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**PAPER MILL PLAYHOUSE ANNOUNCES**

**2023 RISING STAR AWARD WINNERS**

Presented by Citizens Philanthropic Foundation and Investors Foundation

RIDGE HIGH SCHOOL BRINGS HOME TOP HONOR

(**Millburn, NJ)** June 13, 2023– As one of the nation’s leading professional theaters and recipient of the Regional Theatre Tony Award, **Paper Mill Playhouse** (Mark S. Hoebee-Producing Artistic Director, Michael Stotts-Executive Director) has a well-earned reputation for launching both performers and shows to Broadway. Since their inception in 1996, the **Paper Mill Playhouse** **Rising Star Awards for Excellence in High School Musical Theater** have ignited the careers of many notable performers, all of whom attended high school in New Jersey. Among the early nominees and winners are Academy Award-winner Anne Hathaway *(Les Misérables)*; Tony Award-winners Laura Benanti *(Gypsy)*, Nikki M. James *(The Book of Mormon)*, and Rob McClure *(Mrs. Doubtfire*); Olivier Award-nominee Jared Gertner *(The Book of Mormon)*; and Jelani Remy (*The* *Lion King, Ain’t Too Proud*) and Shanice Williams, star of NBC’s *The Wiz Live!*. The **2023** [**Paper Mill Playhouse**](http://broadwayworld.com/people/Paper-Mill-Playhouse/)**Rising Star Awards Presented by Citizens Philanthropic Foundation and Investors Foundation** ceremony took place at Paper Mill Playhouse on **Tuesday, June 13, at 7:30pm as a livestream and is now available to view on Paper Mill’s Facebook page.**

This year, Ridge High School in Basking Ridge took the prize for Outstanding Overall Production for their production of *Newsies*. A complete list of award winners is below. Winning the Leading Role categories were Leah Rose Crossan from Clearview Regional High School for her role as Donna Sheridan in *Mamma Mia!* and Dakota Krouse for his role as Gomez Addams in *The Addams Family* at Delaware Valley Regional High School.

Among the top nominated high schools in a competitive category are Columbia High School (Essex County) with 13 nominations, Delaware Valley Regional High School (Hunterdon County) with 12 nominations, Haddonfield Memorial High School (Camden County) with 10 nominations, Summit High School (Union County) with 9 nominations, and Moorestown High School (Burlington County) with 8 nominations.

“We are very excited to celebrate excellence in high school musical theater with the students of New Jersey,” commented [Mark S. Hoebee](http://broadwayworld.com/people/Mark-S.-Hoebee/), [Paper Mill Playhouse](http://broadwayworld.com/people/Paper-Mill-Playhouse/)’s Producing Artistic Director. “For many New Jersey schools, the prestigious honor of a [Paper Mill Playhouse](http://broadwayworld.com/people/Paper-Mill-Playhouse/) Rising Star nomination is the culmination of their hard work in a high school musical. Many of our Rising Star nominees and winners are now working professionally and have won esteemed industry awards while working in theater and film.”

Paper Mill Director of Education Lisa Cooney explains, "What's happening in high school musical productions here in New Jersey and around the country is remarkable. Programs like the Paper Mill Playhouse Rising Star Awards raise the bar and create opportunities for student performers and theater technicians to be recognized for their achievements, while giving them access to thousands of dollars in scholarships and professional training. We consistently hear from top-tier colleges and casting directors that a Paper Mill Playhouse Rising Star Award is a significant accolade for an aspiring theater artist.”

The [Paper Mill Playhouse](http://broadwayworld.com/people/Paper-Mill-Playhouse/) Rising Star Awards Presented by Citizens Philanthropic Foundation and Investors Foundation are modeled after the Tony Awards, and [Paper Mill Playhouse](http://broadwayworld.com/people/Paper-Mill-Playhouse/)'s program serves the entire state of New Jersey, over 100 productions from public, private and parochial high schools. [Paper Mill Playhouse](http://broadwayworld.com/people/Paper-Mill-Playhouse/) conceived and created the awards in 1996 to give schools the opportunity to showcase their musical arts programs on a statewide level. The musicals are adjudicated by [Paper Mill Playhouse](http://broadwayworld.com/people/Paper-Mill-Playhouse/) throughout the spring by a group of 70 evaluators, with each school receiving three independent evaluations. Schools nominated for Outstanding Overall Musical and Leading Performers nominees take the stage at the event.

"Investors Foundation remains proud to continue supporting the Rising Star Awards. This program celebrates the most creative and talented high school theater programs in the State of New Jersey. We congratulate this year's nominees and hope they continue to have successful theater experiences after high school." Rodger Herrigel - Executive Director, Investors Foundation

[Paper Mill Playhouse](http://broadwayworld.com/people/Paper-Mill-Playhouse/) awarded $7,000 in scholarships at the [Paper Mill Playhouse](http://broadwayworld.com/people/Paper-Mill-Playhouse/) Rising Star Awards Presented by Citizens Philanthropic Foundation and Investors Foundation. Seven $1,000 cash scholarships were awarded to outstanding individual students who plan to continue studying theater performance, technical theater or education in college. The recipients of these scholarships are **Tasneem Abdelsayed of Piscataway High School**, **Eddie Coen of Madison High School**, **Najm Muhammad of Piscataway High School**, **Libby Schmitt of Ridge High School**, **Eva Luna Taveras of Bergen County Academies**, **Grace Velazquez of Perth Amboy High School**, and **Ian Wilson of Cedar Grove High School**.

[Paper Mill Playhouse](http://broadwayworld.com/people/Paper-Mill-Playhouse/) awarded a prize of $500 to **Cedar Grove High School and Jonathan Dayton High School** as the winners of the 2023 Educational Impact Award. This award acknowledges schools that successfully connect the musical to the district's curriculum, using the production as a teaching tool for the greater student body and local community.

The Theater for Everyone Inclusion and Access Award recognizes excellence in the practice of inclusion of students and adults with disabilities as performers, designers, musicians, and production staff. Additionally, this award seeks to recognize schools that took steps to ensure their performances were accessible to audiences with disabilities. Through a partnership with The Cultural Access Network of New Jersey, a project of the New Jersey Theatre Alliance and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, [Paper Mill Playhouse](http://broadwayworld.com/people/Paper-Mill-Playhouse/) presented a cash award of $1,000 to winners **Eastern Regional High School and Moorestown High School.**

The Outstanding Educator Award honored teachers **Alan Van Antwerp of The Pingry School, Julianna Krawiecki of Princeton High School, and Tim Lynch of Ridge High School**. These educators were nominated by their home school districts and awarded a Rising Star Award and $1,000 cash prize for their schools’ theater programs.

Students receiving final nominations in the lead and supporting acting categories received a scholarship to [Paper Mill Playhouse](http://broadwayworld.com/people/Paper-Mill-Playhouse/)'s competitive Summer Musical Theater Conservatory. This professional training program, along with advanced classes in singing, acting, and dance, offers the nominees an opportunity to perform in the season finale concert, ***New Voices of 2023: We Will Rock You!*** on July 28 & 29 on the main stage at Paper Mill Playhouse. Tickets are on sale now and may be purchased at PaperMill.org, or by calling the box office at 973-376-4343.

**Rising Star Awards** - Presented by Citizens Philanthropic Foundation and Investors Foundation are supported by The Blanche and Irving Laurie Foundation.

Rising Star Awards are part of the New Jersey Theatre Alliance 2023 Stages Festival and made possible by support from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, a partner agency of the National Endowment for the Arts; Bank of America; The Horizon Foundation for New Jersey; OceanFirst Foundation; the George A. Ohl, Jr. Trust; New Jersey Historical Commission; and Fund for the New Jersey Blind. [www.njtheatrealliance.org/stages](http://www.njtheatrealliance.org/stages)

Rising Star Awards are made possible, in part, by funds from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/Department of State, A Partner Agency of the National Endowment for the Arts.

Rising Star scholarships are made possible by Ruth Bedford in memory of Jane Burgio, Walt Santner in honor of Janet Sovey, in memory of late father and husband James K. Mosser, and the Douglas Michael Krueger Scholarship Fund Trust. The Theater for Everyone Inclusion and Access Award is supported by the New Jersey Theatre Alliance.

The Hearst Foundations are Paper Mill’s Education & Outreach Partner.

**2023 Rising Star Award Winners**

Outstanding Overall Production of a Musical

**Ridge High School, *Newsies***

Shape

Outstanding Performance in a Female-Identified Leading Role

**Leah Rose Crossan as Donna Sheridan, *Mamma Mia!*, Clearview Regional High School**

Shape

Outstanding Performance in a Male-Identified Leading Role

**Dakota Krouse as Gomez Addams, *The Addams Family*, Delaware Valley Regional High School**

Outstanding Performance in a Female-Identified Supporting Role

**Ryan Yuhas as Ursula, *The Little Mermaid*, Sayreville War Memorial High School**

Shape

Outstanding Performance in a Male-Identified Supporting Role

**Zach Siegel as Nigel Bottom, *Something Rotten!*, Summit High School**

Outstanding Performer in a Featured Role

**Mac Silverstein as Brother Jeremiah, *Something Rotten!*, Columbia High School**

**Elijah Dor as George, *The Drowsy Chaperone*, Morris Knolls High School**

**Amanda Muldowney as Annie Reilly, *42nd Street*, Southern Regional High School**

Shape

Outstanding Performance by a Featured Ensemble Member

**Jaidyn Riley as Mush, *Newsies*, Ridge High School**

Outstanding Performance by a Featured Ensemble Group

**The Troupe, *Something Rotten!*, Summit High School**

Outstanding Performance by a Chorus

**Ridge High School, *Newsies***

Shape

Outstanding Performance by an Orchestra

**Ridge High School, *Newsies***

Outstanding Achievement by a Teacher or Outside Director

**Clinton Ambs, *The Addams Family*, Delaware Valley Regional High School**

Shape

Outstanding Achievement in Choreography and Staging

**Rachel Miranda and Jennifer DiGiuseppe, *Newsies*, Ridge High School**

Shape

Outstanding Achievement in Music Direction

**John Brzozowski, *Sunday in the Park with George*, Westfield High School**

Shape

Outstanding Scenic Achievement

**Anthony Freitas, *Little Women*, Madison High School**

Outstanding Lighting Achievement

**Michael Kimmel and Lisa Weinshrott, *The Wizard of Oz*, Wallkill Valley Regional High School**

Shape

Outstanding Costuming Achievement

**Sabrina Windt, *Head Over Heels*, Haddonfield Memorial High School**

Shape

Outstanding Hair and Make-Up Achievement

**Carrie Snodgrass, *The Addams Family*, Delaware Valley Regional High School**

Shape

Student Achievement Award Recipients

**Lilly Resnick, Stage Mgr.** ***Chicago: Teen Edition*** **Acad. for Perf. Arts at UCVTS**

**Sofia Merie Maravillas, Stage Mgr.** ***Fiddler on the Roof*** **Bergen County Academies**

**Nia Serrano, Dance Captain**  ***Pippin*** **Carteret High School**

**Mazie O’Keefe, Costume Head** ***Frozen,* Eastern**  **Regional High School**

**Skye Coen, Stage Mgr. *Little Women*  Madison High School**

**Azlyn Haley, Head Carpenter *Newsies* Princeton High School**

**Sasha Stepanova, Lighting Design *Newsies* Princeton High School**

**Costume Crew *Something Rotten!* Summit High School**

**Ryan Karlin, Stage Mgr. *Sunday in the Park…* Westfield High School**

**Sophie Havens, Music Director *Sunday in the Park…*  Westfield High School**

Educational Impact Award

**Cedar Grove High School, *The Prom***

**Jonathan Dayton High School, *Heathers: School Edition***

Rising Star Theater for Everyone Inclusion and Access Award

**Eastern Regional High School, *Frozen***

**Moorestown High School, *Rodgers & Hammerstein’s Cinderella***



Outstanding Educator Award

**Alan Van Antwerp, The Pingry School**

**Julianna Krawiecki, Princeton High School**

**Tim Lynch, Ridge High School**

**PAPER MILL PLAYHOUSE**, recipient of the 2016 Regional Theatre Tony Award, is a nationally renowned, not-for-profit theater under the direction of Mark S. Hoebee (Producing Artistic Director) and Mike Stotts (Executive Director). A beloved NJ arts institution since 1938, Paper Mill creates and produces groundbreaking new musicals and reimagined classics. Several productions have gone on to Broadway and launched national tours, including Disney’s *Newsies*, *Les Misérables*, *Honeymoon in Vegas*, *A Bronx Tale*, and *Bandstand*. The theater is also the home of an award-winning center for musical theater education and artist training, with outreach programs that impact tens of thousands of students each year. As one of the nation’s premier musical theaters, Paper Mill fosters a creative environment to advance the art form, educate students, develop future theater lovers, nurture inclusion, and provide access for all. Paper Mill Playhouse programs are made possible, in part, by funds from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, a partner agency of the National Endowment for the Arts. Paper Mill Playhouse is a member of the National Alliance for Musical Theatre, the Council of Stock Theatres, and the New Jersey Theatre Alliance.

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