

HOW WE CHOOSE THE WINNERS

To find our Light A Fire honorees, *Portland Monthly* uses a four-step process:

- 1. WE GATHER:** We ask everyone we know, including our readers, and find experts with a wide vision of the city.
- 2. WE REVIEW:** With a panel of the region's top foundation and corporate-giving leaders, we score every nomination.
- 3. WE DEBATE:** Using the top-scoring nominations as a starting point, panel members weigh the information submitted, their own knowledge of the individuals and organizations, and their convergences and differences of opinion.
- 4. WE SELECT:** There's always more good work than can be awarded ... but there's also always next year.

LIGHT A FIRE AWARDS CELEBRATION

On November 12, *Portland Monthly* is throwing a soirée at the Portland Art Museum to honor the 15 winners of the Light A Fire awards. The evening, sponsored by Bank of America and Merrill Lynch, will include cocktails, dinner, and live performances. In addition, two of the honorees will win the evening's proceeds. To learn more or buy a ticket, visit portlandmonthlymag.com/light-a-fire-2013.

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

MARY VINTON FOLBERG

MY FAMILY says that I am the Great White," says Mary Vinton Folberg, 73, waving her hand like a shark gliding through water, nearly upsetting one of the many piles of papers crowding the desk of her cluttered office at Portland's Northwest Academy. "I have to keep moving.... I have that energy because I feel so strongly about what I do."

When Folberg moves, the city of Portland is often changed in her wake—for good. Over four decades the McMinnville native has enthusiastically championed the marriage of arts and education, building theaters and cultivating future dancers, writers, and scientists as she goes.

After teaching English and dance in California high schools in the late 1960s, the lifelong performer returned to Oregon to find Portland schools didn't even have a dance program. She pushed administrators and lawmakers, and, in 1969, she launched the Jefferson High School dance department and then, in 1976, the lauded Jefferson Dancers performance group, whose alums now pepper professional dance companies across the nation. In the early '80s, as the chair of the mayor-appointed Arts Needs and Use Committee, she helped propose the Newmark and Winningstad Theatres, despite the public's skepticism that there would be the audience to fill them.

By 1997, the tenacious educator was on the move again. Wanting to develop an art program that was just as rigorous as it was academic, she founded Northwest Academy, her own independent, arts-focused middle and high school housed in an ad hoc quartet of buildings downtown. The private school integrates a very tough academic course load with wildly creative art projects—a place

where science students construct comic books about chemical bonding, sixth graders read Kafka, and tap class is mandatory. (It teaches focus and concentration, she says.) Colleges court its savvy grads, and a surprising number of alums end up in the sciences.

"Mary's impact is immense," says McKenzie Kerman, an animator based in Los Angeles who graduated in 2006 from NWA. When a lack of funds barred the then-14-year-old Kerman from attending the school in 2002, Folberg wrangled a four-year, full-ride scholarship for the dyslexic cartoon buff from civic patron Arlene Schnitzer. Some 25 to 30 percent of the academy's 182 students receive a variety of financial aid.



38

Years
Jefferson Dancers
have been
performing

186

Students who
have graduated
from Northwest
Academy since
1997

448,500

Dollars Northwest
Academy awarded
for student
financial aid in the
2013-14 year

Brother famous
for Claymation film
and TV work

"She lives and breathes this school," says John Thomas, the chairman of NWA's board of trustees. "She has no ego—it's all about the kids."

Next up, Folberg is moving toward a permanent building for the school, which would also house affordable after-school arts classes for any kid who wants them. "It's just so important to give young people an education that helps them adapt, to enjoy all kinds of people, literature, and art," she says, practically dancing out of her seat. "That gives them the confidence to follow their dreams."

—Kelly Clarke

