



THE HEINZ AWARDS

for the Arts, Economy and Environment

EMBARGOED UNTIL
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Addressing Tech Entrepreneurship and Racial Barriers to Farm Ownership: Heinz Family Foundation Names Kathryn Finney, Managing General Partner of the Genius Guild, and Leah Penniman, Co-Founder of Soul Fire Farm, as Recipients of the 28th Heinz Awards for the Economy

PITTSBURGH, September 20, 2023 — The Heinz Family Foundation today named Kathryn Finney, author and managing general partner, Genius Guild, and Leah Penniman, co-founder, Soul Fire Farm, recipients of the prestigious 28th Heinz Awards for the Economy. As part of the accolade, Ms. Finney and Mx. Penniman will each receive an unrestricted cash award of \$250,000.

Kathryn Finney receives the Heinz Award for the Economy for disrupting the status quo in the tech field and boldly breaking down barriers that have long hindered Black and Brown women from entering the startup ecosystem. Named one of the most influential women in tech, Ms. Finney has innovated, led, advocated for and started programs that foster economic, financial and social opportunities for BIPOC-owned businesses across the U.S.

Ms. Finney is the founding managing partner of Genius Guild, a multimillion-dollar venture firm that builds and invests in scalable companies led by diverse founders. The Chicago-based venture firm invests in high-growth startups that use the social determinants of health framework to build market-driven solutions that disrupt the \$4.3 trillion health care industry.

A Yale University-trained epidemiologist, Ms. Finney is dedicated to building a new pipeline of talent and economic growth on the core premise that the best solutions to our most pressing problems are built by those closest to them. Prior to launching the Genius Guild, she repeatedly experienced being the only Black person in the room at tech events and being rejected by investors not interested in funding Black women. In response, Ms. Finney founded the social enterprise digitalundivided (DID) to foster economic development by, as she describes, “investing where others won’t, championing what others don’t and doubling down on opportunities that others consider small bets to bridge the digital divide.”

With an initial grant from the U.S. Small Business Administration, Ms. Finney grew DID into an organization with more than 20 staff and partnerships with institutions such as Pivotal Ventures and Microsoft for Startups. Today, DID excels at finding, developing and supporting Black and Latinx women-led startups that have the potential to create community-level economic impact.

At DID, Ms. Finney founded and led ProjectDiane, a groundbreaking research project that compiled data on Black women in tech entrepreneurship, revealing that out of more than 10,000 startups, only 12 Black and Latinx women founders had raised more than \$1 million in outside venture funding; only 88 U.S. startups were led by Black women; and the average funding raised by those founders was \$36,000, an amount radically less than the average of \$1.3 million raised by white founders.

ProjectDiane’s 2016 inaugural report drew widespread media attention and was a call-to-action for many investors and funders. In the two years after the report was released, the number of startups by Black women tripled and funding increased by 500%. DID’s 2022 report showed more than 350 Black and Latina entrepreneurs have raised \$1 million or more. Today, ProjectDiane’s mission is to disrupt pattern-matching in tech by identifying Black and Latinx women founders of tech-enabled companies.

“My life’s work has focused on creating a world where we *all* win — investors, founders of startups and the communities they serve. The world has bought into this notion that for a person to win, someone has to lose, which is simply not true. Investing in innovation that builds a better, more positive world — no matter where it comes from — is a win for us all,” says Ms. Finney.

Ms. Finney is the author of “Build the Damn Thing: How to Start a Successful Business if You’re Not a Rich White Guy.” The book, which made The Wall Street Journal bestsellers list in the first week of its 2022 release, offers a battle-tested guide to help every entrepreneur succeed. Ms. Finney also shares a narrative of her journey and career as an entrepreneur, inclusion champion and investor to encourage Black founders and women entrepreneurs on her podcast, “Build the Damn Thing.”

“Kathryn is honored for her vision and tenacity in creating space for Black and Brown women to bring their too-long overlooked gifts, talent and power to the world of tech entrepreneurship and investment,” says Teresa Heinz, Chairman of the Heinz Family Foundation. “Using data, she has not only revealed entrenched mindsets that have acted as barriers to opportunity, but she is also boldly leading the way as a deeply committed angel investor, speaker, author and entrepreneurial role model for success to ensure that others like her receive the funding and professional support they deserve to make their businesses successful. She is both a dreamer and a doer, and we are proud to present Kathryn with the 28th Heinz Award in the Economy.”

Early in her career, Ms. Finney created the lifestyle media company, The Budget Fashionista, and authored the book “How to Be a Budget Fashionista.” She went on to sell The Budget Fashionista at a profit, making her one of the first Black women to have a successful startup exit.

The co-founder of Soul Fire Farm and author of “Black Earth Wisdom: Soulful Conversations with Black Environmentalists” (2023) and “Farming While Black: Soul Fire Farm’s Practical Guide to Liberation on the Land” (2018), **Leah Penniman** is committed to teaching regenerative farming best practices and land stewardship to Black, Indigenous and people of color and to addressing racism and injustice in the food system. Her 80-acre family farm has evolved into a nonprofit that works to promote equity in food access and to reconnect people of color to the land by equipping them with the training and skills needed to become leaders in farming and the food justice movement, which helps to shape and invest in the future of American agriculture. Just last year, more than 38,000 people participated in trainings. Soul Fire Farm also provides youth education programs, urban plantings, mobilization training and a community-supported agriculture program.

To increase the number of farms owned and operated by people of color, Mx. Penniman developed the Soul Fire Farming Immersion program, which teaches farming skills along with courses on business management, marketing and carpentry. Trainings include crop planning, soil fertility, seed selection and centuries-old farming practices first deployed by Blacks, Native Americans and other Indigenous peoples. These spiritual and sustainable practices include polyculture, a practice adopted from Nigerian and Ghanaian farmers in which multiple types of crops are integrated in a single field; raised beds and

physical barriers to increase water flow and root depth, suppress weeds and eliminate rototilling; silvopasture, the intentional integration of trees, forage plants and livestock as an intensively managed system; and Afro-Indigenous agroforestry, the deliberate maintenance and planting of trees to develop a microclimate that protects crops against extremes. Participants who complete the immersion program receive ongoing support, which helps set them up for continued success by enabling them to access resources, land, funding and mentorship. Buildings on Soul Fire Farm are hand-constructed using local wood, adobe, straw bales, solar heat and reclaimed materials.

“We have a very ambitious mission, which is justice in the food system. We want to train and equip and support the next generation of Black and Brown farmers. Stewarding our own land, growing our own food, educating our own youth, participating in our own health care and justice systems, this is the source of real power and dignity,” says Mx. Penniman.

Mx. Penniman is also engaged in calling for expansion of farm-to-community nutrition incentive programs that give low-income individuals and families living under food apartheid more buying power for and access to fruits and vegetables. She is an outspoken advocate for replacing exploitive farming systems, which focus on efficiency, uniformity, profit and extraction, with regenerative systems that emphasize collaboration, diversity, and the ability to sustain the system and the land long term.

She holds an MA in science education and a BA in environmental science and international development from Clark University; has trained internationally with farmers in Ghana, Haiti and Mexico; and served as a high school biology and environmental science teacher for 17 years.

“Leah is honored for changing the face of farming and the future of agriculture in this country, while also calling into stark view the inequities in our food systems that have excluded Black, Indigenous and people of color from owning farmland and growing their own food for far too long,” says Teresa Heinz, Chairman of the Heinz Family Foundation. “The health of our bodies is inextricably rooted in the soil that produces our food and the way in which we grow and harvest. Leah’s tireless work is reviving practices rich in wisdom, breaking barriers to farm ownership and bringing a whole new generation back to the land. We recognize Leah for her advocacy efforts to reframe policies to enable equal access to land ownership and farm fresh food, for her work in modeling and teaching regenerative farming practices to thousands of people of color who can then become leaders in their own farming and food access initiatives, and for inspiring us to treasure the land that sustains us all.”

Created to honor the memory of the late U.S. Senator John Heinz, the Heinz Awards recognize excellence and achievement in areas of great importance to Senator Heinz. The 28th annual awards bring the total number of recipients to 171 and reflect more than \$31 million in monetary awards since the program was launched in 1993.

Additional recipients by category are:

Arts: Kevin Beasley, Visual Artist, New York, New York, works across sculpture, sound and performance to create artworks inspired by his personal experiences of grappling with history. He uses culturally inspired ephemera, materials, music and sound to create installations that engage multiple senses to address complex American histories that are steeped in our shared generational memories.

Arts: Roberto Lugo, Visual Artist, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is a ceramicist, activist, poet, educator and self-described “ghetto potter” whose wheel-thrown pottery of traditional European and Asian vessel

forms are canvases for depicting narratives about social resistance movements, hip-hop culture, and his own Puerto Rican and African heritage. Mr. Lugo shares his love of ceramics as an assistant professor of ceramics at Temple University and by taking his potter's wheel out onto city sidewalks to encourage strangers to give it a try.

Environment: Nicole Horseherder, Co-Founder, Tó Nizhóní Ání (TNA), Kykotsmovi, Arizona, is an energy justice leader working to protect the water, air and landscapes of the Navajo Nation. Ms. Horseherder, Diné, of the Navajo Nation, co-founded TNA (Sacred Water Speaks) to bring power to Indigenous communities suffering the environmental effects of decades of coal extraction and industry waste, and to ensure a just and equitable transition to a clean energy economy in the Black Mesa, Arizona region.

Environment: Colette Pichon Battle, Co-Founder, Taproot Earth, Slidell, Louisiana, is a climate justice organizer and human rights lawyer. She founded Taproot Earth and is the former executive director of the Gulf Coast Center for Law & Policy, an organization established in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina to provide relief and legal assistance to the region's survivors. At Taproot Earth, Ms. Pichon Battle is advancing ecological equity in communities on the frontlines of extreme weather brought on by climate change. She does this by building power, cultivating solutions, and transforming the systems that govern our land, water and energy.

Recipients of the 28th Heinz Awards will be honored at an event in Pittsburgh in October. For more information on the awardees, visit www.heinzawards.org.

EDITORS/REPORTERS: To obtain photos of the recipients, please contact Maya Brod at mbrod@burness.com or 301-467-4917 and/or Abby Manishor at amanishor@burness.com or 917-539-3308.

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About the Heinz Awards

Established by Teresa Heinz in 1993 to honor the memory of her late husband, U.S. Senator John Heinz, the Heinz Awards celebrates the accomplishments and spirit of the Senator by recognizing the extraordinary achievements of individuals in the areas of greatest importance to him. The Awards, administered by the Heinz Family Foundation, currently recognize individuals for their contributions in the areas of the Arts, the Environment and the Economy. Nominations are submitted by invited experts, who serve anonymously, and are reviewed by jurors appointed by the Heinz Family Foundation. The jurors make recommendations to the Board of Directors, which subsequently selects the Award recipients. For more information on the Heinz Awards, visit www.heinzawards.org.

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