



South Carolina High School League

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Tammie Newman, Director of Communications/Public Relations  
**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **SCHSL wins NFHS Section 3 Heart of the Arts Award**

*Fairfield Central High School's "Theater Tech Team (T3)" brings home title*

We are pleased to announce the South Carolina High School League candidate for the 2020 NFHS Heart of the Arts Award, the Fairfield Central High T3 (Theatre Tech Team), has been selected by the NFHS Heart of the Arts Selection Committee to receive the **NFHS Section 3 Heart of the Arts Award**.

SCHSL Commissioner Jerome Singleton states, "To say we are pleasantly surprised with yet another NFHS award is putting it mildly. We have had a banner year as far as national recognitions and this being only our second arts centered nomination and winning the Section 3 title... it puts a bright light on a somewhat somber end to 2019-20 school year. We are truly proud of the Fairfield Central High students for their work on the T3 projects, especially a production as moving as ['A Pony and His Boy'](#)."

Although the SCHSL is not an activities association, all states are encouraged to nominate their state's best arts activities and projects. Last year, South Carolina won the national title with Beaufort High School's theater club. There are only 8 section award winners in the entire country each year.

"I am already so proud of the students, so to learn that their accomplishments were appreciated outside of the district was truly heartwarming. For the past three years these students have come together from such a variety of backgrounds and interests, from athletes to STEM Cohort members, from G&T Artistic identifications to students with special needs, they've worked as a team to bring important stories to the forefront in our community, and they've done it together. Not only do they collaborate because they need to do that for a project, they truly care about one another and the stories that they are telling. As each of them moves toward graduation, whether they continue in an arts-based career or plan to enjoy the arts as a hobby or past-time, through the T3 program

they know that their creativity and focus on important issues can make a difference in the world. I'm so very proud of every one of them," states program coordinator Julianne Neal.

"We were set to have several individuals honored at the 2020 NFHS Summer Awards Banquet (Alex English, NFHS Hall of Fame; Nessie Harris, NFHS Citation Award) before the COVID 19 pandemic canceled the summer conference. We are beyond proud of the students and instructors at Fairfield Central High for not only doing what they love in addition to the day to day activities of school, but to put so much heart into," states Tammie Newman, SCHSL Director of Communications and Public Relations.

The eight Section Award Winners are honored with a certificate as well as a plaque from the NFHS trophy supplier (*which is currently closed due to COVID 19*). The NFHS also honored the Section Winners with a press release and online article. <https://www.nfhs.org/articles/nebraska-rhode-island-students-selected-as-recipients-of-spirit-of-sport-heart-of-the-arts-awards/>

We plan to select an appropriate time and occasion to present this prestigious Heart of the Arts Section Award to Fairfield Central HS T3 (Theatre Tech Team) once we receive it from the NFHS. Please see the attached document that was submitted with their nomination. We encourage you to follow up with Mrs. Neal and the students on their winning project. In a word, AMAZING.

**Direct link:** <https://filmfestivalflix.com/festival/equus/film/a-pony-and-his-boy/>

Contact the following for additional information:

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## NOMINEE INFORMATION SHEET

### 1. Please describe nominee's current involvement in high school. If applicable, please list any accomplishments or honors attained.

The Fairfield Central High School (FCHS) T3 Team is the Media Literacy-based program for technical theatre students interested in filmmaking. Students in the program have learned both the technical and artistic aspects of filmmaking through a focus on curriculum and design over the past four years during high school theatre coursework. They have created projects commissioned by school and community groups, such as FCHS Athletic Event Promos and Game Openers, as well as Graduation and Class Night Senior films. The students involved in the T3 Team not only spend time creating during the theatre class, much of the footage needed for these projects is captured during volunteer hours after school or during the weekends.

The students have been involved in helping to create Public Service Announcement short films on a variety of topics, including mental health, serving students with special needs, and animal rescue for the EQUUS Film and Arts Fest's Spotlight Rescue Series. As part of a curriculum unit on creating PSAs, the students learned the aspects of film as they relate to design-thinking, which is a new focus in Visual and Performing Arts instruction at the state level due to the 2017 SCCCRSVPA Standards in Design Thinking. The award-winning Spotlight Rescue Series has featured such topics as abuse of pack animals in the Grand Canyon, the Abaco Island Horse breed on the edge of extinction, the neglect case of the Hanging Barn in Pennsylvania and Healing with Horses in Trinidad and Tobago. The series won Best Documentary Series at the 2017 and 2018 EQUUS Film Festival in New York and the Horse Hero Award at the 2019 EQUUS Film Festival at the Kentucky Horse Park.

Julianne Neal, the Director of the Spotlight Rescue Series, is the Fairfield County School District's Coordinator of Visual and Performing Arts and Theatre teacher at FCHS. According to Neal, the students have learned to create the PSAs by focusing on best practices in shooting footage, selecting appropriate locations, conducting interviews, and editing for maximum storytelling effect. The subject matter happens to be animal rescue for the series, but the techniques would be the same, no matter the topic. The student members of the T3 Team are in the 11th and 12th grade at FCHS and are all members of the International Thespian Society (ITS). Each of the T3 Team members serves as an officer in the school's chapter of the ITS. They take the responsibility of recruiting and training new members very seriously and task themselves with finding the right fit for new students with the service mind-set required for the work.

## 2. Please list nominee's actions or accomplishments that deem him or her worthy of the "National High School Heart of the Arts Award."

The featured project for this nomination is a documentary film called "A Pony and His Boy." The film is the story of an 8-year-old boy with Down Syndrome who has a life-changing experience when he meets a 28-year-old rescued pony. The director of the film, Julianne Neal, is the teacher of the T3 Team. Although much of the film includes the original footage of Josh and Berry filmed on location in Chicago, the T3 input linking the emotion of the story to the current practices in serving students with special needs was crucial to the authenticity of the film. T3 students interviewed Ann Cureton, Coordinator of Special Services, about the relationship between parents and children with special needs and that interview was the catalyst for the therapy segment of the film. Cureton's description and recitation of a poem entitled "A Trip to Holland" resonated with the creative team and lead to organizing equine therapeutic sessions for students with special needs at FCHS. As some of the students were able to brush Marley, the horse that was brought to campus by the Nature's View program, the film students had the opportunity to capture the emotional responses. The students were so moved by the experience that they organized a special screening of the film during World Down Syndrome Day in March. Students, parents, and invited guests attended and then connected via social media messages sent to Josh in Chicago. Following the premiere and special screening, the film was selected to travel to festivals in Sedona, Arizona, Lexington, Kentucky, Baltimore, Maryland and Camden, SC. A number of print publications featured the film, including The New York Times., prompting a call from the director of the requesting to screen it in June during the World Down Syndrome Congress in Philadelphia.

This collaboration was preceded by a project partnering the Department of Student Services with the Visual and Performing Arts Team. The three-year partnership was a research-based grant project to determine the effects of participation in the arts on student behavior as demonstrated by number of discipline referrals. The study showed a definite decline in discipline referrals following arts participation. This finding was no surprise to the T3 Team. Thanks to a supportive administration and passionate students, the team continues to research new ways of providing service to others. Further projects have included an in-depth look at mental health featured in a student performance music video, along with original interview on teenage depressions with the T3 Team. The T3 Team also continues to research and create PSAs for the Spotlight Rescue Series with features on the local animal adoption center and equine retirement facilities.