



Women of DISTINCTION

HONORING WOMEN IN NEW YORK

Jacqui Leader Sedlar

Jacqui Leader Sedlar is Artistic Director of the East End Special Players (EESP), a troupe of adult actors with developmental disabilities. Members of the troupe include individuals with Down syndrome, autism, bipolar disorder, hearing and sight loss, and many other physical and mental challenges.

EESP began 35 years ago as a Saturday program sponsored by the Towns of East Hampton and Southampton to give this often-underserved group a form of recreation. Initial expectations of the Players' performing abilities were low, and most performances were in mime to pre-recorded script.

Ms. Sedlar has been Artistic Director of EESP for over 30 years. A seasoned theater professional, she has the unusual skill set to look beyond disability, inspiring her troupe to reach the uppermost levels of their abilities. Under her direction, the Players began to learn their lines, improvise, enunciate – and to search within themselves for emotion and inspiration.

Ms. Sedlar gives the Players real challenges, exploring with them a full spectrum of theater tradition – classics (*Cyrano de Bergerac*), mythology (*The Legend of Deirdre*), tableau vivant (*The Fish Juggler*), and cultural exchange with learning-challenged counterparts in Ghana, Africa (Kokrobite). In 2006, she stepped away from script, encouraging performers to write their own plays.

Audiences are often astounded and tremendously moved by what these players bring to the stage: inner thoughts, ambitions, comedy, political awareness, poetic expression, and dance – all revealing what it is like to be them. Performances are fully-realized theater pieces performed on professional stages, including Bay Street, Guild Hall, Westhampton Performing Arts, and also for high school and college students throughout Suffolk County.

Ms. Sedlar serves not only the Players, tailoring all performance material to their gifts, but she brings to a wider audience a new appreciation and understanding of people with disabilities, breaking down stereotypes and providing transformative attention to a historically-marginalized and deeply underestimated population.

Her talent, dedication, and advocacy for the rights of “differently abled” citizens have changed the lives of special needs individuals on the East End who seek the support of community and a creative outlet for their talents. Ms. Sedlar's distinction in this field is truly noteworthy.

***Jacqui Leader Sedlar was selected as a
2023 Women of Distinction honoree by Senator Anthony H. Palumbo***

