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March 6, 2026

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**ARENA STAGE TO HONOR TONIA WELLONS  
WITH BETH NEWBURGER SCHWARTZ AWARD  
AT ANNUAL GALA CELEBRATING 75TH ANNIVERSARY**

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 20, 2026**

**FEATURING A MUSICAL PERFORMANCE FROM  
TONY AWARD WINNER  
ADRIENNE WARREN**

Washington, DC – Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater today announced **Tonia Wellons**, President & CEO of the Greater Washington Community Foundation, as the 2026 recipient of its **Beth Newburger Schwartz Award**. The honor will be presented as part of an extraordinary evening celebrating Arena Stage's 75th Anniversary—a milestone marking decades of groundbreaking artistic excellence and transformative community impact. The one-night-only event, held on **Wednesday, May 20, 2026**, at the Mead Center, will also feature a spectacular performance by Tony Award winner **Adrienne Warren** (*Tina: The Tina Turner Musical*) and an unforgettable tribute to Arena's legacy. For more information or to purchase tickets, visit [arenastage.org/gala](https://arenastage.org/gala).

Arena Stage is proud to honor **Wellons** with the Beth Newburger Schwartz Award in recognition of her stellar leadership, civic impact, and outstanding commitment to economic justice. Named for its first recipient, the annual award celebrates a female leader who improves the community where she lives and works through her unique strengths and talents.

"Tonia Wellons exemplifies the very spirit of the Beth Newburger Schwartz Award," said Arena Stage Artistic Director **Hana S. Sharif**. "Like Beth, she understands that leadership carries a responsibility to strengthen civic life and expand opportunity for others. Through visionary leadership and an unwavering commitment to economic justice, Tonia has strengthened the civic fabric of Greater Washington—ensuring that philanthropy is not only generous but also equitable, inclusive, and transformative. Her work aligns deeply with Arena Stage's belief in the power of institutions—and of art—to illuminate shared humanity, elevate voices, and help transform the communities in which we live and work."

The President & CEO of the largest public foundation in the Washington region, **Wellons** has transformed the Greater Washington Community Foundation into a driving force for equity and opportunity. Since taking the helm, the Community Foundation's assets have grown from \$331 million to \$500 million. Under her leadership, it launched a transformative 10-year strategy to help close the region's racial wealth gap by directing capital, strengthening civic and philanthropic infrastructure, and centering economic justice. A trusted convener and coalition builder—from instigating game-changing initiatives like Guaranteed Basic Income pilots to Children's Savings Accounts—Wellons has deep connections to grassroots and grassroots communities that span more than 20 years. Prior to joining The Community Foundation, she served as a political appointee in the Obama Administration, serving as head of global partnerships at the Peace Corps. Recognized as one of Washington's most powerful, Wellons is known for her unwavering commitment to bridging sectors and communities, leaving a lasting impact on the public she serves.

Past recipients of the Beth Newburger Schwartz Award include Arlene Kogod, DC Mayor Muriel Bowser, Nina Totenberg, Ambassador Melanne Vermeer, Arena Stage Artistic Director Emerita Molly Smith, the Honorable Marcia L. Fudge, and Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton.

Celebrating **Stories that Transform, Excellence that Endures**, the dazzling event at the Mead Center for American Theater is spearheaded by Gala Chairs Anthony D. Coley; Catherine and Chris Guttman-McCabe; and Belle and Morgan O'Brien. The exclusive evening will include a cocktail reception with live entertainment, an elegant dinner, the presentation of the Beth Newburger Schwartz Award to **Wellons**, an unforgettable musical performance from **Warren**, an after-party with desserts and dancing, and some special surprises.

All Gala proceeds support Arena Stage's vital mission of producing bold, inclusive theater in our nation's capital.

#### **Event Location**

Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater  
1101 6th Street SW, Washington, DC 20024

#### **Event Schedule**

5:30pm: Reception

6:30pm: Seated Dinner

8:00pm: Award Presentation and Musical Performance

A reception and dancing will follow the award presentation and performance.

#### **Ticket Information**

**Single Pearl Ticket:** \$1,250

- One (1) ticket to the pre-show reception, dinner, award presentation, performance, and after party
- Complimentary valet parking

#### **Sponsorship Opportunities**

Anniversary Sponsor: \$75,000

Diamond Sponsor: \$50,000

Sapphire Sponsor: \$25,000

Emerald Sponsor: \$12,500

Ruby Sponsor: \$6,000

For more information on ticket or table purchases, please contact Maria Corso at 202-600-4025 or [rsvp@arenastage.org](mailto:rsvp@arenastage.org).

For media inquiries, email [press@arenastage.org](mailto:press@arenastage.org).

#### **Biographies**

**Tonia Wellons** is the President & CEO of the Greater Washington Community Foundation, the largest public foundation in the Greater Washington region. Under her leadership, The Community Foundation launched a bold 10-year strategic vision to help close the region's racial wealth gap by directing capital, strengthening civic and philanthropic infrastructure, and centering economic justice. Tonia is a dynamic and values-driven leader known for her ability to navigate seamlessly between visionary leadership, strategy, and fundraising. Since her tenure as CEO, The Community Foundation has grown from \$331 million to \$500 million in assets under management. Tonia has deep relationships across both grassroots and grassroots communities and is a trusted convener and coalition builder. Her leadership

reflects a combination of on-the-ground insight and high-level influence, enabling The Community Foundation to respond with both urgency and intention to the region's most pressing challenges and biggest opportunities. From instigating transformative initiatives like Guaranteed Basic Income pilots and Children's Savings Accounts to guiding major fundraising campaigns that expand the Foundation's impact, Tonia consistently brings vision, discipline, and heart to her work. Accolades include Power 100 Washington 2025; *Washingtonian* Magazine's "Hero of the Crisis," and *Washington Business Journal's* 2020 Nonprofit Leader of the Year. Tonia is a graduate of North Carolina A&T, and a proud member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.

**Adrienne Warren's** talent as a singer, actress, and dancer has established her as a dynamic triple threat.

Warren is perhaps most well known for her Tony Award-winning performance as Tina Turner in Broadway's *Tina: The Tina Turner Musical*. Warren originated the role in numerous workshops of the show, working together with Tina Turner herself to embody the titular role. Warren transferred the role to Broadway following the 2018 West End production, for which she earned 2019 Olivier, Evening Standard, and Joe Allen Award nominations.

Warren's performance in the Broadway run has been heralded as "extraordinary" (*The Hollywood Reporter*), "electrifying" (*Rolling Stone*), and "star-making" (*The New York Times*). In addition to the Tony Award, she also received a Chita Rivera nomination and the Drama Desk, Antonio, and Outer Critics Circle Awards for her iconic performance.

Warren previously earned Tony and Chita Rivera Award nominations for her performance as Gertrude Saunders/Florence Mills in the Broadway production of *Shuffle Along* opposite Audra McDonald. Warren made her Broadway debut in 2012's *Bring It On: The Musical* and previously appeared onstage in *The Wiz* (Encores! City Center) and *Dreamgirls* (The Apollo; NAACP Theatre Award nomination).

She made her Carnegie Hall debut in 2017 with the New York Pops and continues to perform around the world. In 2023, she was featured on PBS's annual *A Capitol Fourth* performing an electrifying tribute to the late Tina Turner.

Warren can currently be seen on season 2 of the Netflix series *The Diplomat* and in the films *Rustin*, with Coleman Domingo, and in *The Woman King*, with Viola Davis. She starred as Benny in Hulu's *Black Cake*, based on the best-selling book, and as Mamie Till-Mobley in *Women of the Movement*, a limited series for ABC. Other television and film credits include *Paws & Fury: The Legend of Hank*, *Helpsters*, *Quantico*, *Black Box*, *Blue Bloods*, and *Orange is the New Black*. Warren's voice can also be heard as the iconic spokesperson for Maybelline Cosmetics.

Warren is a co-founder of the Broadway Advocacy Coalition (BAC), which unites artists, experts, students, and community leaders to use storytelling and artistry to combat systemic racism. BAC received a special Tony Award in 2021.

Adrienne recently completed a limited run on Broadway of *The Last Five Years* with Nick Jonas.

She is a graduate of Marymount Manhattan College and the Governor's School for the Arts in Norfolk, Virginia.

*The first racially integrated theater in our nation's capital and a pioneer of the regional theater movement, **Arena Stage** was founded in 1950 in Washington, DC. Today, under the leadership of Artistic Director Hana S. Sharif and Executive Producer Edgar Dobie, Arena Stage at the Mead Center for American Theater is a national center dedicated to American voices and artists. We produce plays of all that is passionate, profound, deep, and dangerous in the American spirit, and present diverse and groundbreaking work from*

*some of the best artists around the country. Consistently contributing to the American theatrical lexicon by commissioning and developing new plays, Arena Stage impacts the lives of over 10,000 students annually through its work in community engagement and serves a diverse annual audience of more than 300,000. [arenastage.org](http://arenastage.org)*

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