

February 2026

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Behind The Curtain With The Wilbury Theatre Group

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Photos above by Erin X. Smithers and courtesy of The Wilbury Theatre Group.

There's a moment, Josh Short says, when a first-time [Wilbury Theatre](#) guest realizes this isn't quite what they expected from a night at the theatre. Nobody scans their ticket at the door. Someone greets them by name.

"Our community room feels like gathering at an old friend's house to catch up over a drink and some music," Short says. "From the

moment our guests step through the door, they're welcomed into a space where anything is possible."

Short founded the Wilbury Theatre Group 16 years ago, and as its artistic director, he built something remarkable. Based at the WaterFire Arts Center in Providence, the company has become synonymous with what it calls "adventurous playmaking."

"We configure our theater space specifically for each show," Short explains, "so audiences get to be surprised every time they attend." For Short, Wilbury's identity is inseparable from the state it calls home.

"In a small state, community isn't some abstract idea," he says. "Our artists and audiences often know each other, which creates a sense that the stories are being told among neighbors rather than for strangers. That closeness encourages emotional honesty and risk, because there's trust in the room."

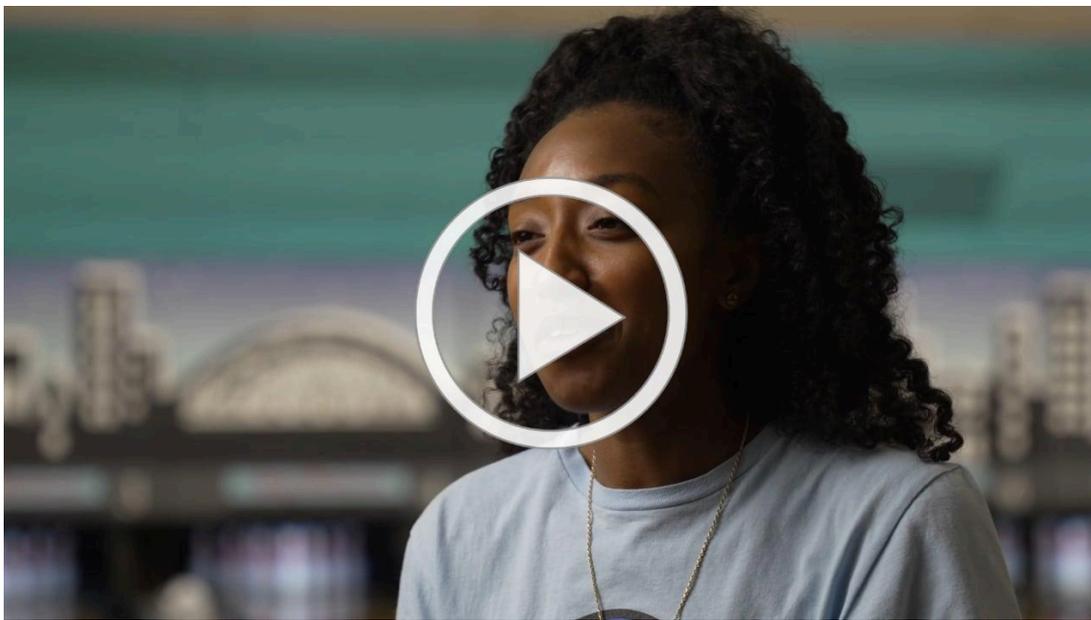
What Wilbury has also worked to make clear is that none of this requires any background, income, or familiarity with theatre to access. The company's Pay-What-You-Can model and \$5 student tickets are a direct expression of Short's belief that cost should never be the reason someone doesn't try something new.

"If you think theatre isn't for you, you might just not have seen the right show—or been to the Wilbury yet," he says. "Theatre isn't a single style or audience. It's comedy, music, silence, chaos, intimacy, and everything in between."

He's emphatic that there's no special knowledge required to walk through the door.

"You don't need to know the 'rules,' dress a certain way, or have any special background. The stories on our stage are about real people wrestling with questions we all face and sitting in a room with other humans and experiencing these questions live can feel surprisingly immediate and electric."

His invitation, in the end, is a simple one. "If you're even a little curious, that curiosity is enough. We'll meet you where you are."



Striking A Path Forward With The Gazmine Mason Foundation

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What does a four-time Olympic gold medalist do between competitions? If you're Gazmine "GG" Mason, you build a foundation – literally. Founded in 2020 alongside her parents George and Danielle, the [Gazmine Mason Foundation](#) (GMF) uses the sport of bowling to open doors for under-resourced youth that might otherwise stay shut.

"No one can achieve their dreams alone and we're here to make sure that's not the reason anyone falls short," said GG.

GG began bowling at age 10 and as she rose through the ranks to become a two-time World Champion, she noticed a stark divide in the resources available to athletes depending on where they grew up. That observation became a mission: provide inner-city kids with equipment, training, nutrition guidance, educational resources, and the community that elite athletes take for granted.

GMF's 3rd Annual Roll Back to School event brought that mission to life in a big way, distributing free backpacks, school supplies, food, and bowling to nearly 100 Rhode Island youth and families, more than double the previous year's attendance. GG also shared her own story of earning a full college scholarship through bowling, spotlighting a pathway to higher education many families had never considered.

1st Black Museum Opens Here

Reproduction of documents on Rhode Island's history of slavery, including the Black Book, the first collection of a black man to have contributed significant articles to the advancement of the country and his magazine articles related to Negro history in various parts of the state, are included in the first collection of a black man which opened today afternoon in the Mt. Zion A.M.E. Church.

The museum, believed to be the first of its kind in the state, is located in the city, is financed by private gifts, including an appropriation from the State House. It is expected to become an important center of information for the Negro people of Rhode Island and throughout the country.

Sen. Frank A. O'D Taylor, who sponsored the legislation, said there are many sources of further records within the community that may be lost unless a concerted effort is made now to search them out and preserve them in a museum.

These include gravestones, many of them made by the John Brown Shop, in the 1780-1790 period. He said "songs, prayers and 'broadsides'" were needed to bring them to light.

Referring to the placing of the museum in Mt. Zion Church, "accepted by people of Christian faith, but there is not another place in Rhode Island which so well represents what Rhode Island wanted in the Civil War era."

Arthur Cookman, assistant secretary of state of Massachusetts, the principal speaker, called the museum the beginning of something significant in the lives of Americans both black and white and a factor in the re-awakening, healing, grief and dignity with love, compassion and understanding, the present and future.

Sen. Taylor and the Mt. Zion committee, headed by Oliver Burton Jr. for their initiative and imagination and urged the community to get behind the effort and make this "an echo that reflects all over America," and an inspiration not only to blacks but to whites as well. It will call for work and money, but he said, "I find people find time and money to do anything they really want to do. 'Action' he said, they will always bring success, but without action there is no success."

The Rev. Verne Allen Jr., Mt. Zion pastor, gave the opening invocation and welcomed the audience. Rep. Robert Williams spoke for Gov. Lick, voicing the greetings of the state. Mrs. John H. Thompson and Mrs. Mary Spaulding sang two duet selections, accompanied by Mrs. Ella Anderson.

Oliver Burton presided, and introduced the museum committee members, John H. Thompson, co-chairman; Mrs. Victoria Burton, ground committee; Mrs. Mary Spaulding, secretary; Mrs. Martin Thompson, treasurer; Mrs. Gene Thomas, Mrs. Anderson, Mrs. Edith Magruder, Mrs. DeWberry, Richard Phillips and Julian West.

Others introduced were Mel Downes, Chairman Richard Lydgreve, Frederick C. Williamson, director of the State Department of Community Affairs and former president of the United League, Mrs. George C. Cottrell and Michael DeLuz, who is candidate opposing him; Thornton Drummond Jr.,



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BLACK MUSEUM BUILDS OPEN HOUSE—At open house and tea Sunday afternoon at Black Museum at Mount Zion A.M.E. Church. From left, Chairman Hungarey Hunsley, representing Gov. Oliver Burton, chairman; Mrs. Sydney L. Wright, holding booklet on "Negro on the Island of Rhode Island," publication of which she sponsored; and Frank O'D Taylor, one of museum's backers. (Daily News Photo)



RI Black Heritage Society: Preserving The Past For A Better Future

[Learn More](#)

Top right image above: BirthRiteRI youth dive into truths of RI's Indigenous history and storytelling at [Tomaquag Museum](#).

Founded in 1970 as Rhode Island's first Black museum and incorporated in 1975, the [Rhode Island Black Heritage Society](#) (RIBHS) has spent more than 50 years preserving, protecting, and sharing the rich history and contributions of people of African heritage in the Ocean State.

"As Executive Director of the Rhode Island Black Heritage Society, I have the privilege of exploring and showcasing often overlooked African history and contributions," said RIBHS Executive Director Theresa Stokes. "I am proud to lead an organization rooted in preservation, education, and empowerment."

As one of the oldest African heritage organizations in the country, RIBHS is dedicated to recording, preserving, and interpreting the history and achievements

of people of African descent in Rhode Island.

Recognized by the Association of African American Museums, RIBHS's distinction as Rhode Island's first Black Museum is grounded in documented history. Through engaging exhibits, lectures, publications, scholarships, and empowering youth through BirthriteRI, its signature educational programs, RIBHS amplify stories that have long been silenced.

By taking a closer look at Rhode Island's past, RIBHS seeks to inspire future generations and contribute to a more informed and equitable future.

"Join the RIBHS in celebrating our Black heritage, inspiring future generations, and advancing our 50-year mission—this month and every month," Stokes said.



Transform RI Scholarship Featured On The Rhode Show

[Learn More](#)

Top image: Zachary Jean Pierre & Chachi Carvahlo join Will Gilbert on The Rhode Show.
Bottom image: Zachary Jean-Pierre was a 2024 TRIS finalist with his big idea - Sweet Talkers.

[Transform RI Scholarship](#) Ambassador leader Chachi Carvalho and 2024 Top 10 finalist Zach-Jean Pierre joined *The Rhode Show* on WPRI 12 to kick off the 2026 TRIS application season. Chachi detailed the unique opportunity TRIS offers and encouraged all RI high school students to apply. Zach, a Cranston West grad who now attends Johnson & Wales, highlighted "Sweet Talkers" - a program he created and supported by POC that empowers children with speech and language impairments to build communication skills through baking.

2026 TRIS applications are now being accepted through March 31, 2026.

For more information or to apply, visit the TRIS link above.

Spread the word and follow @transformri on Instagram and TikTok for updates.

POC's Impactful Work Highlighted In Rhode Island Monthly Magazine

[Learn More](#)

As Papitto Opportunity Connection (POC) celebrated its fifth anniversary, [Rhode Island Monthly](#) took a deep dive into POC founder Barbara Papitto and spotlighted [the ELISHA project](#), [Jenks Park Pediatrics](#) and [The FLY Initiative](#) — just a few of the many organizations POC supports that are delivering critical services and making a meaningful impact across our small but mighty state, reflecting the mission on which POC was founded back in 2020.

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Rhode Island
MONTHLY

Papitto Opportunity Connection is Creating a Firm Foundation for the Community

“ It’s easy when you just sign checks. But it’s the people that have the boots on the ground, doing the work, day in and day out, that matter. We can all contribute to this humanity, to this world, by stepping forward and doing something. Yes, I’ve given over \$100 million, I’m very blessed... But when we first started POC, we said, ‘What are we going to do?’ We wanted to serve the Rhode Island community of need, and when we got out here, we found out there are so many. ”

401

GIVES

MARCH 31, 2026

powered by the Alliance for Nonprofit Impact
at United Way of Rhode Island

THE **Alliance**
for **NONPROFIT IMPACT**

FORTTUNA.
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COUNCIL

News & Notes

The Alliance for Non-Profit Impact will release the results of its annual State of Rhode Island's Non-Profit sector, Thursday, Feb. 26 at 10am via Zoom.

The findings will be shared with the Rhode Island General Assembly and funders to provide insights into the challenges currently facing the Ocean State's more than 7,000 non-profits.

If you are interested in learning more, you can register for the virtual Zoom session by clicking [here](#).



If you haven't already started planning, it's not too late to participate in 401Gives, Rhode Island's day of giving. This year, 401Gives will begin on March 31st to honor Passover. According to the United Way of Rhode Island, last year, April 1-2, 2025, 401Gives made RI history by raising over \$4.9 MILLION for 644 local nonprofits from over 19,000 donors.

Once again, POC is proud to be the presenting sponsor for 401Gives. Learn more [here](#).



Congratulations to POC Managing Trustee John Tarantino who has been named to the [Fortuna Council's Health and Wellness Council](#) Global Advisory Board for 2026.

In making the announcement, the Council said, “John’s leadership combines legal expertise, strategic thinking, and empathy, embodying the influence and impact central to the Forttuna Councils. We look forward to the insights, guidance, and thoughtful leadership he will bring to our global community of changemakers.”

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