



## **Avon Theatre Awards \$9,000 in College Scholarships “Why Film Matters”**

Greenwich, CT - The Avon Theatre Film Center Board of Directors is pleased to announce the winners of the **Eleventh Annual Avon Scholarship Essay Contest, “Why Film Matters”**. The contest was open to high school seniors in both public and private schools throughout Fairfield and Westchester Counties. Prizes totaling \$9,000 were awarded this month to eleven talented high school seniors.

This year the competition was fierce with 94 essays submitted for consideration. During the pandemic this past Spring, several local English teachers used the essay contest as part of their e-distance learning curriculum, giving students an opportunity to reflect on the importance of film in today’s challenging times.

Students submitted an essay on **“Why Film Matters”** based on a film they saw in a theatre or virtually that was released in 2019 or 2020. They selected either a feature, documentary, short, American or foreign film. The students were also asked to write about how film, in general, impacts our society. Social justice, gender equality and sexual harassment were some of the topics of the films the students wrote about, which included *Harriet*, *Just Mercy*, *Little Women* and *Bombshell*.

Chris Saladin, who tied for first place, wrote about the drama *Just Mercy*, which had such a personal impact on him that he is now considering law school after Yale with a concentration in social justice.

Chris wrote “Film for me is not only entertainment, which is a big factor, but also film can provide a call to action, can inform, and can tell extremely important stories in a way no other medium can.”

There was a tie for first place resulting in each winner receiving a scholarship of \$2,000. The top three Avon Scholarship 2020 winners are: **Isabelle Abbasi**, Greenwich High — Pomona College; **Christopher Saladin**, Fairfield Warde High — Yale University; and **Ekaterina Ulyanov**, Academy of Information Technology & Engineering (AITE – Stamford) – Williams College, who won a \$1,000 prize

for third place.

Honorable Mention winners each received a scholarship award of \$500 and included:

**Ciara Munnely**, Greenwich High – UCONN – Stamford campus

**Hannaly Lopez**, Stamford High – UCONN – Stamford campus

**Chloe deGraft-Johnson**, Westhill High – Villanova University

**Salvatore Acciarino**, Fairfield Warde High – New York University

**Fatima Leguiza**, Greenwich High – UCONN – Storrs campus

**Aliyah Carson**, Westhill High – Norwalk Community College

**Liana Haigis**, Mamaroneck High – Brown University

**Teagan McDonough**, Westhill High – University of Delaware

Each essay was read by two independent judges, who included professional writers, script writers, media publishing executives, educators and filmmakers. The top finalists' essays were read by two additional judges. This year our judges included: *Stuart Adelberg*, Avon Theatre executive director; *Sue Baker*, retired Greenwich High educator; *Mimi Cohen*, retired secondary school administrator; Louisa Greene, Avon Theatre director of development and marketing; Camilla Herrera, Avon Board member, communications consultant & former editor of *Stamford Magazine*; *Beth Levine*, freelance journalist; *Arlene Mark*, author and poet; Donna Moffly, founding editor of Moffly Media; *Jeanne Ronan*, Avon Theatre director of public relations; *Diane Cohen Schneider*, novelist & retired executive; *Ingrid Semaan*, UCONN Assoc. Professor of Sociology and Director of Women's & Gender Studies; and *May Wuthrich*, Audiobook producer, director & creative consultant.

Sue Baker, Avon Board member, is chair of the Avon Education Initiative Committee that sponsors the essay contest. Scholarship monies are funded from donations to the Avon Annual Appeal. The winners' scholarship checks are made out to the university or college each student plans to attend.

The Avon Theatre Film Center is a community-supported non-profit first run art house showcasing the best in independent, foreign, classic, documentary, and cult classic films. The Avon, a Bedford Street landmark, has been restored to its 1939 vintage appearance and is celebrating over 80 years of timeless elegance. As part of its mission, the Avon is dedicated to teaching educators and students about film as an art form. Throughout the school year, the Avon welcomes students to view films that enhance their curriculum. Earlier this year Stamford and Westhill High students and educators saw the documentary about Martin Luther King, Jr., ***When Harlem Saved a King***. The directors Al and Janet Cohen donated a free screening and hosted a riveting post-film Q&A with the students.

The Avon is open for in-theatre screenings of new releases and classic films. Showtimes and tickets are available at: [www.avontheatre.org](http://www.avontheatre.org)

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