

SIUE alumnus accepts national honor on behalf of St. Louis ArtWorks

by Megan Wieser

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WASHINGTON D.C. - Southern Illinois University Edwardsville College of Arts and Sciences alumnus Priscilla Block, executive director of [St. Louis ArtWorks](#), accepted the 2016 National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award (NAHYP) on Tuesday, Nov. 15. First Lady Michelle Obama presided over a special ceremony at the White House. Block achieved a bachelor's of fine arts from SIUE in 1996.

The NAHYP Award is the highest national honor for youth programs and was presented to 12 organizations. According to the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, the award recognizes the programs for using engagement in the arts and the humanities to generate a wide range of positive outcomes, including increases in academic achievement, growth in graduation and college enrollment rates, and improvements in literacy and language abilities, communication and performance skills, and cultural awareness.

"We believe that every single child has boundless promise, no matter who they are, where they come from, or how much money their parents have," said Mrs. Obama during the awards ceremony. "And it is important to our continued greatness to see these kids as ours – not as 'them,' not as 'other,' but as ours. And that's really the power of programs like these. That's the message that they send to our young people every single day."

St. Louis ArtWorks is a year-round job training program using art as a tool to teach essential life and job skills to underserved St. Louis youth. Ninety percent of St. Louis ArtWorks' participants graduate high school and plan to attend college, which is a significantly higher rate than their classmates.

"Our primary goal is to strengthen our apprentices' core skills in science, technology, engineering, art and math, exposing them to a variety of careers," said Block. "We hope this award will draw attention to the documented fact that programs like ours are essential investments not just in the lives of our young people, but in our community as well. We're incredibly proud of this achievement and of the young people, volunteers, supporters, board, and staff who made it possible."

About St. Louis ArtWorks

Since its founding in 1995, [St. Louis ArtWorks](#)' programs have engaged more than 3,000 young people in arts apprenticeships, successfully helping to prepare them for future education and employment opportunities. St. Louis ArtWorks bridges economic, racial and social divisions by providing underserved youth with arts education, workforce development training and 21st century life skills.

St. Louis ArtWorks was created to use art as a tool to help youth in the community explore who they are and who they want to be in a safe environment. So many young people are repeatedly told what they cannot do, and thus, have neither hope nor dreams for a brighter future. St. Louis ArtWorks listens to teen apprentices, to help them realize that each of them is a work of art, and that their choices have a direct effect on their future and the person they want to become.

In 2015, St. Louis ArtWorks moved to 5959 Delmar, one block east of The Loop. The new building includes traditional and digital art studios, a pollinator garden and a MakerSpace.

About the National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award

First presented in 1998, the [National Arts and Humanities Youth Program](#) Award is the signature program of the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities (PCAH). The awards are presented annually in partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS).

Created in 1982 by Executive Order, the PCAH is an advisory committee to the White House on cultural issues. The PCAH works directly with the administration and the three primary cultural agencies—the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS)—as well as with other federal partners and the private sector, to address policy questions in the arts and humanities, to initiate and support key programs in those disciplines, and to recognize excellence in the field. Its core areas of focus are arts and humanities education, cultural exchange, and community revitalization. Mrs. Obama, like other first ladies before her, serves as Honorary Chair of the committee, which comprises both private and public members.

[Southern Illinois University Edwardsville](#) provides students with a high quality, affordable education that prepares them for successful careers and lives of purpose to shape a changing world. Built on the foundation of a broad-based liberal education, and enhanced by hands-on research and real-world experiences, the academic preparation SIUE students receive equips them to thrive in the global marketplace and make our communities better places to live. Situated on 2,660 acres of beautiful woodland atop the bluffs overlooking the natural beauty of the Mississippi River's rich bottomland and only a short drive from downtown St. Louis, the SIUE campus is home to a diverse student body of more than 14,000.