

Hudson Hall among 1st Ackerman winners

By Jammel Cutler

Columbia-Greene Media

HUDSON — Christmas came early for six local nonprofit organizations. The Columbia County Recovery Kitchen, Friends of Hudson Youth, Friends of the Public Square Hudson, High and

Mighty Therapeutic Riding and Driving Center, Hudson Hall and PS21 were the recipients of the first Ackerman Foundation Award Grants. The Foundation was established by David M. Ackerman in late 2021, a short time before his death in January 2022. Ackerman was a well-known

businessman and philanthropist with a career stretching over nearly 50 years in Hudson and Columbia County. Each organization received \$2,500. The Columbia County Recovery Kitchen is a public charity that

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File photo

The Columbia County Recovery Kitchen received an inaugural Ackerman Foundation Award.

Winners

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prepares and delivers healthy meals in Columbia County to meet the needs of the hungry. The Kitchen serves adults and children who have been referred by a county social service organization, public school, social workers and the Columbia County Sanctuary Movement. The meals are delivered by volunteer drivers, as well as drivers from the Department of Social Services and the Columbia County Sanctuary. "It's just so wonderful and empowering to know that we have the funds to continue our work," Kitchen cofounder Pam Kline said. "I'm so grateful for people in the community like the Ackerman Foundation that are so supportive of our endeavors. The biggest financial need that we have is donations, we need donations to continue to deliver meals to people who have food insecurity, all of our funds go toward purchasing the food. We're a volunteer-based organization and we have two paid chefs, but other than that every penny donated

to us goes directly to the people with food insecurity." The Friends of the Public Square works with the city of Hudson through a Memorandum of Understanding. Co-chairwoman Katherine Kanaga said she is excited about the grant. "I'm extremely grateful for this grant," Kanaga said. "We appreciate all the foundation support that we receive from the community and support from our donors. We like that we're being one of the first organizations to receive this award." Kanaga noted the importance of rejuvenating 7th Street Park. "Seventh Street Park, or the Public Square in Hudson, is the most used park in the city," she said. "It's used beyond rest and relaxation. It's the start of parades, it's where rallies are held across Columbia County, it's an important center in Hudson used by the entire community and people have been calling for the park to be taken care of, and, like other parks across New York State, 7th Street Park needs a lot of love and care." Much work remains to be done at the site. "We're looking at everything," Kanaga said. "Our fountain is nonexistent at this point, and that's our next step

— the pathways and plaza area around the fountain leading in and through the park. The park needs new infrastructure, it needs new plumbing, electrical, a new pump for the fountain and what's underneath the surface needs to be replaced as well. It's a very old park and it's been a long time since it's been brought into the 21 century." The Friends of Hudson Youth was created to fortify and enhance Hudson's Department of Youth, which provides free after-school and summer recreation and enrichment programs, primarily for families who struggle with limited resources. Peter Frank is a member of the board of the Friends of Hudson Youth. "It always feels great to get a grant," Frank said. "David Ackerman was a wonderful man who left a wonderful legacy. He had such a big impact on the community, and it's quite the honor to be one of the first recipients honoring his legacy." Frank said the organization will put the grant money to good use. "We have a program called the bike co-op where kids put in hours in the shop," Frank said. "They completely break down and put back together a donated

bike. When they complete the program, they're given a bike to take home, which includes a helmet and a lock. Forty kids from Hudson have completed the program and now they're bike owners. It's a really exciting and popular program, and we want to keep it standing. We're using this money to continue to grow and expand the program in the years to come." Hudson Hall is located in a historic building housing New York State's oldest surviving theater — a place where Frederic Church and Sanford Gifford showed paintings, Bret Harte read poems, "Blind Tom" Wiggins packed the house with his virtuosity on the piano, Henry Ward Beecher presented a rousing abolitionist lecture, Susan B. Anthony visited three times and Theodore Roosevelt regaled a crowd. Abandoned for decades, the building was saved by local citizens who came together in 1992 and established a cultural center. "We're thrilled because it's a new foundation, and it's quite an honor to be one of the first recipients of this grant," said Tandra Dillon, executive director of Hudson Hall. "We ask for money to pay

artist fees and for community members to participate in Winter Walk," Dillon said. "It's one of the biggest events in Hudson. It attracts thousands of people to Hudson to kick off the holiday season." Another theater to receive the award is PS21.

"PS21 is deeply grateful to the Ackerman Foundation and we are honored to be included in this inaugural round of the program," Executive Director Matthew Gold said. "We knew David Ackerman as a beloved member and supporter of the community, and we are proud to be able to honor his legacy." PS21 plans to use the grant money to expose Hudson to the arts. "This grant will be instrumental in bringing Jamal Jackson and the teaching artists in his company to Hudson and Chatham for this free program involving a week of immersive dancing and drumming," Gold said. "It will also allow us to bring the young participants in the program to PS21 to perform on our stage and to be able to provide costumes, lighting and food, all at no cost to the participants. This experience of learning, creating new work together and presenting it at a venue like PS21 can be extraordinarily rewarding

and empowering for students." High & Mighty is located on more than 60 acres in Ghent. Built in 2012, it has an indoor arena and includes heated viewing rooms. The horses enjoy pastures with run-in sheds and it has paddocks for horses that require less grass. It also has miles of trails including interactive sensory exploration, camping areas and outdoor corrals. Dianne Ortmann, director of development at High and Mighty considers the grant an early holiday blessing. "We are so appreciative to be able to have an opportunity to continue working with the Mental Health Association of Columbia Greene Counties," she said. Instead of using the grant money for themselves, High and Mighty is teaming up with the Mental Health Association. "The Mental Health Association of Columbia Greene has a program called Youth Clubhouse, which is an after-school program for at-risk teens that are in danger of developing substance abuse disorders," Ortmann said. "They come to High and Mighty for eight weeks to receive equine-assisted services."