

Bob Navis Jr. to Retire from Role as Artistic Director of Near West Theatre

*Visionary theater leader created lasting cultural and community impact over
five decades in Northeast Ohio*

CLEVELAND – Near West Theatre (NWT) announced today that artistic director Bob Navis Jr. has chosen to retire at the end of February 2019. Navis' influential career has spanned four decades at NWT and 50 years in theatre in Northeast Ohio.

Navis came to NWT in 1980, becoming the theatre's first artistic director in 1993, and leading the theatre's artistic approach from the outset. His vision guided the organization's evolution from a tiny community theatre housed in a church hall to an anchor institution in Gordon Square's Art District, all the while maintaining an equal focus on artistic excellence and community building. Navis oversaw all arts programming and program development, and was the author behind the formation and facilitation of the creative theatrical process core to the mission and values of Near West Theatre.

"It has been a wild ride of unfathomable beauty, with countless moments of healing, joy, co-creation and activism, and an honor to pour myself into this place for decades and receive a hundred-fold in return," said Navis. "Near West Theatre is a sacred, loving space where life in all its chaos and uncertainty comes together and transcends boundaries, limits and division. Together we learn to grow and soar! I am eternally grateful for the gift of NWT."

Navis is quick to point out his gratitude to those who have walked the NWT journey with him over the thousands of performances he has guided at the theatre – from the actors, singers, and musicians who performed to the designers, crew members, and other directors who guided the productions. He also has a special place in his heart for the loyal audience members who shared the transformational moments with the NWT family.

Navis has spent over 50 years pursuing his passion for theatre, music and creativity. His career started at St. Francis Church on the near east side where he taught music to grades K-8 for ten years and acted as the Organist/Choir Director for 17 years, eventually founding and directing the St Francis Community Theatre for a decade. Later, he became Director of the Musical Theatre program for Erieview Catholic High School.

Shortly after NWT's birth, Navis teamed with founder Stephanie Morrison Hrbek to cultivate NWT's mission of building loving relationships and engaging diverse people through transformational theatre arts experiences. His background in music and teaching influenced the multi-age productions that NWT has become renowned for in Cleveland's arts community.

"I am in awe of Bob's passion, artistic vision, and all he's given to Near West Theatre and our community," said Michael Obertacz, NWT's managing director. "I am grateful to work by his side and have learned so much from him and the mission-centric process he has made an immutable part of the culture that is essential to everything we do here."

"On behalf of the board and all who have been involved with Near West Theatre, I would like to thank Bob for the dedication, vision, and passion he has brought to this organization and the community," said Stephen Beiting, President of the Near West Theatre Board of Trustees. "He is truly loved by our community and we have been so proud to have him at the helm of our artistic vision. The next artistic director will have big shoes to fill, and we look forward to partnering with Bob to find his successor."

NWT will launch a search for an artistic director in the coming weeks. Navis plans to assist the organization in selecting his successor and will continue to be involved with the theatre as a consultant and guest artist. Near West Theatre will host a retirement celebration for Navis from 6pm to 9pm on Sunday, January, 27th with more details on the event to be announced at a later date.