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**STARLIGHT THEATRE AWARDS
2009 RISING STAR SCHOLARSHIPS**

Recipients of \$2,500 scholarships are theatre students from Grandview and Piper High Schools

KANSAS CITY, Mo. – In keeping with its organizational vision of being a place “where performing arts share center stage with education,” Starlight Theatre recently shone the spotlight on two highly dedicated and talented high school theatre students. Megan Herrera of Grandview, Mo., and Kent Reynolds of Kansas City, Kan., were announced as the 2009 Rising Star Scholarship recipients during Starlight’s seventh annual Blue Star Ceremony at the theatre on May 21.

The Rising Star Scholarships are made possible by the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation. As part of Starlight’s Blue Star Awards program, sponsored by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas City, each year two \$2,500 Rising Star scholarships are awarded to the male and female seniors who have made the greatest contributions their high schools’ theatre and music departments.

Megan Herrera, who just completed her senior year at Grandview High School, has a résumé that spans more than 15 theatre productions, including *Willy Wonka*, *Meet Me in St. Louis* and *Footloose* at Grandview High, years of band and vocal experience, and an admirable list of school club officer roles. She won the Kansas City Cappies Award for “Best Featured Actress in a Musical” for her role

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as Anita in *West Side Story* at Grandview High in 2006. As a result, she was selected to attend the Cappies International Theatre in Washington D.C. in 2007 and performed at the Kennedy Center. Herrera also has traveled to New York and London to attend actors' workshops through the International Thespian Society.

Herrera was recommended for the scholarship by her theatre instructor, Brad Rackers. "Megan is truly deserving of this award for reasons too numerous to mention," Rackers wrote. When on stage "she is able to create vivid and exciting characters that not only are believable but leave the audience wanting more." In addition to spending time on stage, she has served on stage crews for a variety of shows and co-directed the advanced acting production in her last semester of high school.

"Theatre has taught me that being a leader is not about standing in the spotlight alone, but by empowering those around you to share it with you," Herrera explained in her application essay. She described theatre using the words passion, comfort, hope and sheer joy. "I can truly say that I love and appreciate this art form for all it's worth," she said. Herrera will attend Stephens College in Columbia, Mo., beginning this fall and will pursue a degree in musical theatre.

Kent Reynolds, a new Piper High School graduate, is the second Rising Star Scholarship recipient for 2009. In her letter of recommendation, Katie Deneault referred to Reynolds as "without a doubt, one of the most reliable and dedicated members of my theatre department." Deneault, Piper's theatre and speech director, also credited Reynolds as being the driving force behind the school's decision to join the Blue Star Awards program. "Kent saw the benefit of feedback from theatre professionals," she said. "He did the research and legwork required to persuade me (to join)."

In his application essay, Reynolds referred to his first acting role in 2000 as Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof* at the Kansas Academy of Theatrical Arts. "From the moment I stepped out on that stage, nothing else felt so right," he wrote. "Since then, I've worked in every production I could, in and out of school, on stage and behind the scenes."

Reynolds' résumé includes a diverse range of activities from theatre to choir, debate, honor roll and the scholar bowl team. He has participated in 19 productions since 2000, including *Romeo & Juliet*,

The Wizard of Oz, and even as member of the teen ensemble in *Les Misérables* at Starlight last summer.

He also has participated in the “Odyssey of the Minds” international competition, qualifying for the world finals eight times. According to Reynolds, Odyssey teams “creatively solve complicated problems with eight-minute skits.” It was at one of these competitions, he said, that he decided he wanted to be a theatre teacher. Reynolds plans to attend Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa, and pursue a degree in musical theatre.

During the seven years of the Blue Star Awards and Rising Star Scholarship competition, a total of 14 talented and ambitious Kansas City teens have received \$35,000 in college scholarships.

Starlight Theatre

Presenting Broadway entertainment since 1951, the non-profit Starlight Theatre Association is Kansas City’s oldest and largest performing arts organization. The Association operates, programs and maintains the largest stage in the United States, as well as the 16-acre Starlight Theatre complex. While assuming all annual operating costs for the complex, the Association also raises funds for capital improvements and a variety of programs, including national Broadway musical performances, concerts, community outreach and education. Since 2000, the Association has contributed more than \$25 million of privately funded improvements to the Kansas City, Mo.-owned Starlight Theatre. Each Broadway season, Starlight donates more than 11,000 tickets to its performances to regional non-profit organizations serving the disadvantaged.

In 2008, Starlight Theatre was selected as the “Favorite Performing Arts Venue or Organization” in the Kansas City Convention & Visitors Association’s Visitors’ Choice Awards program. Starlight also received a Gold Award for “Best Performing Arts Venue” and a Bronze Award for “Best Theater” in *Ingram’s* 2008 Best of Business Kansas City Awards. The theatre seats approximately 8,000 and is located in Swope Park.

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