



arts hero

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*Empowering the community
through arts and culture.*

LARICHE LAMAR

Empowering All Abilities

LaRiche Lamar grew up in a family of church musicians, one with the voice of an angel. Her young cousin had autism and was allowed to perform under an accepted practice of being placed on stage to sing, then immediately whisked away.

"It's what we do with people who have disabilities," Lamar said. "We tell them what they can't do, we're worried about how they will behave in certain situations, and we form constructs around that, rather than around all the things they can accomplish."

A defining moment for her came in 2019 during a theater performance of "Shrek," featuring a cast of all disabled individuals. They weren't a stagnant part of the show, they were the show.

"I wept," said Lamar, Artistic Director and CEO of Scottsdale-based Empowered Theater & Arts. "And I felt convicted. I'd spent my entire life in the arts and hadn't seen something like this before. I felt I should have known this could happen, and why wasn't it happening everywhere?"

Lamar's unbridled passion for access and inclusion, coupled with her 20 years of business leadership, quickly led to what she describes as "an opportunity you just can't refuse". A group of dedicated arts advocates invited LaRiche to spearhead the creation of a non-profit theater. Since inception, ETA has collaborated with Best Buddies, TheaterWorks, and other thriving community orgs, producing workshops and multiple sold-out performances.

Emerging artists like Rebecca Jansen, who played Joy in ETA's "Cinderella", are finding their spotlight. "Every time Rebecca gets on stage, she makes people smile from ear-to-ear," Lamar boasted. "Theater builds confidence, and that impacts your whole life. Artists at Empowered aren't only great performers. They're advocates for access who are choosing how they'll be represented in this world."

Do you know an Arts Hero? Someone who works tirelessly to strengthen, improve and enhance the arts in our community?

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