

May 31, 2022

Dear members of the Grand Rapids Arts and Culture Commission,

To honor of the memory of one of our community's biggest supporter of arts and culture development, I am writing to nominate Kathy Dodge for the 2022 Mayor's Arts Award.

Kathy was an inaugural member of the City of Grand Rapids Arts and Culture Commission, where she was one of the first – if not the first – Chairs. As such, she led with City personnel, the City Council, and Commissioners to establish a ten-year Arts and Culture Roadmap, an arts adoption plan, and a public art placement plan, which is currently being executed. She was also the Commission's first liaison to a new artist residency space on the 3rd Floor of Central School. She was never afraid to try new ideas and inspired a group of local volunteers to maintain a creative pop up park in the old Kremer's parking lot for a few years.

As a founding member of Grand Rapids Arts, Kathy was instrumental in starting – with MacRostie Art Center and other local arts organizations – what are First Friday Art Walks in Grand Rapids.

After Kathy retired from teaching, she was Executive Director of the Itasca Orchestra and Strings Program for six years. In addition to her devotion to the many talented students, a highlight was her effort to bring the Minnesota Orchestra to Grand Rapids for their first "Common Chords" residency in 2011.



Although this award is distinctly connected with the City of Grand Rapids, Kathy's statewide work to advocate for the arts benefited Grand Rapids directly. She served on the Minnesota Citizens for the Arts Board, including as Chair, during which time Grand Rapids – as one of the first rural areas – completed its first economic impact study of the arts.

She also volunteered countless hours to review proposals on behalf of the Minnesota State Arts Board and the Arrowhead Regional Arts Council, which helped her build and share knowledge that led other local arts organizations to securing funding for the arts from outside Itasca County.

These efforts earned her recognition in 2016, as she was awarded the Maddie Simons Award for Arts Advocacy from the Arrowhead Regional Arts Council.

Finally, and perhaps most visibly, if you knew Kathy, or Dodger as most knew her, she always showed up and she always contributed. She attended every orchestra concert she could, every First Friday event she could, personally visiting and thanking stores and businesses who participated. She attended every art event she could and was deeply supportive of the many folks in the area who make a living being an artist. She and her husband, Steve Downing, purchased numerous pieces of art over the years from local artists, which makes their home a beautiful, welcoming place to visit.

Dodger embodied her fingertips what it is to be an arts advocate. She understood instinctively the heart of an artist and made a life of supporting them for the benefit of us all.

I am honored to nominate Kathy Dodge for the 2022 Mayor's Arts Award in her memory. She passed away earlier this spring; our arts community will miss her for a long time.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sonja Merrild', written in a cursive style.

Sonja Merrild