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CO-FOUNDER HOWARD SHALWITZ TO STEP DOWN AS ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF WOOLLY MAMMOTH THEATRE COMPANY

Washington, DC: After nearly four decades of leadership, co-founder Howard Shalwitz will step down as the artistic director of Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company. He will continue in his position through the end of the 2017-18 season. A national search for his successor will begin this summer.

"I'm incredibly proud of everything we've accomplished over the past 38 years," Shalwitz said. "Woolly Mammoth was a dream that Roger Brady and I had in the late 1970s, and with the help of our third co-founder Linda Reinish, as well as the dedication and support of so many others, we've had greater impact than I could have imagined."

"I've always felt my career would have a second act, and this feels like the right time to give up the daily responsibility of running the company and expand my horizons as an actor, director, teacher, and advocate for theatre. Because of the artistic and financial success Woolly has enjoyed, it is well positioned to attract a superb new leader, and I am excited to see its next artistic director build on what we've created and take the company to new heights."

After a couple of initial productions under the name Woolly Mammoth in New York, Shalwitz and Brady brought the company to DC in 1980, where Reinish joined them as a managing director. Under Shalwitz's leadership, Woolly has produced more than 200 plays in Washington (including 78 world and US premieres), commissioned 14 new works from award-winning writers, and earned 45 Helen Hayes Awards, becoming a nationally recognized leader in the creation and production of new plays. In 2014, Shalwitz received the prestigious Margo Jones Award in recognition of his lifetime commitment to new American plays.

"Our premise has been that it's possible to advance the art of theatre through innovative, provocative new work and, at the same time, to build energetic new audiences," Shalwitz said. "It's never been easy, but we've thrived in our miraculous downtown home: a testament to this community's adventurous theatre lovers and many generous supporters both here and around the country. I'm especially proud that Woolly has stayed true to its risk-taking mission, built a company of remarkable artists, launched dozens of path-breaking plays, and set a standard for creativity that has inspired others."

By the end of its first decade, Woolly had already acquired a “reputation for derring-do,” according to the *Washington Post*, and that reputation had begun to spread nationwide. In a review of Nicky Silver’s *FAT MEN IN SKIRTS*, a signature production early in the company’s history, the *New York Times* called Woolly “uniquely plugged in to the mad temper of the times.” In more recent years, after Shalwitz moved Woolly into its current award-winning location in DC’s Penn Quarter in 2005, the theater has become known as “one of the most influential outposts for the best new American plays,” according to the *Washington Post*. Shalwitz’s direction of critically acclaimed plays—from Aaron Posner’s *STUPID FUCKING BIRD* to Bruce Norris’s *CLYBOURNE PARK*—has continued to bolster that recognition.

During his tenure, Shalwitz has also overseen significant organizational innovations with implications both local and national. In 2009, during the theater’s 30th season, Shalwitz and Woolly brought diverse local and national stakeholders together for a convening entitled “Who’s In Your Circle: Theatre, Democracy, and Engagement in the 21st Century.” The result was the launch of Woolly’s Connectivity program, which has since become a nationwide model for community engagement and outreach. In 2012, Shalwitz and Woolly launched *FREE THE BEAST!*, an artistic innovation and risk capital fund designed to support new work by “getting plays off the assembly line.” *FREE THE BEAST!* has supported the development and production of new plays by Aaron Posner, Mia Chung, Sheila Callaghan, and Robert O’Hara, among others, with the goal of making significant investments in 25 new plays by the year 2022.

Shalwitz has also earned recognition as an actor for his work on the Woolly stage. The *Washington Post* noted his “electrical, lyrical performance” in Tom Murphy’s *THE GIGLI CONCERT* in 1996 and his “exquisitely funny” turn in Stanley Rutherford’s *THE CHINESE ART OF PLACEMENT* in 1999. In a review of Ian Cohen’s *LENNY & LOU* in 2004, the *Post* singled out Shalwitz’s “spectacular” work for high praise: “It’s scary how marvelously this role suits him, how Lenny’s depraved desperation can be made to seem so real, so tangible, so hilarious.” Shalwitz will be returning to the Woolly stage this September as Biedermann in Max Frisch’s *THE ARSONISTS*, which opens his final season as artistic director.

“We are looking forward to celebrating Howard and everything Woolly has achieved under his leadership,” said Linette Hwu, president of Woolly Mammoth’s board of directors. “At the same time, because he’s built an organization that has change in its DNA, we are also excited about this transition and the opportunity it presents to ensure that Woolly’s next four decades are equally successful. To that end, the board and I are ready to undertake a search process with the same reach, depth, and inclusiveness that characterizes all of Woolly’s efforts and to support its next artistic director as we move together through an important milestone in the theater’s evolution.”

“There are so many people I’d like to thank for all they’ve done to support me, and for all their contributions to the success of Woolly Mammoth,” said Shalwitz. “They include thousands of artists, staff members, board members, donors, supporters, and audience members who have taken a chance on Woolly from day one, believing that we had an important role to play in the growing cultural scene of Washington, DC. The legacy of a theatre company lies in its sense of

purpose and in the standards and skills that it reinforces and hones over time. It's a huge honor for me to know that the Woolly community's collective determination to innovate will remain as strong as ever."

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