

## KC's Friends of Alvin Ailey Gets NEA Grant

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By Patrick Nease



Participants in a past AileyCamp rehearsed for the show that concludes the six-week camp. This year's performance is scheduled for July 29.  
Photo: Susan Pfannmuller

In these cash-strapped times, arts organizations need all the help they can get.

The Kansas City Friends of Alvin Ailey recently received a much-needed assist from the National Endowment for the Arts, which has awarded a grant of \$25,000 to benefit AileyCamp and AileyCamp the Group.

Tyrone Aiken, executive director of the Kansas City Friends of Alvin Ailey, says the group supports two summer camps: one at Central High School and one at Schlagel High School in Kansas City, Kan., that also draws students from Topeka.

AileyCamp the Group is composed of AileyCamp alumni who continue their summer dance experience by rehearsing biweekly during the school year, leading to a spring performance that is open to the public.

"This is the 23rd year for AileyCamp," Aiken said. "We've received NEA grants before, and we applied again last year and went through the process. But this year was more challenging because of the economic climate. It took them a little longer to decide on the grant."

The \$25,000 is certainly helpful but will hardly cover the needs of the group's innovative programs for youth. "I would say between the two projects, our costs are around \$300,000," Aiken said. "But the NEA grant is a great testament to what we do and will garner attention and help us get the additional support we need."

AileyCamp hosts 200 middle-school students for a six-week summer day camp, giving underserved youth a chance to study jazz, tap, ballet and modern dance with Ailey's excellent teachers.

At the same time, the immersive program helps students develop discipline, creativity, motivation and self-esteem. The summer camp concludes with a public performance. This year's will be on July 29, and although the venue is not yet set in stone, Aiken hopes it will be at Wyandotte High School.

AileyCamp the Group begins in October and runs through May.

"AileyCamp the Group is held here in the 18th and Vine district, and it's an opportunity for these young dancers not only to deepen their training, but also to experience cultural opportunities," Aiken said. "We take them to concerts, First Fridays in the Crossroads and to area museums. And we also encourage them to pursue their goals and finish college."

Like AileyCamp, AileyCamp the Group is provided to participants at no cost. In addition to summer youth programs, Aiken is also looking forward to performances this fall by the Friends of Alvin Ailey in the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts.

"We are extremely excited about the new Kauffman Center," he said. "We'll be performing there in November, and we think audiences will be totally impressed when they see the company in the new theater.

"We're also going to make sure that the ticket prices are affordable. Both in terms of the work we're doing with the Kauffman Center and what they're trying to do on a community outreach level, it's something we're very excited about." To learn more about the Kansas City Friends of Alvin Ailey, visit [www.kcfaa.org](http://www.kcfaa.org).