

Kean University in Union honors four outstanding alumni at awards luncheon

By Suburban News Follow

nj.com

 Sign in with Facebook 

Don't have an account?

Kean University in Union honors four outstanding alumni at awards luncheon

Published: Monday, May 14, 2012, 4:00 PM Updated: Monday, May 14, 2012, 4:12 PM

SN

Kean University recently honored four of its most exceptional alumni at its annual Distinguished Alumni Awards ceremony and reception. The event took place in the University's STEM (Science, Technology, and Mathematics) Building. This year's honorees were Theresa Jaffe '70, president, Theresa Jaffe Consulting, Highland Park, Ill.; Frank R. Nero '68, president and CEO, The Beacon Council, Miami Beach, Fla.; Franc Palaia '71, visual artist, Poughkeepsie, N.Y.; and Helen M.

Stummer '77, author and visual sociologist, Metuchen.

"Every year, we are pleased to recognize a very select group of individuals who embody our highest aspirations for graduates of this University," said Dawood Farahi, Ph.D., president of Kean University. "Our honorees this year are a diverse group representing outstanding achievement in business, government, and the arts. We are proud to highlight their accomplishments and hold them up as role models for current students who want to see just how far it is possible to take a Kean degree."

Theresa A. Jaffe, founder and principal of Theresa Jaffe Consulting, is an advisor and consultant to professional services firms, businesses, and associations. Her professional career has included executive positions in the accounting, consulting, health care, law, nonprofit, professional services, and technology industries. Prior to forming her own firm, Jaffe served as the first chief marketing officer in the 90-year history of Jenner & Block LLP, a national law firm headquartered in Chicago. She was one of the first nationally to serve in this role in the legal industry. She is a recognized thought leader in the field of professional services marketing, having held high-level positions with firms and organizations including Katten Muchin Rosenman LLP, Arthur Andersen, KPMG, and the United Way of Metropolitan Chicago. In addition to her career accomplishments, Jaffe has a remarkable track record of community service. She has served on the boards of numerous non-profit organizations including the Boys and Girls Clubs of Chicago, the Kean University Foundation, the United Way, and the Chicago Bar Foundation, where she created the Investing in Justice Campaign in 2007. Since its inception the Campaign has raised over \$6 million to support the work and supplement the salaries of Chicago's legal aid attorneys. Jaffe is the recipient of numerous awards recognizing her professional and community service contributions.

"I am thrilled to receive the Distinguished Alumni Award from my alma mater," said Jaffe. "Kean University gave me a window to the world and an excellent foundation. My education has enabled me to have a rewarding career and opportunities to be of service to others. I am very grateful for the significant impact Kean has had on my life and am deeply honored by this recognition.

Frank R. Nero has been president and CEO since 1996 of The Beacon Council, Miami-Dade County's official economic development partnership in charge of recruiting new-to-market businesses and helping local businesses expand. Under his stewardship, The Beacon Council has been recognized as one of only 25 Accredited Economic Development Organizations by the International Economic Development Association. Previously, he served concurrently as Jacksonville, Florida's deputy mayor for economic development and as executive director of the Jacksonville Downtown Development Authority. His career has included a variety of elected and appointed positions at the federal, state, county, and municipal levels.

At age 23, he was elected mayor of North Plainfield, New Jersey, one of the youngest elected mayors in the United States at that time. During President Jimmy Carter's administration, Nero was appointed as the regional representative of the U.S. Department of Labor for Region 10 (New Jersey, New York, Puerto Rico, and the U.S.

Virgin Islands). Later, President Carter appointed Nero chairman of the Federal Regional Council, charged with coordinating 18 federal domestic agencies in the same region on behalf of the administration, reporting directly to the White House Chief of Staff. His many awards include being honored as Power Leader of the Year at the 2010 Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce Salute to Miami awards.

“I am honored to receive this award and join the ranks of other preeminent alumni,” said Nero. “College changed my life for the better. Up until then, I was just a kid from a blue-collar working class family looking for a job.”

Franc Palaia is a versatile multimedia artist: a painter, photographer, muralist, sculptor, lamp designer, independent curator, gallerist, book artist, educator, and TV producer/host. His résumé includes more than 300 group exhibitions and more than 40 regional, national, and international solo shows. He has exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Museum of Contemporary Art (MoCA) in Los Angeles, the White House, the New Museum, and the Smithsonian Institution.

He received two Executive Arts Awards from the Dutchess County Arts Council, has been listed in “Who’s Who in American art, and in 2010 was named “Best Friend to the Arts in Poughkeepsie” by Hudson Valley Magazine. He has curated more than 18 group exhibitions in the U.S. and Italy in venues including the Newark Museum, Alternative Museum, Collaborative Concepts in Beacon, Velan-Arte Contemporanea in Torino, Italy, and the American Academy in Rome.

He has received several public art commissions for murals, sculpture, and train station designs from New Jersey Transit in Bayonne and Woodbridge and New York Transit in Ulster County. His works are in dozens of public and private collections such as New York’s Museum of Modern Art; the Brooklyn Museum; Fundacio Salvador Dali, Spain; the Newark Museum; the New Jersey State Museum; and the collections of Diana Ross and Sen. Frank Lautenberg. He has received 20 grants and fellowships, among them the prestigious Rome Prize, the Tiffany Foundation Award, two Polaroid Sponsorships, and two N.J. State Arts Council grants.

“Kean offered me a complete learning experience with high-level faculty and a liberal and engaged art department,” said Palaia. “It was a perfect nurturing environment that prepared me for future challenges and in creating my life and art career.”

Helen M. Stummer is a socially concerned documentary photographer who tries to capture images of the dignity, elegance, and suffering of people who are trying to survive on virtually nothing. For more than 25 years, she has been photographing poor people in Newark, N.J.; the Lower East Side of Manhattan; rural Maine; and Comalapa, Guatemala. She describes her works as often self-portraits, but also protests against the stereotypes that picture the poor in an attempt to expose some of the myths of poverty. She is the author of *No Easy Walk: Newark, 1980-1993* (Temple University Press, 1994), and has just received a grant from the Segal Foundation to write a memoir of how she began her photography career taking pictures of children on the Lower East Side.

Stummer has exhibited her work extensively and has received numerous grants and awards from organizations such as the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, the New Jersey Historical Commission, the Mid-Atlantic Foundation for the Arts, and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts. Her photographs are in the permanent collections of the Library of Congress, the Brooklyn Museum, the Newark Museum, the Newark Library, the Museum of the City of New York, the Jersey City Museum, the New-York Historical Society, the Center for Photography at Woodstock, N.Y., the Child Welfare League of America, and in numerous private collections.

Rutgers University has just made a large acquisition of hundreds of her exhibit prints for its Special Collection Archives. Stummer holds a bachelor’s degree cum laude in studio art from Kean, a master’s degree in visual sociology from Vermont College, and also studied at the International Center of Photography in Manhattan. She was married to the late Professor Douglas Tatton, who taught at Kean University for more than 40 years.

“When Kean University first contacted me to tell me about this award, I was stunned,” said Stummer. “I couldn’t believe it. Of course I was honored. Receiving this award opened my mind as to how my years at Kean had shaped my life.”

“Kean University remains grateful to its dedicated and committed alumni whose contributions have impacted the communities in which they live and work,” said Dr. Farahi. “As in the past, this year’s award winners are exceptional practitioners in their respective fields; are an inspiration to others; and are recognized by their peers for professional endeavors and contributions.

“We are actively seeking candidates for future Distinguished Alumni Awards,” continued Dr. Farahi, “and we encourage members of the Kean community as well as the general public to send their suggestions to the Office of Alumni Relations.”

Founded in 1855 as the Newark Normal School, Kean University has become one of the largest metropolitan institutions of higher education in the region, boasting a richly diverse student, faculty and staff population. The University has produced approximately 80,000 alumni over the course of its 157-year history.

For more information about upcoming Kean University alumni events, visit <http://www.keanalumni.org>.