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Ballet Memphis Honors Founder by Renaming Headquarters

The Dorothy Gunther Pugh Center for Dance Realization of Life's Work

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (Memphis, Tenn.) — On Saturday, March 2, 2024, Ballet Memphis's Midtown headquarters will receive a new name when the Board of Directors honors Founding Artistic Director Dorothy Gunther Pugh by unveiling new signage at a reception in her honor. The award-winning facility, designed by local firm archimania and opened to the public in 2017 will now be known as the Dorothy Gunther Pugh Center for Dance. Dorothy founded Ballet Memphis in 1986 with the vision of creating a world-class ballet company for her hometown and served at its helm until her retirement in 2020.

"Dorothy was a visionary and used her own experiences in dance to champion a kinder, more inclusive world," says current board chair Shelley Shanaman. She continued, "Just walking through this building and its thoughtful openness created for the community, and you can see how her work has transformed thousands of lives. This space is the manifestation of Dorothy's vision to help everyone to soar in their own way, so it's only appropriate that it carry her name."

Long before there was a national spotlight on the area of equity and inclusion, Dorothy was a champion in building a ballet company that was reflective of this city and nation. She was a leader in modeling what American ballet companies should look like to advance the art form and engage more audiences through thoughtful work and programming. Under her direction Ballet Memphis rose to national prominence for its compelling artistry, thematic new work, and support of emerging choreographers.

From her retirement announcement, Dorothy described her vision best by saying, "We do not serve the ballet world or our personal careers. We must use our glorious art form to see and hear others, celebrate, and problem solve together. We must learn to live as one humanity, knowing there is enough love and its real power of kindness to carry forward for all."

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Ballet Memphis (balletmemphis.org) was founded in 1986 with the mission to create a ballet company that is reflective of our community and the nation by creating, presenting and teaching ballet in a way that celebrates the human spirit. We have built a Company that is beautifully diverse in mind, body and soul and seeks to use our art in service to others. We have built acclaimed original repertoire that speaks of the cultural significance of the area and have shared it with audiences around the globe and at home, including The Joyce Theater in New York City and the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C., among others.

Dorothy Gunther Pugh (former CEO & Founding Artistic Director) founded Ballet Memphis in 1986 with two dancers and a budget of \$75,000. Under Dorothy's direction, Ballet Memphis has been lauded by



the Ford Foundation, the Hearst Foundations, and the Mellon Foundation, among others. Dorothy has appeared on several national dance panels, including PBS NewsHour, the National Endowment for the Arts Dance Panel and the Glass Slipper Ceiling Symposium. Memphis Magazine named Dorothy its 2017 "Memphian of the Year." A member of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, she also has received the Women of Achievement Award for Initiative and the Gordon Holl Outstanding Arts Administrator's Award, and is a recipient of a fellowship from the Center for Social Innovation at Stanford University Graduate School of Business. She was a fellow in the National Arts Strategies' Chief Executive Program™ and was named a 2012 Legends Award winner from the Women's Foundation for a Greater Memphis. In 2013, she received the Briggs' Foundation Community Service Award. She served three years as chair of the Artistic Directors' Council for Dance/USA, the nation's largest dance service organization for professional dance companies and served on its panel for diversity and inclusion. Dorothy is a native Memphian who began her ballet training with Edith Royal of Orlando, Florida, and later studied with Louise Rooke and Memphis Ballet. After graduating cum laude from Vanderbilt University, she studied with Raymond Clay and Donna Carver, and performed with Dance Concert Theatre. She completed teacher-training courses at the Royal Academy of Dance in London and with New York ballet master David Howard. Dorothy appeared in many roles with Ballet Memphis before leaving the stage.