

CONTACT:
Rina Thaler
The Art League of Ocean City
Ocean City Center for the Arts
rthaler@artleagueofoceancity.org
410-524-9433

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Art League of Ocean City celebrates 30 years of college scholarships
with awards to seven new recipients**

OCEAN CITY, MD — June 7, 2021 — The Art League of Ocean City is celebrating 30 years of providing college scholarships, awarding 69 scholarships since 1991 to local students pursuing a college degree in the visual and performing arts. In 2021, seven students received scholarships, presented at a First Friday ceremony by Worcester County native and Broadway star Jennifer Wills, who was the first student to receive an Art League scholarship

On First Friday, Wills was joined by Kay Ayers who in 1991 presented the first Art League scholarship to the future lead singer of “The Phantom of the Opera.” Wills said the financial help was important to her success.

“It was wonderful to be recognized for my hard work by someone other than my parents,” Wills laughed. “I used the scholarship money during my time at Salisbury University where I received my BA in Music Education. I then received my MM from Indiana University and spent 20 years in New York working professionally in theatre and music including starring in several Broadway shows and headlining with symphonies across the United States.”

Wills has since returned to her native Eastern Shore to raise her family. “I always loved it here and have wonderful memories of my childhood ...,” she said. “I wanted a return to a simpler life and liked the idea of hopefully giving back to the community that gave me so much.”

This year’s scholarships include the inaugural \$5,000 Sidney M. Beckstead Award, in honor of the entrepreneur, artist, and jeweler who passed away in 2020. The recipient is Colin Porter, graduate of Stephen Decatur High School, who will attend the Fashion Institute of Technology, focusing on jewelry and footwear design.

“Sid began his career in the jewelry industry in Ocean City, Md.,” Sherrie Beckstead said. “It is with great humility and honor that we want to celebrate Sid’s creative gifts by awarding a scholarship in his name.”

The Art League also awarded six \$1,000 scholarships, funded through the Katherine Ellen Brown Fund at the Community Foundation of the Eastern Shore. The recipients are Serap Aksu of Ocean City, a SDHS graduate who will attend Salisbury University; Lilly Jones of Ocean City, graduating from the Salisbury School and attending the Savannah College of Art & Design; and Allison Marx of Ocean City, a SDHS graduate who will attend the University of Maryland College Park. Three previous scholarship winners reapplied for and were awarded continuing scholarships: Lamont Hall of Pocomoke City, who attends the Pratt Institute; Sara Hancock of Ocean City, who attends Salisbury University; and Alana Troxell of Pocomoke City, who attends Marymount Manhattan College.

The Art League of Ocean City is a non-profit organization dedicated to bringing the visual arts to the community through education, exhibits, scholarship, programs and community art projects. Financial support comes primarily through membership dues from individuals and corporate sponsors.

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EDITORS -- Photos attached:

Jennifer Wills & Kay Ayers ~ 1991 & 2021

Scholarship winners with Art League scholarship committee – Left to right: Alana Troxell, Judy Tremellen, Lamont Hall, Allison Marx, Sherry Beckstead, Colin Porter, Jennifer Wills, Serap Aksu, and B.J. Sommers of the Community Foundation of the Eastern Shore.

Scholarship Winners & Jennifer Wills: Left to right: Serap Aksu, Alana Troxell, Lamont Hall, Allison Marx, Colin Porter, and Jennifer Wills, the first person to receive an Art League scholarship in 1991.

Beckstead Award – Left to right: Art League of Ocean City President John Sisson, Sara Beckstead, Jessica Beckstead, Sherry Beckstead, scholarship recipient Colin Porter, and Art League Executive Director Rina Thaler.