## THE biography OF CYNTHIA PENN Halal

Cynthia Penn Halal is an established arts educator with more than thirty years of experience. She is an alumna of *The North Carolina School of the Arts* (renamed, The University of North Carolina University of the Arts - UNCSA) with a degree in Modern Dance. Cynthia’s passion for dance was realized at a very young age. She emphasizes the fact that she is the product of a summer arts program that came to her rural community, Mt. Airy, North Carolina. She experienced a six-week summer program in the late sixties, left home at age fourteen to study dance professionally at North Carolina School of the Arts Carolina, and endured extensive training to become a dancer of the world renowned *Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre*. Cynthia Penn Halal has served as a part time dance instructor in the drama program at University North Carolina School of the Arts. She will conclude her duties there in 2015.

After a successful concert dance career Cynthia’s dream of developing as an artist in a Latin-American country came true when she had the opportunity to teach in Caracas, Venezuela. There she served as resident choreographer for *Radio Caracas TV* and opened *Cynthia Jazz Center*. In the United States, as gas prices soared in the eighties, Cynthia found her passion for teaching youth in a country that was open and receptive to the arts. Her teaching and choreography took her to Japan, France, Switzerland, Morocco and back to the “Big Apple”, New York City.

Mrs. Penn Halal performed with other greats and major companies such as The Joffrey Ballet, Agnes de Mille Heritage Dance Theatre, DanzaHoy and Bella Lewitzky. She received outstanding awards from the Kennedy Center and was named Miss North Carolina’s Woman of the Year in 1998. Cynthia worked with *MacArthur Award* legendary genius, Jacques d’Amboise of *National Dance Institute* in New York City and the New Jersey school systems, as well as the Kennedy Center for Performing Arts in Washington, D.C.

Back in the United States, after marrying in Durham, NC, Cynthia knew she wanted to work with under-served youth. She could relate very well to what a community-based arts program could do for the life of a child. Her commitment to give back gave conception to the Walltown Children’s Theatre. Her ‘Art-Reach’ began in a small predominately African American community in Durham, North Carolina and has extended throughout the state with educational shows, workshops, academic tutoring, community outreach, a partnership with the FoodBank of Central & Eastern North Carolina “*Summer Kids Feeding*, *Duke University Office of Community Affairs “Doing Good in The Community”, Triangle Community Foundation’s “Send A Kid to Camp”, Durham Arts Council, and The Neighborhood Improvement Services of Durham.*

Walltown Children's Theatre theatre is known for it’s exemplary programming and socio-economical diversity. WCT benefits youth of all backgrounds by exposing them to the very best training in theatre, dance, acting, fencing, guitar and piano. Cynthia’s motto, “I will never give up on you as long as you never give up on yourself” renews hope for many children who live with severe home conditions: lack of income, incarcerated parents, parents living with HIV/AIDS, and much more. Thus, some of their artistic productions, such as “Bangin” have been aimed at issues affecting children, real life issues such as teen violence. Other material includes classics such as William Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet in Spanish and “Unity: A 2003 Tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.”

Walltown Children’s Theatre inspires positive social change by developing and reconnecting diverse, under-served youth in Walltown and the surrounding communities through exemplary performing arts programming, after-school academic tutoring and collaborative leadership opportunities. Mrs. Penn Halal has served as a full time Executive Director with only one other full time staff member for over five years and Co-Director since October 2000. Triangle Community Foundation awarded Cynthia, *The Kathryn H. Wallace Award for Artists in Community Service*, an award given annually to recognize an individual who has made a significant contribution to the Triangle community.