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Partnership, education and advocacy:

Cayman National Cultural Foundation shifts strategic direction

As it celebrates 40 years as a leading arts organisation, the Cayman National Cultural Foundation is expanding its areas of focus from producing theatre, festivals and events in-house to developing new creative partnerships, growing education and cultural resources, and broadening for support for creatives working in the Cayman Islands.

To meet the needs of Cayman's cultural sector in the 21st century, the Cultural Foundation undertook a strategic redevelopment review under the leadership of Board and interim CEO Natalie Urquhart, with input from more than 100 direct stakeholders as well as wider public surveys across the industry and community.

"The review highlighted demand for more collaboration and alignment within the sector, greater access to cultural resources and expertise, and further opportunities for professional development," said Urquhart. "Our new strategic direction builds on the Foundation's remarkable legacy while opening up new opportunities. For example, we will continue to produce much-loved events such as Cayfest and Red Sky at Night, but our emphasis going forward will be to foster partnerships with other creatives and community groups and facilitate increased performances at the Harquail and Studio Theatres, and across the wider community. We are also significantly expanding our education programmes, creative grants and residency programmes and investing more in our role as a cultural resource for the country."

The Cayman National Cultural Foundation was founded in 1984 to support the performing, visual and literary arts in the Cayman Islands. Over the past four decades and under the early leadership of Founding Director Geoff Cresswell, and later long running Artistic Direction of Henry Muttoo, and Marcia Muttoo, the Foundation has played a crucial role in helping to preserve Cayman's cultural heritage and develop talent on and off stage.

“Cayman has changed and grown considerably since the Foundation was established and will continue to change and grow. Culture and heritage are critical tools to bridge the past, present and future,” said Urquhart. “Through the arts, we can explore what it means to be Caymanian today, strengthening unity in the community and promoting a sense of wellbeing and national pride. The Foundation can support this by fulfilling our wider remit in cultural management and advocacy.”

A new chapter begins

The Cultural Foundation has already taken the first steps in piloting new programmes and restructuring operations to deliver its new priorities:

1. Theatre and festivals

With a focus on collaboration and partnership, the Foundation will continue to run a busy calendar of events throughout the year at the FJ Harquail Cultural Centre and at locations across all three Cayman Islands. New initiatives include a relaunch of Cayfest on a larger scale in March, the launch of the Creative Partnership Programme (est. 2023), and the Cayman National Choir & Orchestra taking up residency at the Studio Theatre.

2. Education and research

Preserving Cayman’s history and traditions, from storytelling, dance and folk singing to the new heritage archive library and Miss Lassie’s house at the Minds Eye Centre, the Foundation is a resource for students of all ages. Empowering the next generation of talent, youth programmes range from school tours, after-school clubs and summer camps to educational materials for the classroom, and cultural and heritage training for teachers.

3. Creative sector advocacy, grants and training

Supporting the creative sector through grants and residency programmes, the Foundation will serve as both a launch pad for careers in the arts while providing ongoing support for creative practitioners. The Foundation plans to offer more training and professional development for creatives and has increased its allocation of grants, providing \$85,000 in support to artists last year alone. By promoting and advocating for the creative sector at a national level, the Foundation also aims to provide increased visibility for multiple creatives and organisations and their work.

4. Future planning

The Harquail Theatre was originally envisioned as part of a larger cultural campus with architectural drawings dating back to 1984. In partnership with the National Gallery of the Cayman Islands, the Cultural Foundation is revisiting this initial concept and has formed a Steering Committee to undertake feasibility studies and seek stakeholder input to develop a national cultural campus.

Setting the stage

In line with the strategic direction, the Cultural Foundation has a new leadership team. Rosie Twohey has been appointed as managing director, with Rita Powell heading up Education, Grants and Research and Cassandra Shea leading the Theatre & Festivals team. Natalie Urquhart will step down from her role as CEO at the end of the year but will continue to guide creative strategy and lead the campus development with the joint Steering Committee.

The Cultural Foundation is also currently developing a new brand which will be a refreshed interpretation of its familiar landmark, using the traditional weaving pattern to signal the diversity of arts, culture and heritage in the Cayman Islands, along with its commitment to cultural preservation. A new website will launch in December and will include a comprehensive calendar for all Cultural Foundation and partner events and downloadable lesson plans and teaching resources for schools.

“Our team is excited to embark on this next chapter of our story,” said Foundation Chairperson Lorna Reid. “We look forward to supporting and promoting the phenomenal creative talent we have in the Cayman Islands, and to hosting increased programmes and productions for our diverse audiences, while expanding our education offerings and cultural resources to ensure the preservation of Caymanian cultural heritage.”

For new and updates from the Cultural Foundation, follow @caymanculture on Facebook or Instagram.

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For media enquiries, please contact cncf@artscayman.org.

Photo captions:

1. Cayman National Cultural Foundation will continue to host a busy calendar of events at the FJ Harquail Centre such as the popular Red Sky at Night festival. Photo by David Goddard.

2.The Foundation is introducing new opportunities for collaboration with creatives and community groups to put on theatre productions and performances.

3.The Cayman National Choir and Orchestra are the first resident company at the FJ Harquail Cultural Centre. Photo credit: Gabriel Cadenas.