**Mrs. Myrtis “Jeri” L. Nims**

In providing financial support and contributions to a multitude of institutions, Myrtis “Jeri” L. Nims personifies the role of Art Patron. She states that the greatest joy comes from using her fortune to “help people.” Mrs. Nims, who with her husband built a financial success story with the Lucky Coin Machine Company, has utilized her personal rewards to bestow an enduring legacy on our community for generations to come. Her patronage of the arts includes the Robert E. Nims Center for Entertainment, Amusement, and Technology and the Jeri Nims School of the Arts at the University of New Orleans; Nims Black Box Theater at the New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts Riverfront; a new fine arts center at the Academy of the Sacred Heart; helping to fund Louisiana ArtWorks; and many others. In 2002, Mrs. Nims was recognized by the national “Chronicle of Philanthropy” as one of the 60 largest contributors in the United States. In addition, she was awarded an honorary doctorate in Humane Letters from the University of New Orleans and is this year’s recipient of the Governor’s Arts Awards Patron of the Year.

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**Herman Leonard**  
*photo by Greg Miles*

In the late 1940’s, Herman Leonard’s passion for jazz brought him to the swinging clubs of Broadway, 52nd Street and Harlem. With the camera as his free ticket, he photographed and developed friendships with some of the greats of jazz history including Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Billie Holiday, Duke Ellington and many more. A year’s apprenticeship with Yousuf Karsh provided invaluable experience photographing the likes of Albert Einstein, Harry S. Truman and Clark Gable. In 1956 Leonard was chosen to be Marlon Brando’s personal photographer for an extensive research trip to the Far East. The Smithsonian Institute in Washington DC has honored him by housing his entire collection in the permanent archives of musical history. In 1990 while living in San Francisco, Leonard found his true home when he visited New Orleans on tour with his photography exhibit. Within 24 hours he had decided to move to our beloved city and is currently working on a book of New Orleans photographs.

**Cosimo Matassa**

When Cosimo Matassa’s love of music lead him to open his recording studio at J&M studios, he thought he was simply filling a void by providing local individuals with the ability to make personal recordings. Little did he realize that he would be making music history by recording the likes of Fats Domino, Smiley Lewis, Little Richard, and Professor Longhair just to name a few. Though he is quick to place credit elsewhere and laud the accomplishments of the dedicated studio musicians, if it were not for Cosimo’s engineering skills a vast chunk of rock-n-roll, R&B, and jazz history would have gone unrecorded and the “New Orleans Sound” as we know it today may never have existed. In 2000, Cosimo was very deservedly inducted into the Louisiana Blues Hall of Fame.
Nick Spitzer

As the official Louisiana State Folklorist, Nick Spitzer, has created films, festivals, exhibits, and recordings of regional music and helped bring Cajun and Zydeco music the national recognition it deserves, and has worked tirelessly to promote Louisiana culture and music. Nick has served as host and producer of the award winning Folk Masters and American Roots 4th of July concert series; documentary, record, film, and festival producer for the Smithsonian Institute and PBS; and independent cultural producer for NPR’s All Things Considered. He was named Mellon professor of humanities at Tulane University in 2004. Currently he continues promoting Louisiana music as host and producer of American Routes on NPR and is Professor of Folklore and Cultural Conservation at the University of New Orleans.

Gayle Parmelee

Gayle Parmelee’s love affair with dance and ballet began with her very first class at the age of 7. She started her professional career with the New Orleans Opera Ballet, but moved to New York to expand her opportunities where she performed in the Broadway hit Oklahoma and Silk Stalkings and was one of the June Taylor dancers on the Jackie Gleason show. This avid learner who studied in every major city in which she toured as well as studying extensively in Russia became an even more avid teacher when she became the Director of the Loyola University Ballet. Many of Ms. Parmelee’s students have gone on to regional and national renown as professional dancers, teachers, and directors. Even though she retired from Loyola University in 1999, she continues teaching today as the Coordinator of the Loyola Preparatory Ballet Program.

Patricia Sallier Seals

For the past 56 years, Mrs. Patricia Sallier Seals has dedicated her life to teaching students not only skills in vocal and instrumental music but to instilling in them the drive for excellence. She began her teaching career at Gilbert Academy in 1949 during the last year of her beloved alma mater. After Gilbert Academy was closed she went on to teach at Locket Elementary School, Carter G. Woodson Middle School and McDonogh #35 High School from which she retired in 1991. Today she continues teaching and reaching students through her Sallier School of music and the New Orleans Society of Musicians.