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MORRISON-SHEARER FOUNDATION MAKES \$1.5 MILLION GRANT TOWARD CONSTRUCTION OF NEW DANCE AND COMPOSER'S STUDIOS AT RAGDALE

New Sybil Shearer Studio to be Named in Honor of Chicago-Area's Modern Dance Pioneer

Northbrook, Ill. – The Morrison-Shearer Foundation is pleased to announce a \$1.5 million one-time grant to the Ragdale Foundation in Lake Forest, Ill., a non-profit organization supporting the artists' community of Ragdale. The grant, along with \$400,000 from the Ragdale Foundation, supports construction of two one-story attached buildings – the Sybil Shearer Studio and a composer's studio. The Ragdale campus is located on the verdant 5-acre historic grounds of the former country estate of architect Howard Van Doren Shaw not far from Lake Michigan and approximately 30 miles north of Chicago.

The state-of-the-art Sybil Shearer Studio and composer's studio will provide artists with space for contemplative creativity and the opportunity to explore their practice within a group of other artists and writers, with housing and meals provided during their residency. The building is being designed by Woodhouse Tinucci Architects; the general contractor for the project is Jake Goldberg of Goldberg General Contracting and landscape design is by Rosborough Partners, Inc.

The new building brings about the realization of the dream of modern dance pioneer Sybil Shearer (1912 – 2005) and her longtime artistic collaborator, photographer Helen Balfour Morrison (1901-1984), both of whom had connections to the Howard Van Doren Shaw family. All envisioned creating a tranquil location where artists could hone their skills and advance their artistic self-expression free from distractions.

The roughly 2,500 square foot new building will house both the Sybil Shearer Studio and a new composer's studio. The Sybil Shearer Studio will feature a 30 foot deep by 50 foot wide clear-span space, with a sprung dance floor and provisions for adjustable lighting and audio-visual equipment.

Both studios will be accompanied by private sleeping spaces with full bathrooms and be fully accessible. The composer's studio will have a thick acoustical curtain, and provision will be made for containing sound in the Sybil Shearer Studio as well. Additionally, large windows will enable Ragdale resident artists to experience the feeling of being immersed in nature as Shearer did in her original Northbrook studio.

Dancer and choreographer Sybil Shearer has been described as an original, provocative, a maverick, gentle rebel, and near legendary figure. Walter Terry, critic for the New York Herald Tribune, hailed Shearer as "a dancer's dancer." "Her original studio, which also served as her

residence, was designed by her friend and collaborator, Helen Balfour Morrison," said Carol Doty, retiring Board Chair of the Morrison-Shearer Foundation. Doty added, "It was Ginger Farley, Executive Director of Chicago Dancemakers Forum, who first suggested Ragdale to us when our trustees realized that Sybil's original studio could not become the artists' retreat she had envisioned. Following a meeting between the two foundations, the idea of collaborating on a new dance studio at Ragdale took root."

Ragdale residents are selected by a competitive jury process from a large pool of applicants. In a typical year, the residency program enables nearly 200 writers, dancers, playwrights, musicians, visual artists, poets, architectural designers and other artists to enjoy the rarity of dedicated time and space to focus on their creative projects. In addition to the typical 18- or 25-day residencies for individual residents and fellows, Ragdale also offers several weeklong "themed residencies" for artists working collaboratively on a shared project. Dance collectives, theater groups or artists working in a shared discipline can often benefit from collaborating with their peers in an immersive environment.

"Ragdale has been experiencing an increased demand from dancers, choreographers and musicians looking for dedicated time and studio space for their work. This new dance and music building, home to the new Sybil Shearer Studio, will help meet that need," says Jeanna Park, President of the Ragdale Board of Trustees.

Andy Tinucci, AIA Principal, Woodhouse Tinucci Architects (WTA) commented, "In designing this new building, we drew inspiration from the celebrated collaboration of two dynamic artists - Sybil Shearer and Helen Balfour Morrison. As a result, the form and material palette will recall Sybil's original studio while generous windows merge the interior spaces with the prairie beyond, honoring Sybil's love of nature and its influence on her choreography."

"It is so exciting that Morrison-Shearer Foundation and the Ragdale Foundation have come together to create this new space for dance," says Ginger Farley. "The new Sybil Shearer Studio will be firmly rooted in the past, alive in the present moment, and has its vision focused on the future of this beautiful art form. The opportunity for dance artists to experience creative retreat in a supportive space and to be in dialogue with artists of all sorts provides a critically needed resource for the field."

Preparation of the site for the new building is scheduled to begin in early 2021 in anticipation of spring construction. Completion is expected in fall 2021, when a grand opening will be supported by the premiere of a new documentary by Bob Hercules on the life of Shearer, and a series of opening events to introduce the dance community and the public to this important new resource. For construction updates and additional information visit ragdale.org.

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Sybil Shearer (1912 – 2005) was a leading pioneer of modern dance in the mid-20th century, beginning in New York with the Humphrey-Weidman Company and Agnes de Mille while passionately developing her own solos on the side. After a critically acclaimed solo debut at the Carnegie Chamber Music Hall in 1941, she moved to Chicago and soon met photographer Helen Balfour Morrison (1901-1984), who became her lighting director, photographer, filmographer and artistic collaborator for the next 40 years. Shearer first taught at Roosevelt College, started the Sybil Shearer School of Dance, and continued to return to New York for annual solo performances that attracted leading figures from the dance community. She gave all these up in 1951 when she, in collaboration with Morrison, built a studio-residence in Northbrook, Illinois and started the Sybil

Shearer Company. As a soloist, critic Walter Terry stated that her "technical skill, creative independence, and unpredictable innovations have made her what is known as 'a dancer's dancer'" and called her "one of the world's foremost modern dancers," a status reaffirmed in 2014 by noted dance historian, David Vaughan. Shearer may not be not as widely remembered today as one would expect, perhaps because she worked out of the mainstream and close to nature, with infrequent performances.

The Morrison-Shearer Foundation, established by Shearer in 1991, now "perpetuates the legacy of dancer-choreographer Sybil Shearer and photographer Helen Balfour Morrison as an inspiration for new creativity in the arts." This legacy has been shared through grants and fellowships, occasional public programs and dance re-creations. All of the Morrison and Shearer archives have been placed in the Newberry Library and the Morrison films are in the Chicago Film Archives. An in-depth website was launched in 2020, and Shearer's 3-volume autobiography, "Without Wings the Way Is Steep," is scheduled to be released in January 2021. The new Sybil Shearer Studio at Ragdale will be a living embodiment of the legacy of the two women, encouraging new creativity for years to come. For more information visit morrisonsshearer.org.

Ragdale is a nonprofit artists' community located on the former country estate of architect Howard Van Doren Shaw. Its mission is to embolden creative exploration and achievement by giving courage to and providing a setting establishing a culture of excellence, generosity, and inclusivity. Ragdale was founded in 1976 by poet Alice Judson Hayes, the granddaughter of Shaw. In 1897, Shaw built the country estate where the Ragdale Foundation is located, on the edge of a beautiful 50-acre prairie in Lake Forest. Ragdale was the family's summer retreat, and included an outdoor theater, the Ragdale Ring, where Shaw's friends and family frequently performed for the community. Ragdale typically offers 200 residencies and fellowships annually to creative professionals of all types, representing a cross-section of ages, cultures, experience and mediums. While residents do pay a fee to attend Ragdale, the actual costs of a residency are about 95 percent subsidized by Ragdale's annual fundraising. Ragdale Fellows, whose fees are entirely underwritten, are selected based on merit, from the group of accepted residents. Each year about 25 to 30 Fellows are selected. Due to COVID-19 distancing protocols, Ragdale is not accepting new residency applications at this time. For more information visit ragdale.org.

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