



Duquesne University students, along with August Wilson House board members and neighborhood residents, display theater posters from 10 August Wilson plays during the 2017 annual block party to celebrate the playwright's birthday.

## Duquesne Students Work to Keep August Wilson's Legacy Alive

By Ken Walters

Since August Wilson's death in 2005, many fans and admirers of the playwright have made the pilgrimage to 1727 Bedford Avenue in the Hill District to see his childhood home.

Duquesne University Honors College students have been working to make those visits even more meaningful.

In collaboration with the Daisy Wilson Artist Community, Inc., named after the playwright's mother, who made her home in the Hill District, the students have worked to promote the literary and social legacy of August Wilson during the past several years. After developing a strategic plan in 2011, students take on new responsibilities each year to help refurbish the house and create programming around it, including an annual block party on or near Wilson's birthday, April 27.

"Our collaboration with Duquesne has been very productive," said Paul A. Ellis, Jr., executive director and general counsel of the August Wilson House, the project name of the Daisy Wilson Artist Community, and a nephew of August Wilson. "The student impact has been extremely beneficial in helping us start and continue this partnership."

Over the years, students used a variety of skills to benefit the house, Ellis said, noting their work in creating the organization's website and Facebook pages, planning events, engaging with other community groups, and developing sponsorship opportunities.

"Students put us in a position to develop a unique curriculum every year," Ellis said. "Thanks to their work, we've been at a different stage each year. Students have grown up along with our organization, and that makes it unique, much like the August Wilson house itself."

"This work changes our students' lives by encouraging them to look outward—the community is their classroom," said Kathleen Roberts, professor of communication and rhetorical studies and

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director of the University Honors College at Duquesne. “Students can develop a reverence for Wilson’s work and also learn how their skills have a use beyond the profession they choose.”

The students’ work also has reached the community in a variety of ways, from learning to create business plans to offering musical and theatrical performances, Roberts said.

The Honors College provides two courses for students who are interested in working with the Daisy Wilson Artist Community. An introductory course has students read and discuss Wilson’s plays, providing them with a knowledge of and reverence for the writer and a better understanding of the neighborhood’s history, Roberts noted. The second course allows students



Since 2011, Duquesne students have helped to refurbish the August Wilson House each year.

to work with the artist community on various projects.

The results of this collaboration have led to some creative ways to honor Wilson. To highlight the playwright’s love of jazz, for example, students from Duquesne’s School of Music performed jazz pieces during one of the birthday celebrations at the house, Roberts said. In another collaboration, she noted students from Duquesne’s College of Liberal Arts took narratives from the 1,000 Stories project, which chronicles the lives of Hill District residents over the decades, and created theatrical pieces which were performed on the home’s grounds.

The annual block party also serves to bring the community together. Roberts said that a variety of organizations support the event, including Strong Women, Strong Girls; Hill House; Carnegie Library; the City of Pittsburgh Police; food vendors; and dozens of small businesses offering myriad services and products.

Ellis added that the students’ impact goes far beyond their work for the house.

“One of the ways students have influenced us is in enhancing our partnerships in general,” he said. “Every year, students are engaged, proactive and committed to our goals. As soon as they find out what we need and what we stand for, they are all in. That passion and dedication sets an elevated standard for how we engage with all of our community partners. It’s invaluable in helping us reach our goals.” ♦

➔ To learn more, visit [www.duq.edu/augustwilson](http://www.duq.edu/augustwilson) to watch a video produced by students in the McNulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts.

## AUGUST WILSON HOUSE, DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY ESTABLISH FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

### NEW \$100,000 PROGRAM FUNDED BY THE NANCY JONES BEARD FOUNDATION

A new August Wilson House Fellowship has been established with a premier sponsor.

Duquesne University has announced it will host the initial August Wilson House Fellowships, allowing scholars and artists of color in varied media to engage in literary, cultural and artistic expression that advances their own work and serves the joint interests of the University and community. The fellowships, designed to bring national and regional artists and scholars into a collaboration between the famed playwright’s Hill District and educational and artistic institutions, are the first to be located in Wilson’s hometown.

Supported by a \$100,000 grant from the Nancy Jones Beard Foundation, August Wilson House Fellows at Duquesne will serve as artists/scholars-in-residence, living in a Duquesne University apartment while developing their own creative work, engaging in research, teaching and participating in educational events both in the community and on campus. The three-year program will begin in the upcoming 2018 fall semester.

“I want to thank the Beard foundation, and especially Nancy and Gene Beard—two great supporters of the arts and of Duquesne University—for their generous support of this groundbreaking program,” said Duquesne University President Ken Gormley. “This gift helps bring August Wilson’s legacy full circle by honoring his extraordinary career while encouraging the work of great artists and scholars of the future. It also allows the University to strengthen its engagement with the Hill District and its commitment to advancing the arts and culture in Western Pennsylvania.”

The new program furthers Duquesne’s signature partnership with the August Wilson House. Fellows will be invited to create work that can be showcased in Wilson’s childhood home and the Hill community. They will be given access to Duquesne’s resources for scholarly research and public programs, while making classroom presentations and programs available on campus and off. Duquesne and the August Wilson House will pilot the fellowship program with two fellows per academic year for three years, with the goal of sustaining the program thereafter.

“I have no doubt August would be very pleased,” said Paul A. Ellis, Jr., executive director and general counsel of the August Wilson House and Wilson’s nephew. “As a young artist, he didn’t receive the support he deserved. This program will allow fellows to work in the same community as August and draw inspiration from it to create immersive and enduring work.”

The August Wilson House is in the process of restoring the playwright’s childhood home to honor his legacy and serve as a community arts center, sponsoring roundtables, classes, exhibits and plays. Duquesne has partnered with the August Wilson House since 2011, with students from its Honors College supporting its programs to honor his art and historic presence.

“The heart of our partnership with the August Wilson House has always been education in the humanities. This fellowship program will expand that exponentially,” said Dr. Kathleen Glenister Roberts, director of the University Honors College and an August Wilson House board member. “We are eager to help extend the artistic legacy of August Wilson through new iterations at Duquesne, in the Hill District, for the city of Pittsburgh, and beyond.”