

THE OPERA VOLUNTEER VOICE

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The official newsletter of
*Opera Volunteers
International*

**Advocate
Educate
Celebrate
The Power of
Volunteers**

In this Issue: Registration Details for Opera Conference 2026

Join OVI's upcoming Zoom Webinar Jan. 29 at 1:00 p.m. EST

Register for Zoom webinar here:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/join/register/qrvq25BmTfe65qxRBepQhw>

Top to Bottom: Refreshing Your Arts Advocacy Toolkit



Arts advocacy has never been more urgent—or more complex. As federal, state, and local policy landscapes shift, volunteer leaders must be ready to engage with clarity, confidence, and purpose.

Join **OPERA America** and **Opera Theatre of Saint Louis** for a timely, practical webinar that refreshes your advocacy toolkit from the top down. Our expert panel will share real-world strategies for building relationships, communicating impact, and engaging decision-makers at every level, grounded in today's realities and proven practices across the opera community.

**President/CEO
OPERA America**



Michael J. Bobbitt

**Senior Manager
of Government
Affairs and
Civic Practice,
OPERA America**



Megan Carpenter

**Manager of
Volunteer
Engagement,
Opera Theatre
of Saint Louis**



Tyler McKenzie

You'll leave with:

- A clearer picture of advocacy at the federal, state, and local levels
- Practical tools you can adapt immediately in your own organization
- Insights from volunteer leaders actively advancing the arts

Who should attend:

- Opera guild and volunteer leaders, board members, staff partners, and anyone committed to sustaining the arts through informed advocacy.

• Format:

One-hour Zoom webinar (view-only). Q&A as time allows.

- **Registration required.** After registering, you will receive a confirmation email with details on joining the meeting.

Register now by clicking here:

REGISTER

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*If you can't attend the Opera Conference May 12 - 15 in Wilmington, Delaware, OVI's January 29 webinar is the perfect opportunity to hear from OPERA America's new president/CEO, **Michael J. Bobbitt***

From the President: Rhonda Catanzaro

A New Year, A Renewed Voice



The beginning of a new year invites both reflection and renewal. For Opera Volunteers International, 2026 marks an important moment as we take purposeful steps to refresh our brand, redesign our website, and revitalize *The Opera Volunteer Voice* - all with an eye toward a clearer, more forward-looking presence.

These efforts are not about leaving our history behind. As the familiar lyric reminds us, *make new friends but keep the old - one is silver and the other gold*. Our legacy mission, **to advocate for, educate, and celebrate the power of volunteers**, remains firmly at the center of our work. What is evolving is how effectively and consistently we communicate that mission across our platforms, ensuring that the impact of volunteer leadership is visible, compelling, and widely shared.

A renewed brand and revitalized newsletter allow us to better highlight your stories, your successes, and the innovative work happening in opera communities across North America. We encourage you to share your accomplishments and insights, so we can help amplify your work across the broader opera landscape.

Speaking of successes; as we look ahead, I also invite you to apply for one of OVI's awards - *Partners in Excellence* or *Projects of Special Merit* - or consider a *Matching Grant* to support a volunteer-led initiative. I know you are all doing the work. We'd love to celebrate you!

In closing, I am always happy to hear from you. You can reach me at president@operavolunteers.org or rhondazaro@gmail.com.

Happy 2026 to you!

Rhonda Cat



Thank You

A special thank you to these donors in 2025, and to our members who joined at the Patron level.

With their generous contributions, we will provide matching grants for worthy volunteer led projects in our groups.

Rhonda and Jim Catanzaro

Don Dagenais

Barbara Dittmar

Erika Erich

Sophia Johnson

James Jolly

Kathryn Keefer

Marlene McAllister

Sheila McNeill

Anne and Ernest Prokopovych

Pauline Quinn

Stanley Ransom

Dianne Schemm

Mary Sveta

Donate & Help
Make a Difference



Exciting Changes coming to *The Opera Volunteer Voice*

Beginning with our next spring edition, we are excited to unveil a fresh new look for our newsletter. Alongside this visual update, we are refocusing on our core values, as highlighted in Rhonda's message above.

We look forward to sharing this journey with you and hearing your thoughts; After all,...

this publication is designed to be for you and about you.

Find us on the internet at www.OperaVolunteers.org

Opera Conference 2026

Join Us in Wilmington: OPERA America Conference, May 12–15

Registration is open now.

REGISTER

OVI 2-Day Pass enables our members to save \$350 on conference registration. And attendees can still take advantage of an additional \$25 early registration savings through March 4.

You are invited!

This year's conference promises to be especially rich for opera volunteers and leaders. Be sure to look for the **OVI Track Sessions**, thoughtfully curated to span the full range of volunteer engagement - from hearing directly from our award-winning organizations to a brand new initiative facilitating opera visits - all the while gaining practical tools-of-the-trade that help programs grow, adapt, and succeed.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to **OVI Conference Chair, Carol Steigelman**, who is planning a fabulous and wide-ranging volunteer track, and to **OPERA America** for its continued support of OVI's mission to **Educate, Advocate, and Celebrate the Power of Volunteers**.

Never Been to Conference? Go to OPERA America's conference webpage to get the full picture, or contact Carol Steigelman for the OVI perspective. Carol.steigelman@hotmail.com

What happens at Opera Conference?

LEARN MORE

Opera Conference is a gathering where key figures in the Operatic field share the latest happenings in Opera, as well as external factors affecting its creation, production, and attendance throughout the world. Meet fellow OVI members and opera insiders from around the country. Hear from the important players as they address problems, opportunities, and the future of opera. Participate in roundtable discussions, sample new works, see operas, and attend the Host Reception.

Three general sessions will address: ***Keep Them Coming Back; Designing the Future; Advocate Like a Pro***. Hourly breakout sessions are offered in all aspects of opera. OVI has its own breakout sessions.

Purchase tickets for any of 3 operas:

Andrea Chenier
Loksi' Shaali'
The Black Clown

Conference venue:

The Hotel Dupont



What does OVI have planned?

A highlight of the week will be the **Annual OVI Awards Luncheon**,* always a meaningful and celebratory gathering. We will proudly recognize our **2026 Matching Grant recipients, Projects of Special Merit**, and **Partners in Excellence Award** winners - an inspiring showcase of the creativity, commitment, and impact of opera volunteers across the country.

Mark your calendar, register early, and plan to join us in Wilmington for a conference that informs, connects, and inspires.

**Awards Luncheon at separate cost is free to OVI members at the Patron level.*

Things to do in Wilmington:

It will be a full schedule, but check the conference website for local attractions and consider staying an extra day to tour the area.

----- Like us on Facebook to join the conversation! -----

Awards & Recognition Deadline February 15

Celebrate Your Volunteers. Fund Your Vision. Apply Now!

The application window is now open for **Opera Volunteers International's 2026 Matching Grants and Awards**, and we encourage every member organization to take a fresh look at this opportunity to celebrate your people and support your work. Applications close February 15.

This year, the application process has been **streamlined and simplified**, making it easier than ever to apply. All applications and guidelines can be found on the OVI website, and we hope you'll take advantage of this chance to shine a spotlight on the volunteers and projects that make your organization thrive.

Find out more, and apply here:

operavolunteers.org/grants-and-awards/

Need inspiration? Here are a few of our recent remarkable honorees.

- **Partners in Excellence Award winner, Sara Fabick**, a longtime leader with the **Opera Theatre of Saint Louis Guild**, was recognized for her innovative stewardship. Under Sara's guidance, the Guild successfully recruited new members by participating in a community job fair, an inspired example of meeting future volunteers where they are.



- **Projects of Special Merit Award winner, the Guild of the Glimmerglass Festival**, was honored as it celebrated 50 years of dedicated support for Glimmerglass in Cooperstown, New York—demonstrating the enduring power of volunteer commitment across generations.



- OVI's **Matching Grants** continue to help bring volunteer-driven programs to life, such as **Peach State Opera's production of *Hansel and Gretel***, which meaningfully engaged volunteers throughout the production process.

Whether your story highlights an outstanding volunteer leader, a milestone project, or a bold new initiative powered by volunteers, we want to hear it. **Don't miss this opportunity to celebrate your members, amplify your impact, and invest in the future of volunteerism in opera.**

We can't wait to see your applications!

Here's the link: **operavolunteers.org/grants-and-awards/**

----- Find us on the internet at **www.OperaVolunteers.org** -----

South Central Region Opera Theatre of Saint Louis Guild

OTSL Guild Participates in John Lesser Poster Tour

John Lesser--Artist, Teacher, Collector, and a legend of sorts at **Opera Theatre of Saint Louis**--spoke to the guild about his extensive collection of (mostly opera) posters. On display were 20 posters from his collection. When asked how many John has, he replies "nearly 1,000." John's posters are housed by four major institutions across Saint Louis, including OTSL.

John has been to every single OTSL performance since the company was founded in 1976. Look for more about John in a future issue.



Photos 1 & 2 by Pam Belloli.



Photo -GatesworthSenior Community

South Central Region The Guild of Tulsa Opera

Acknowledging a Successful Year

Note: All of our groups are exceptional examples of supporting their associated companies and promoting opera in their communities. This year, Tulsa Opera took the opportunity to document the guild's accomplishments and acknowledge the dedicated volunteers who made it possible.

National Volunteer Week will take place **April 19-25, 2026**. This would be a perfect time to share your successes, thank those involved, and notify OVI so we can celebrate your success. Start planning now, and let us know what you are doing!

As we close out this year, I, along with the Board of the Guild of Tulsa Opera, wish you and your family the happiest of new beginnings.

In 2025, we have:

Reintroduced our Artist Hospitality lunches, serving lunch to our resident and visiting artists.

Hosted the *65th Opera Ball* celebrating the lives of eighteen young opera lovers.

Reintroduced *Opera Insights* providing music education to the public.

Given more than \$35,000 to Tulsa Opera.

Through our beloved *Biga* fundraiser, raised and donated more than \$3,000 to Songs By Heart.

Prepared to host *Opera Ball 2026* with twenty debutantes and five squires.

It has been a busy 2025! We look forward with anticipation for the coming year ahead.

While 2025 was wonderful, 2026 will be even better.

Without your support--without you--none of what we accomplished would be possible. Thank you for being part of the Guild of Tulsa Opera.

With gratitude,
Danette Dillon

Borrow This Idea



Borrow This Idea!

A new regular feature of *The Opera Volunteer Voice*.

Sometimes the most effective ideas don't require a new venue or a big budget—just a smart way to help people connect. That's precisely what the **Opera Guild of Rochester** has done with its **pre-performance *Met Live in HD* Meet-Ups**.

Before the pandemic, the Guild experimented with informal gatherings tied to Royal Opera House cinema broadcasts. Attendance was modest, but the concept worked. When those broadcasts ended, the idea paused—until the Guild explored whether a local cinema showing ***Met Live in HD*** might offer a space *before* the opera.

One theater did. For \$100, the Guild has access to a party room for an hour before each performance. The theater provides coffee and soft drinks; the Guild brings light refreshments. The space is accessible, flexible, and—most importantly—perfect for conversation.

Meeting *before* the film turned out to be key. Recliner seats may be great for viewing, but they're not ideal for engagement. These meet-ups create a welcoming moment for connection while people are relaxed, social, and eager to talk.

Attendance now typically ranges from 18–30 people per meet-up, with new faces at nearly every gathering. Board members and volunteers greet guests, make introductions, and encourage conversation—often sparking stories about first operas, favorite productions, and beloved singers. Email lists are added to, and donor cards are placed on tables—no hard sell, just a friendly ask.

The results speak for themselves: stronger relationships, growing awareness, modest but meaningful donations, and even a season-long sponsorship from a longtime supporter who simply loved the idea.

All with coffee, conversation, and a little borrowed space.

Why It Works

- **Low cost, high return:** A modest room fee creates outsized relationship value.
- **Meets people where they already are:** No extra travel, no extra ticket required.
- **Conversation first, fundraising second:** Engagement feels natural, not transactional.
- **Flexible and welcoming:** Come early, arrive late, stay briefly—it all works.
- **Easy to replicate:** One room, light refreshments, and friendly hosts.

Does Your Group Have a bright Idea for the Taking?

OVI is a forum for your ideas, your challenges, and your successes.

Other guilds and volunteer groups would love to benefit from your experience and your successes, big and small.

Please send your ideas to newsletter@operavolunteers.org.

Be sure to include OVI newsletter submission in the subject line.



Thank you Mark Scorca - OPERA America past president

By Rhonda Sweeney

Honoring a Remarkable Partner and Leader

As **Marc Scorca** retires after 35 years of extraordinary leadership at **OPERA America**, Opera Volunteers International pauses to offer our heartfelt thanks for his vision, his generosity of spirit, and his unwavering belief in the power of volunteers.

Those who have worked alongside Marc will say the same thing first: **his energy and enthusiasm are unmistakable**. Whether actively leading a conference panel, engaging trustees in thoughtful webinars, or welcoming volunteers into the conversation, Marc brought warmth, clarity, and momentum to everything he touched. His unique ability to *truly lead a discussion*, not just moderate it, set a standard which will be difficult to match.

OVI has benefited deeply from our long-standing alliance with OPERA America. Since first gathering momentum in Philadelphia in 2012, and with the exception of the pandemic years, OVI has proudly been present at every OPERA America Conference, learning, connecting, and building lasting relationships with opera professionals from across North America. Early visits to OPERA America's New York offices helped energize a shared, forward-looking vision—one grounded in partnership and possibility.

Marc was also a gifted teacher. Many of us gained lasting insight from his now-famous "hourglass" framework, illustrating the vital relationship between boards and staff; top-down and bottom-up, meeting in the middle through trust and shared purpose. His guidance helped deepen our understanding of the role of board chairs, trustees, and volunteer leaders alike. lessons that continue to resonate far beyond opera organizations.

On behalf of OVI presidents past and present - Julie Benson, Susan Malott, Mary Svela, Rhonda Catanzaro, and those who came before them, we extend our deepest gratitude to Marc Scorca, for his leadership, his upbeat and inclusive spirit, and his genuine willingness to engage volunteers as essential partners in the opera ecosystem. Marc brought volunteers firmly and proudly into the opera fold, and his legacy will continue to shape our work for years to come.



Marc with OVI past president, Rhonda Sweeney



Marc with OVI past president, Julie Benson

Welcoming a New Partner and Leader



OVI welcomes **Michael J. Bobbitt** as he assumes the position of President/CEO of OPERA America. A nationally recognized arts executive, producer, and artist, his career bridges public policy, organizational transformation, and creative practice.

Before OPERA America, Bobbitt served as Executive Director of the Mass Cultural Council (Boston) from 2021–2025, Massachusetts' state arts agency. As the Commonwealth's highest-ranking public official for arts and culture, he led strategy, operations, and cross-sector partnerships supporting a \$29.7B creative economy. During his tenure, the agency secured \$60.1M in COVID relief, increased state appropriations from \$18.2M to \$26.9M, and helped embed arts and culture in statewide health, education, and economic development policy.

Prior to public service, Bobbitt led two producing theaters. As Producing Artistic Director of New Repertory Theatre (2019–2021), he repositioned the organization around inclusion and community engagement while growing audiences, earned revenue, contributed income, and board giving. From 2007–2019, as Artistic Director of Adventure Theatre MTC (Maryland), he drove significant audience growth, quadrupled fundraising, commissioned more than 50 new works, and pioneered sensory-friendly/autism-inclusive performances that became a national model.

As a playwright, director, and choreographer, Bobbitt's credits include works such as *Bob Marley's Three Little Birds*, *Garfield: The Musical with Cattitude*, *Jumanji*, *Make Way for Ducklings*, and *Monster Mash, the Musical*, among others. His work has received multiple Helen Hayes nominations, including for the Charles MacArthur Award for Outstanding New Play or Musical.

It is a great achievement for OPERA America to have at its helm a person who has worked in the creation, management, and funding of the Arts, as well as in the government sector.