Press Release – Nov. 2020

**38th “SPOTLIGHT ON TALENT” COMPETITION -**

**the COVID VERSION**

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Many have been wondering if the popular "Spotlight on Talent" competition would be able to happen next spring in light of the Covid pandemic. Heritage Arts Center producers want to get the word out that they are committed to making that happen. Applications have been sent to all area public and private schools, music studios, chambers of commerce, and are available on our website at heritagearts.org. If the virus is gone from the area by January, plans will go ahead with prelims on Feb. 13 and finals on March 6. More likely, we have a much different Plan B that will be used.

 The application process will be the same either way, so talented young people need to start "getting their act together" and get applications completed. The deadline for applications is Jan. 28, 2021. The Plan B process will have a one day contest on March 6. The participants will still be able to prepare and perform their acts in front of a panel of paid, professional judges. They will receive valuable feedback and scores from those judges. We will still award $4,000 in cash and trophy prizes, and a $1,000 scholarship to the high school senior from Pasco County with the highest judges scores. The important difference is that there will be no large audience, only immediate family members may attend, social distancing and masking will be required, and the contestants will only come for their age category performances and awards, and then leave.

 As in the past, this is our area's version of "America's Got Talent", a regional performing arts competition for students up through high school seniors, all types of talents, both solos and groups. Several hundred students compete each year, with the judges evaluating about 100 performances. Participants are judged primarily on talent with additional points for stage presence and appropriate appearance.

The competition is conducted in a professional atmosphere with judges from central Florida who are outstanding in their respective fields. Every year as word of the excitement and quality talent spreads, more and more young people participate coming from as far away as Tampa, Brooksville, St. Pete, and West Pasco. Vocalists, dancers, instrumental musicians, piano players, baton twirlers, bands, gymnasts and other forms of entertainment are welcome to participate. There are several age categories for solos and one or more group categories. A student may enter as a solo and with a group.

 Community sponsors have always allowed us to generously reward these young people for their hard work in developing their talents. This year because we probably won't have income from audience tickets, and we are not increasing the application fee, it is more important than ever for generous sponsors to step forward. If you are interested in becoming a sponsor, please email Barbara Friedman at spotlight@heritagearts.org or call 352-567-1720, and our newly launched web site will have a "donate now" button.

For the past 38 years, gifted young people have been eager each spring for this chance to shine as a true star! Many of our former contestants have gained valuable experience and confidence, and have gone on to receive college scholarships and positions with professional performance organizations. It is indeed a rewarding event for all – sponsors, producers, and performers! We look forward to returning our enthusiastic audience to the experience in the future.