift is also supporting an extension of the program from five to six weeks beginning in 2019.

George Heintzelman has been coming to Chautauqua on a nearly annual basis since the summer of 1982. "I remember my parents and my two sisters came for a week when I was 12," he said, "and we often stayed with our grandparents here." In 2010, Heintzelman and Clarkson, who live on Long Island, bought a house on Warren Avenue, and George's parents, his two sisters, and their children began coming together as a family for two weeks each summer.

Margaret Clarkson said she "married into Chautauqua," and though she started out in a career in curriculum management for technical sales, she later learned to play piano and was involved in teaching music to children under the age of five and their families. At Chautauqua, Margaret is an enthusiastic member of the CLSC's Class of 2016.

George's mother, Jane Heintzelman, is a professional piano teacher, and through many years she has always looked forward to participating in the piano master classes and attending performances at Sherwood-Marshall Studios, where the Piano Program is headquartered. In 2012, when the program was in transition and was shortened to five weeks during the season, the Heintzelmans shifted their regular two weeks on the grounds to include Week Five whenever possible, but the family missed many performances. They were worried at first about the future prospects for piano at Chautauqua.

"There was room for the Institution at this juncture to take a step back in its support of piano, but my mother said that Chautauqua was still committed to the highest possible quality in piano instruction. We saw the caliber of people who came in for the competitions," George Heintzelman said. "It seemed like a good time to invest in piano at Chautauqua, so we talked to the Foundation about where and what would be the best way to help." Their gift was made in honor of Jane's birthday.

Remarkably the family has not yet had a chance to meet the electrifying Alexander "Sasha" Gavrylyuk, and they have only seen one of his early performances in the Amphitheater, but they have wholeheartedly supported his new endowed position and the re-expansion of the Piano Program.

"We are so appreciative of this generous commitment from George and Margaret," President Michael E. Hill said. "They have come forward at an opportune moment as the Piano Program has developed a fresh momentum and is reaching ever higher standards. This infusion of resources is an affirmation of the incredible collaborative team that is now working with our exceptional students from around the globe."

Expanding Jazz Program

In memory of his wife Kay Bailey, Jack Bailey has created the John T. and Katherine G. Bailey Family Fund for Jazz at Chautauqua. This endowment gift will be used to support jazz of a high caliber as a regular part of Institution programming, Bailey, who has just completed his 92nd summer on the grounds, and his late wife Kay represent a distinguished Chautauqua family spanning five generations, beginning with Jack's grandfather, the artist and educator Louis Turner Bailey, who oversaw the design and building of the Arts Quadrangle in 1909 and who served as the first director of visual arts at the Institution.

Jack Bailey — who ran his own public relations firm for many years in Cleveland — also became an avocationalist of jazz, both at Chautauqua and in Sanibel, Florida. His lifelong love of jazz began with Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington and expanded to embrace all of the great players of the 20th century, including Benny Goodman, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis and the contemporary jazz icon Wynton Marsalis.

"Jazz has always been a unique American art form," Jack said, "and it has had an important impact on our society in the way we think, the way we dance and the way we listen to music. It is a special mix of harmony, rhythm and improvisation unlike that found in any other form of music."

Jack and Kay Bailey always said that there are two principal things that brought them back to Chautauqua year after year — one was the quality and variety of the musical offerings and the second was Chautauqua Lake.

"Sometimes we take the beauty of this place for granted," Jack said. "Beyond all the lectures, the musical notes that are played, the courses that are.
New Endowment for Visual Arts Invites Diversity, Open Studios and More

As of Sept. 1, Sharon Louden assumed the role of serving as the Sydelle Sonkin and Herb Siegel Artistic Director of the Visual Arts at Chautauqua Institution. The endowed chair is Chautauqua’s first for an artistic director position.

Sonkin and Siegel have been visiting Chautauqua for more than a decade, extensively exploring the galleries and programs together. “Herb and I have had an incredible love affair,” Sonkin said. “Together, we have a love affair with Chautauqua, and it so enriched our lives.”

Sonkin first enjoyed drawing in her hometown of Detroit and has been frequenting galleries and museums since her 20s. She came from an art-savvy family, while Siegel discovered his interest in art on his own in Buffalo, New York, as a young professional, visiting the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in his spare time.

The couple believes there is value and importance in continuing to learn about the visual arts and hopes their gift will enhance the lives of those who participate in Chautauqua’s art programs. Their endowment comes at a particularly auspicious time, as Visual Arts at Chautauqua Institution (VACI) transitions to a new artistic director after a long period of strong leadership under artistic director Don Kimes and managing director Lois Jubeck. Building upon that solid foundation, the new artistic director, Sharon Louden — a visual artist who works across several media and has championed the creative life of the artist — brings a national following.

She is known across the country and beyond for her thought leadership and advocacy for the role of artists and artists in the public sphere (Page 4).

Sonkin and Siegel and their passion for the visual arts were honored in June with the installation of “Catapulta,” a sculpture displayed on the front lawn of Fowler-Kellogg Art Center and at a lunch at the Athenaeum Hotel where President Hill toasted their generosity and expressed the gratitude of the Institution.

looking at Chautauqua

taught, and the words that are spoken and read here at Chautauqua, there is the lake, and it brings them to us all together. After you experience Chautauqua, you are a different person. After the music ends and darkness falls the grounds, after the last chime from Miller Bell Tower rings out, there is a wonderful silence here, too.

As the Bailey endowment instructs, the fund will be directed toward making jazz a more influential part of the Chautauqua mix, “with the intent to grow the audience for jazz and deepen that audience’s understanding of the history and impact of jazz in American culture.”

A CREATIVE LIFE

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“Catapulta” is displayed on the front lawn of Fowler-Kellogg Art Center.

22, 2018, in the Amphitheater.

Photo: Dave Munch

Herb Siegel and Sydelle Sonkin

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to students and faculty in the Arts Quad. (In her own work, Louden has been incorporating digital animation and film for more than a decade.) She is also adding opportunities for students to learn more about professional development, sustainability in the profession and how to write effectively about art in the 21st century.

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Institution’s Planning Process Moves into Phase II

October and November are critical months in the strategic planning process that the Chautauqua Institution Board of Trustees launched earlier this year. The results from Phase I, which centered on collecting input from the Chautauqua community, are now being reviewed and analyzed by the Strategic Planning Working Group. Companion planning efforts drafted as part of Phase I were the Campus Master Plan, the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility Plan and a security assessment.

Multiple Inputs from Chautauquans

The Institution began collecting input from Chautauquans at gatherings in Florida, North Carolina, Pittsburgh, Cleveland and Atlanta even before the 2018 season began. In spring, the consulting firm of Bernuth & Williamson also helped to devise and launch an online survey of Chautauquans that was tailored to returning/frequently visiting Chautauquans and families with young children. The survey closed in July.

This input was complemented by suggestions and concerns gathered through essence.chq.org, an online portal that has been open for community comments through the beginning of September. Face-to-face input sessions were also conducted every Thursday in the Hall of Christ throughout the 2018 season to provide Chautauquans on the grounds an opportunity to present their best ideas and hopes to the Institution’s leadership. All of these comments were recorded by staff and added to the mix of inputs. The same format was used for Trustee Open Forums on two Saturdays during the summer, while the consultants also held smaller, targeted focus groups with Chautauquans to gather additional input.

“All the sessions were well attended,” says Laurie Currie, a former trustee who was appointed chair of the Strategic Planning Working Group by Board Chair Jim Pardo. Currie, Pardo and President Michael E. Hill facilitated the weekly input sessions, setting a tone of civility and rigor in the discussions. They emphasized that the Institution has no plans to revisit or alter its mission. Hill reiterated his conviction that Chautauqua aspires to be seen as both a place and a movement, according to the founders’ original vision. He also reminded participants of the broad tenets of his own vision, which include providing national thought leadership, engaging more with surrounding communities in the region and welcoming local citizens to the grounds, enhancing the overall diversity of the Chautauqua community, expanding offerings beyond the nine-week season, growing Chautauqua’s engagement with youth, and developing alternative revenue and engagement streams.

“We didn’t begin any interim analysis of our findings during the summer,” Currie said, “and we wanted to be thorough, offering Chautauqua multiple modes of input. We didn’t want to get to the end and have someone say, ‘You didn’t ask me what I thought.’”

The Hall of Christ input sessions invited Chautauquans to reflect on what possibilities for the future excited them the most, what they hoped Chautauqua might look like by its sesquicentennial year of 2024, and what they saw as barriers to achieving the full realization of institutional goals. Hill noted his desire to make a case for financial support of Chautauqua beyond the generous philanthropy given by Chautauquans themselves. “I believe outreach nationally and internationally will result in philanthropic investment from beyond the gates to help sustain what happens here during the nine-week summer season,” he said. Hill also asked session participants to offer up any new questions they felt the Institution has not already asked of itself.

Comments in the public forums ranged broadly from the micro to the macro. Some participants expressed the need for an identity in the 21st-century version of Chautauqua’s youth programs, where increasingly, “one size does not fit all” for children. Recognizing the opportunity to test some new activities for young people, the Institution developed an afternoon experiment of its own this season called Club Plus.

On a sunny afternoon in Week Three this past season, a gaggle of fifth, sixth, and seventh graders wore water shoes and bathing suits and carried buckets and nets. They spread themselves along the banks of the ravine and were taking water samples.

“There’s a crayfish over here,” a dark-haired girl shouted. Another child waved to the group leader and called out: “I have a question. Why is this called a ravine?”

Meanwhile, a group of kids rushed out from under Thunder Bridge and down the hill where the young scientists were working. The Clubbers were wielding Styrofoam noodles and brandishing Frisbees as shields. The passers-by stopped only long enough to explain that they were in the middle of a “Hunger Games” re-enactment and continued downstream.

This scene captures something of the 21st-century version of Chautauqua’s youth programs, where increasingly, “one size does not fit all” for children. Recognizing...
the macro, from the pricing of gate tickets to the idea of staging an annual musical in the Amphitheater, to altering the beginning and ending dates of the season. The effort to increase the racial and socio-economic diversity of the population on the grounds was considered at every gathering. Some Chautauquans said they hoped the Institution would sponsor more young families to come to the grounds from all 50 states, while others discussed the perpetual quandary of being an Institution with a billion dollars’ worth of physical assets that are only fully used during three months of the year. As Hill noted, “If we sold out the nine-week season, it would only yield a few million dollars of additional annual revenue. How can we leverage the full capacity of this place year-round?”

Complementary research on how best to position the Institution among its competitors in the marketplace is being conducted by staff in Chautauqua’s Marketing and Communications Department. This analysis will feed into the information presented to the Board of Trustees in November, as will preliminary financial projections.

A draft of a Campus Master Plan prepared by a Pittsburgh consulting firm, Urban Design Associates (UDA), addresses all 750 acres owned by the Institution. (Only 250 of these acres are on the lake side of Route 394.) UDA, working with a cross-section of the community as well as local government officials, initially identified those sections of the grounds that are intrinsic to the history and mission of Chautauqua and should not be considered for significant modifications. With those parameters established, the group then considered other areas on the grounds that are working well for the Institution, some that are problematic, and the open spaces where future development may be contemplated.

The Campus Master Plan will revisit potential modifications to the aging maintenance facilities along the 394 corridor as well as the development of the corridor itself, said Vice President of Campus Planning and Operations John Shedd. Further, it looks at potential uses for undeveloped land and the Whallon Farm property around the golf course, which has remained undeveloped since its acquisition more than 50 years ago.

The inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility (IDEA) consultants from the firm Cook Ross — who hosted an open session in the middle of July for all Chautauquans — presented a preliminary assessment of their findings to the administration during the last week of September. The Strategic Planning Working Group received and discussed that report in early October.

Meanwhile, the Phase I report from a security firm, The Chertoff Group, has been delivered to the administration. Many of these recommendations will remain confidential to the Institution’s leadership to maximize their effectiveness.

**Bountiful Possibilities**

“It feels like we are looking at a garden that is about to burst into bloom,” Hill said. “All of these inputs from Chautauquans through the various aspects of planning have moved along in significant ways over the summer and early fall. Between now and January, we come into an intense period where the campus master plan, security plan, the program ideas, market research, IDEA plan, and the ideas from community members will come together for us to examine in full. We want to come out the other side of this analysis having identified the critical issues that we should be working on.”

The Strategic Planning Working Group’s charge is to deliver a full integration of these ideas in draft form for the trustees to reflect upon at their meeting the first week of February 2019. “I hope if we come out of the first board meeting of the new year with shared consensus of the major priorities, then we will have time to discuss them fully in order to finalize the plan by the May Board meeting,” Hill said.

The Institution will also be developing a way to share the plan with the community during the 2019 season so that Chautauquans can become familiar with the strategies the Board will have approved. “We will build awareness across the community about the Institution’s goals and objectives,” Hill added.

As Currie explained, “After the Board has set the priorities, it will be up to Michael and his team to discern how to operationalize these big ideas and build support for them.”
Jason Phillips’ first impression of Chautauqua came from standing on stage in the Amphitheater. He was 14 years old and had been chosen to sing in the New York All-State Chorus, one of several arts groups that perform at the Institution in advance of the regular season. “I remember being captivated by this fascinating pedestrian community, walking around the grounds after the performance and seeing all the cottages,” he said.

Later that summer, Phillips, who was still too young to have a driver’s license, would take the family motorboat and ride up the lake from his home in Bemus Point to visit local friends working on the docks at Chautauqua. He would spend time with his buddies and then head up the hill to attend lectures and performances, all without a gate ticket.

Eventually, Phillips was hired as a reporter and later editor for The Chautauquan Daily — a position he would hold for four years. “The best summer job in all of America,” he calls it. To make amends, however, for his earlier breach of the grounds, Phillips donated his very first paycheck from the Daily to the Chautauqua Fund. “I did eventually come clean to [former Chautauqua President] Tom Becker,” he added, still a bit sheepish.

Phillips is a partner at McKinsey & Company in San Francisco, and completed eight years serving on the Institution Board of Trustees in 2014. During this time, he served as chair of the Development Council and co-chair of Chautauqua’s Strategic Planning Committee.

Phillips’s wife, Sheila Schroeder, is the business development officer for Private Ocean, a wealth management firm in the Bay Area. She joined the Foundation Board of Directors in 2017 and serves on the Nominating and Governance Committee and the Investment Committee. Schroeder made her first visit to Chautauqua in 1997. The couple had met in New York City the year prior, the night before Sheila moved to San Francisco. When Jason accepted a job in the Bay Area a few months later, they began seeing each other more. Going to Chautauqua after the big trip to Japan was something of a litmus test for both of them.

“I was born in Japan and ultimately ended up in Indianapolis,” Sheila said. “But my family moved around a lot, so I never felt like I had a place to call home. It was love at first sight when I came to Chautauqua.”

The couple soon married and continued visiting Western New York in the summers. “Our children have spent every birthday on the grounds,” Sheila said. Twins Athena and Cooper, now 17, still love returning with their parents each year.

From his very first encounter with Chautauqua, Jason realized that the Institution’s mission could not exist in a vacuum. “Too few institutions in this country are focusing on civil discourse,” he said. “To exercise the muscle of civil dialogue and to disagree, without being disagreeable, is essential to our democracy. I think we are still figuring out what that can mean for Chautauqua in the 21st century.”

Sheila agreed. “We have tremendous respect and affection for Tom Becker,” she said. “We are very excited about the way Michael Hill is pressing forward with new ideas. His establishment of an office in D.C. will keep us looking outward.”

Schroeder said she was also pleased with Chautauqua’s commitment to gender balance on its mainstage lecture platform. “As a woman of color, I hadn’t been aware of that aim at first, but I am excited by the thoughtful way we are approaching the diversity initiative.”

From his experience heading up Chautauqua’s last strategic planning effort with Ron Kilpatrick, Phillips said he talked to hundreds of Chautauquans about their hopes for the Institution and its future. He learned that each individual approaches the Institution with a deep love, but there are many different perspectives on how measured the pace of change might be.

What I am hoping for is the willingness to push forward in more than an incremental way. Where do we want to be in two or three years from now, and where do we want to be in a decade? Pacing the change helps us unbind our thinking,” — Jason Phillips

Phillips/Schroeder Family

The Amphitheater was a challenging experience,” he said, noting the return to a more positive atmosphere of engagement now that the project is complete. “I am sorry it took so much time to get it done, but resilience is the word I would use to describe this community. I hope everyone felt heard. I do think we are in a much better place today.”

Phillips and Schroeder often reflect on the Institution’s need to bring more people through the gates and keep gate fees affordable. “Jason talks about how we want this place to grow,” Sheila said. “One thing I’ve learned is that sometimes people come, but don’t feel that connected. I felt like an outsider when I first came to Chautauqua. I was new. To integrate, I realized I was going to have to proactively reach out and push myself outside of my comfort zone. Volunteering for the Chautauqua Fund turned out to be a really wonderful way to engage. We are also part of the Miller Park [neighborhood] community which is incredibly welcoming. Individually and as a group, we make an effort to include and invite new neighbors to join us for events and activities. We can’t just stay in our comfortable groove.”

“We are a close-knit, integrated community, but we are also responsible for welcoming newcomers,” Jason concluded. “We are the ambassadors and hosts and stewards of this place. I am very excited about Chautauqua’s next decade and continuing our conversations about shaping the Institution’s future.”
Putting the ‘Fun’ in Fundraising:  
TIM AND LESLIE RENJILIAN

Tim and Leslie Renjilian are the new chairs of the Chautauqua Fund, the program of annual giving that collects contributions to support the annual operations of the Institution, helping fill a gap between gate ticket and other revenues and the overall expenses involved in running Chautauqua and its programs. The Renjilians, who live in Atlanta, are enthusiastic about their new job. “We are stepping into a good situation,” Tim said. “Tina Downey [director of the fund] has created a well-oiled machine. And I love getting to do this with Leslie because she brings so much humor and irreverence to the task.”

As of this year, the Chautauqua Fund will also incorporate restricted donations for specific projects. The Renjilians are excited about this expanded vision and scope for the Fund.

“It provides a way for Chautauquans not only to support the day-to-day operations of the Institution through unrestricted giving or contributions to a programming area, but also to receive recognition for providing seed funding for innovative projects,” Tim said. These projects may include Chautauqua initiatives such as new programs, diversity, equity and accessibility initiatives (see Page 2), one-off programs such as past inter-art-arts initiatives, and larger projects that might fall under a single theme week.

“This year,” Leslie explained, “Yo-Yo Ma’s residency at Chautauqua with the Silkroad Ensemble was supported by gifts made to the Chautauqua Fund for that purpose.”

Making it Memorable

The Renjilians are seasoned fundraisers who don’t mind having some fun in the process. Some years back they ran the annual fund for their children’s school, Morris Brandon Elementary School, in Atlanta. Through that experience they learned about the challenge of persuading parents to donate toward the more mundane aspects of running a school each year.

“Everyone wants to help create a new kitchen for the school,” Tim told the parents at back-to-school night, “but nobody wants to pay the power bill.” Looking back he adds that, “injecting humor into our pitch made it a lot more engaging.”

Similarly, the Chautauqua Fund’s primary purpose is to help with expenses that include everything from keeping the pool clean at Turner Community Center to weeding Chautauqua’s vibrant flower beds to providing the many scholarships that are required to support top students enrolled in Chautauqua’s Schools of Performing and Visual Arts. Describing the range of annual operating needs the Fund supports as “not necessarily the sexiest message,” Tim said that he and Leslie are “looking for ways to make it memorable and light-hearted.”

The Renjilians kicked off the initial meeting of Chautauqua Fund volunteers this summer, playfully poking fun at staff and generally keeping the group laughing. Serving as a volunteer for the Fund typically involves calling on four or five families to discuss the purpose of the Fund and its critical role in the sustainability of Chautauqua. “One of the joys of being a Fund volunteer is getting to meet new people and finding out what they like about Chautauqua,” Tim said. “The volunteers also serve as conduits of information, helping to address questions and collecting feedback.”

“Our sense is that everyone is looking forward to seeing what Chautauqua can do,” Leslie said. “For Fund volunteers,” Tim added, “the strategic planning process is a great conversation topic. It is stimulating all sorts of ideas about the future of Chautauqua and the role we can play in shaping it.”

The Renjilians first came to Chautauqua in 2000. “This place has changed a lot in 18 years,” Leslie noted. Coming from the multicultural environment of Atlanta, she was immediately struck by the lack of diversity among Chautauquans. Now, however, “I appreciate the effort to change that,” she said. “We also have so many one-week visitors coming in, and I feel like the ‘long-timers’ are playing a critical role in helping them to feel welcome. You have to assume people are new and may need help navigating this place.”

Tim laughs. At the corner of South and Park where they live, within earshot of Thunder Bridge, the Renjilians often find themselves providing directions. “Right here, at our house, is where people tend to get lost.”Posted on their porch is a large, hand-painted map of the grounds, providing a visual aid when they are re-orienting confused passers-by. The map also includes a tiny depiction of the state of Nebraska on one side, painted spontaneously by a friend from the state who thought the map needed a larger directional orientation. Tim chuckled as he pointed out that detail. He commutes regularly from Atlanta for the summer weekends. “Chairing the Chautauqua Fund means I get to be here for more events and meetings,” he said, grinning. Every year, Tim is also in residence for the entirety of Week Two, including the Institution’s Fourth of July celebration. (Chautauquans may recognize the Renjian cottage for the enormous American flag they always hoist for the day from a tree in front of their home.) The family also comes for Christmas in the off-season and loves sending pictures back home to friends of the tennis courts under 3 feet of snow. Leslie is a dedicated player and marvels at the excellence of the courts at the Tennis Center. Tim is an ultimate Frisbee player, but mostly the couple enjoys the lectures and arts programming. “We still have many layers of Chautauqua to explore, including the sailing and golf communities,” Tim said.

The Renjilians are recent empty-nesters. Of their three daughters, one has completed college and the other two are still in school. During the 2018 season, the whole family only expected to gather together over a single weekend. “The girls can’t wait to come back here,” Tim explained. “And we always look forward to them bringing friends — though if the friends don’t love Chautauqua, they’re done!”

Such levity plays well with the task of motivating and encouraging Chautauqua Fund volunteers, but the Renjilians also bring more serious skills to the task. “Tim brings the wisdom of formerly serving on the Institution Board of Trustees and currently serves on the Foundation Board of Directors. Leslie has been deeply involved in VACI Partners and the Bird, Tree and Garden Club,” Downey said. “They both have a great sense of where this place needs to go and have a very collaborative mindset. The Chautauqua Fund is about building year-round relationships and connections among Chautauquans, and understanding around their common interests and their geographic location in the off season.”

Essential Support

Offering the opportunity for donors to make restricted gifts to meet a special need and to have those funds be applied toward their membership in Chautauqua’s leadership-giving societies also magnifies the sense of community and connection among donors, who are in turn thanked with special opportunities and recognition for their philanthropy at various levels. “This new policy on restricted gifts provides opportunities for donors to direct their gifts and not be constrained by our internal accounting silos,” Downey said.

Chautauqua Fund donors may divide their gift between restricted donations (such as scholarships — a significant annual need) and unrestricted gifts that help cover a wide range of operations and initiatives. “Both are essential,” Downey said, “and while the philanthropic need for special projects will vary each year in alignment with the Institution’s programmatic priorities, recognizing these special gifts through the Chautauqua Fund helps us more fully acknowledge and honor these donors.”

The Renjilians are the new chairs of the Chautauqua Fund, the program of annual giving that collects contributions to support the annual operations of the Institution, helping fill a gap between gate ticket and other revenues and the overall expenses involved in running Chautauqua and its programs. The Renjilians, who live in Atlanta, are enthusiastic about their new job. “We are stepping into a good situation,” Tim said. “Tina Downey [director of the fund] has created a well-oiled machine. And I love getting to do this with Leslie because she brings so much humor and irreverence to the task.”

As of this year, the Chautauqua Fund will also incorporate restricted donations for specific projects. The Renjilians are excited about this expanded vision and scope for the Fund.

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On July 19, more than two hundred Chautauquans gathered at Miller Park to take part in a festive fundraiser for the Miller Edison Cottage and Garden, where costumed interpreters led guided tours of the historic home and its green space. The actors were in character, helping visitors to experience the property with the guidance of Mina and Thomas Edison along with Chautauqua’s co-founder Lewis Miller and his wife, Mary Valinda Miller. By the end of the evening, Chautauquans had stepped forward to commit $14,000 toward capital improvements needed for the cottage. Another $110,000 was pledged to restore the gardens that surround the house, and $32,000 was raised for garden endowment.

The overall goal for the Miller Edison Cottage and Garden project is nearly $1 million, which will cover improvements to the cottage and garden along with endowment funds sufficient to maintain the historic property over time. The Chautauqua Foundation is now a little over halfway toward this goal, counting gifts made prior to the July event. Funds secured to date fully cover the capital needs for the garden’s restoration, which is already underway this fall.

Another $43,000 is still needed for the cottage renovation, which will support critical foundation restoration, refinishing the floors, repairing ceilings, replacing the plumbing, and restoring windows. Thanks to an earlier matching challenge gift from Tom Hagen, the endowment funds needed to maintain the cottage over time have also been secured.

Resources to endow the annual maintenance of the garden remains the largest goal to meet in this effort with approximately $500,000 needed to ensure the garden’s future care and maintenance, according to Chautauqua Foundation board vice-chair Karen Goodell and Institution trustee Bob Jeffrey, who are serving as co-chairs of the Miller Edison Cottage and Garden Committee. The reinvigorated garden, Jeffrey said, will be the most noticeable potential to draw new visitors to the grounds, even in the off season, to tour the space.

Mina Miller Edison, wife of Thomas Edison and daughter of Lewis Edison, commissioned the gardens and landscapes in partnership with the Bird, Tree & Garden (BTG) Club to determine how best to open the garden to visitors who are in character of protecting our portion of this remarkable national legacy,” said Jeffrey, who added that house tours and other events that could erode the character of the Miller Edison Cottage will thus be carefully managed by the Institution. The Foundation is also working closely in partnership with the Bird, Tree & Garden (BTG) Club to determine how best to open the garden to visitors who are interested in the Edison and Shipman stories.

Planning is underway for educational tours to be conducted both during the regular season and at other times throughout the year.

“This garden is going to be a fantastic addition to the diverse gardens we already have at Chautauqua,” says BTG President Angela James. “We have the formal Campbell Garden, the new rain gardens and buffer zones around the lake, a number of informal and pocket gardens, and now we will have this fantastic historic garden that was designed by a legendary female landscaper...
in the 1920s, making Chautauqua an important destination for horticulturists, historians, and even birders and photographers. As a nature photographer herself, James has worked to expand the programming of BTG to incorporate contemporary environmental issues such as pollinator preservation, eco-gardening, healing through gardening, and home habitat gardening practices.

While the Miller Edison Cottage and Garden have, for many years, been stops on the biennial House Tour sponsored by BTG, the new tour James and her colleagues envision will be a much more comprehensive history of the Institution. Visitors will begin at the “Original Stump” — the site in Miller Park where Chautauqua’s first addresses were made in the 1870s — and then proceed to Miller Edison Cottage, following the narrative line of Chautauqua’s growth and early prominence.

“For example, we’ll talk about how President Grant came to stay at the Miller Edison Cottage for an overnight,” says James, “and then we’ll tour the gardens and talk about the history of Mina Edison, who was president for 14 years of the Bird and Tree Club, as it was called then. And we’ll present the story of Ellen Biddle Shipman and her pioneering impact in the field. We’ll have plant markers on every shrub, plant, and tree in both English and Latin.” The property will also be featured in 2020 as a destination for the BTG’s biennial tour.

Burgeson will also have some surprises for garden visitors as he looks to get the garden back into shape. Together, we can protect the legacy of Ellen Biddle Shipman and visitors to enjoy for generations to come.”

**A GREEN INVESTMENT**

“It was a spontaneous idea on my part to invest in the restoration of the Miller Cottage and Garden project,” said Mary Davenport, a Chautauquan for 25 years who has always loved gardens and gardening. As a child growing up in a small town outside of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, near the Monongahela River, Mary was charged with watering and weeding the backyard garden. She still remembers her first visit to Pittsburgh’s Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens at the age of five and how she was mesmerized by the plants and blooms. This fascination extended into adulthood, Davenport has made a lifetime practice of touring gardens around the world, including those around Kyoto, the Tivoli gardens in Italy, the Loire Valley in France, and many formal gardens in England.

When Mary and her husband, Dave, first discovered Chautauqua, they were living in Erie, Pennsylvania, where Dave worked for LORD Corporation. By this time, Mary had left her career as an analytical and industrial chemist, which had previously included stints with Koppers Company and PPG in Pittsburgh. Trained at the University of Pittsburgh, Mary was one of only two female chemistry majors in her class. Now as the mother of a son, Andrew, and living in Erie, Chautauqua offered foreign films, Special Studies classes and new friends. Soon, the family was staying on the grounds for a week at a time in a guest house. Though the Davenports moved to North Carolina in 1996, they continued their summer visits and, when Dave retired, they bought a condo in the Skatekey House, a renovated 1899 Queen Anne-era house on Bostor Plaza.

“I went home from the [Miller Edison Cottage and Garden] fundraiser this July and told Dave about my idea of investing in the gardens. He thought it was a good idea, too,” Mary said. She admitted they had always been curious about the cottage where Ford, Firestone, and Edison once gathered. “I am grateful that they made the difficult trip back then to get to Chautauqua and that they put this place on the map,” she added.

Seeing the house and being able to imagine the gardens restored was a thrilling prospect. “The cottage faces the lake and Miller Park where it all started,” she said. The Davenports have made a $25,000 contribution toward the restoration of Ellen Biddle Shipman’s design and will be recognized along with other major donors to the project on a plaque to be installed in the garden. Additional gifts are still needed to endow the maintenance of the Miller Edison Garden in perpetuity. For more information about the initiative or to make a gift or pledge, please visit chq.org/miller-edison-cottage or contact foundation@chq.org or 716-357-6243.
Odland Plaza Welcomes Chautauquans to the Amp

Just days before the 2018 season commenced, a crew of 23 gardeners put the finishing touches on Chautauqua’s new Odland Plaza, setting out river birch and other trees, along with several varieties of hostas, coneflowers, grasses, dozens of hydrangea bushes and other perennials, to complete the main entryway to the Amphitheater. Odland Plaza runs alongside the Clark Brick Walk, between Pratt and the back of Smith Memorial Library. The new plantings help with stormwater management and, as they develop, the trees will offer a fresh green canopy over these pedestrian areas.

A newly designed and constructed gazebo where Chautauquans can obtain event tickets, headsets, recordings of lectures, literature, souvenirs, and snacks is also a part of the plaza, as are bicycle racks, accessible parking, and a dedicated space for a food truck.

The existing restroom facilities behind the library have also been dressed up with a white pergola “green up” the space, as Shedd put it. Numerous wrought iron benches of various sizes surround the plantings and invite Chautauquans to gather for conversation, a quick meal, or rest between events.

The Odland family has been coming to Chautauqua for more than two decades, resulting in lifelong friendships for their children. Steve commutes to the grounds on weekends, while Anne spends the summer in residence.

“I like the fact that there’s a big mix of things to do. There’s something for everyone,” Steve said. “I also like that you have a lot of generations coming. We’re hoping that our kids will come back and, when we have grandkids, that they would come back.”

After the Odlands saw the initial design for the plaza, Steve came back to Vice President of Campus Planning and Operations John Shedd with another idea. “He liked most of the design,” Shedd explained, “but he felt that it could be improved even more.” Odland suggested eliminating the curb alongside the Hultquist Center, removing the existing asphalt and wrapping the pavers from there, around the back of the library with more plantings and a matching extension toward Bestor Plaza alongside the west side of the library. “Steve has a flair for design,” Shedd added. These improvements will make entrance to the Amphitheater more friendly to Chautauquans who have mobility issues, in addition to creating a seamless aesthetic from Bestor to Odland plazas.

The Odlands offered a second gift to match Institution funds to complete the larger concept. Bids went out this past June, and construction on the second phase of Odland Plaza began at the end of the 2018 season. Betsy Burgeson, supervisor of gardens and landscapes, and her landscaping staff will complete the additional plantings that will further “green up” the space, as Shedd put it. The project will be completed by the opening of the 2019 season.

“We are grateful to the Odland family for this handsome addition to the apron around the west side of the Amphitheater,” said Vice President of Development/Foundation CEO Geof Follansbee. “As I conducted tours of the new Amp this past season, I heard many positive comments on the welcoming design and the ease of coming and going through this dedicated pedestrian space. Odland Plaza now serves as the front patio and garden for our most significant structure, and I am sure it will continue to be used and appreciated by generations of Chautauquans.”

— Geof Follansbee, Chautauqua Foundation CEO

Chautauquans Steve and Anne Odland of Washington, D.C., and designed by Wendel, a landscape architecture firm out of Buffalo, New York — combines handsome gray pavers with a herringbone brick patio that incorporates a clever rendering of the Miller Bell Tower and the words “Odland Plaza” in contrasting yellow bricks. Numerous wrought iron benches of various sizes surround the plantings and invite Chautauquans to gather for conversation, a quick meal, or rest between events.

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