



# INTERNATIONAL STORYTELLING CENTER

## ISC's Year in Review 2019

*2019 was an especially rewarding and productive year for us here at the International Storytelling Center. Building on the foundation of our applied storytelling programs, we expanded our youth outreach and launched an important storytelling initiative. We also solidified our position as a leading cultural institution, launching innovative programs in our region while planning major steps for expanding our global audience. Here are some of our highlights from the last year.*

### A Game-Changing Grant

ISC was the proud recipient of a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), one of the largest and most prestigious funders of humanities programs in the country. The award will help fund **Freedom Stories: Unearthing the African-American Heritage of Appalachia**, a new program that we announced with a special performance by Sheila Arnold at the 2019 National Storytelling Festival. “Freedom Stories” will illuminate underappreciated and neglected aspects of African Americans and African-American life in Appalachian history, highlighting the role that storytelling has played in black Appalachian culture and beyond. In the coming years, ISC will produce a series of public events that combine storytelling performances with scholarly discussion about this unique and vibrant culture that has been so integral to our region’s rich and troubled history. More to come in 2020!

### Our World-Class Events

ISC’s signature live storytelling program, the **National Storytelling Festival**, enjoyed another banner year. At the 2019 Festival, we hosted about 11,000 attendees, including 700 students from 16 different schools. One of our special guests this year was 92-year-old Peter MacDonald, a Navajo “Code Talker” whose encryption skills helped defeat the Nazis in World War II. If you weren’t able to attend the Festival this year, no worries—in the coming year, we’ll be releasing videos that were recorded from our livestream and a few special performances (including MacDonald’s).



*Storytelling Live!*

**Storytelling Live!** officially concluded its 2019 season in October, having hosted 26 storytellers for weeklong residencies that featured matinee performances, evening concerts, workshops, and children’s shows (with encore performances from musicians and storytellers, including folk legend John McCutcheon and the Kyoto-born guitarist Hiroya Tsukamoto). Our audience this year included more than 12,000 people! We’re looking forward to opening the 2020 season next Spring. Look for a lineup announcement early in the year.

*continued*



*National Storytelling Festival*

JAY HURON



WHITNEY S. WILLIAMS

*SHero's Journey Day Camp*

## Serving Local Youth

We stepped up our game in 2019 with not one, but two, new cultural arts education programs designed to educate and empower young children. First, over the summer, we produced the **SHero's Journey Day Camp**. The two-week program taught critical thinking skills to a group of girls age 10 to 13, a range that experts have flagged as critical for the development of self-image. With the help of guest speakers, special field trips, and collaborations with community partners like the Jonesborough Repertory Theater and East Tennessee State University, our SHERos used fairy tales, folk tales, writing, and performance to explore new ideas—and their own place as girls and women in the world.

In November, we launched ISC's **Kids Institute**. More than 700 fifth graders and their teachers worked with storyteller Tim Lowry in an innovative “storytelling lab” format, where everyone pitched in to produce a 1940s-style radio show. One class dressed up for the occasion (including ties for the boys), and several kids reported that it was “the best field trip ever.”



MARINA WATERS

*Kids Institute*

## Community and Regional Engagement

Building on ISC's long-standing relationship with regional health care system Ballad Health, we deepened our partnership with **Unicoi County Hospital**, which will soon be named as a Storytelling Site of Excellence. We offered multiple training events for administrators, management, and nurses about how to use storytelling to connect with patients and community members. We also produced two live storytelling concerts that were open to the public, as well as a free workshop on how to gather family stories. Our relationship with the hospital serves as a national and global model of a major cultural institution partnering with a rural health care provider.



ANNA ERBACH

*Young Appalachian Story Summit*

In October, ISC held our second annual **Young Appalachian Story Summit**, a youth-led event on leadership and empowerment. With the support of the NEH, we invited 50 young adults (age 16 to 30) to attend workshops and talks on the ISC campus.

## Global Bridge Building

ISC president Kiran Singh Sirah, whose professional background is in conflict-resolution and peacebuilding, was featured in *The Rotarian*, the magazine of Rotary International in early 2019. He also delivered a keynote address as part of the International Day of Peace celebration in New York City. In May, ISC was named the winner of Purdue University's **Peacebuilding Big Idea Challenge** with a proposal for a state-of-the-art storytelling videogame, “Europa.” The \$10,000 award will cover costs for the initial proof of concept. Watch for info on a prototype and limited-release pilot program in 2020.

*Thank you for being part of the ISC story.*

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*In association with the Smithsonian Institution*