

The Actors Gymnasium and the founder of Literature for All of Us will receive Evanston's annual award for the arts next Friday during the state of the city luncheon sponsored by the Evanston Chamber of Commerce.

The Actors Gymnasium, founded in 1995, is a school for circus and performing arts dedicated to the education and development of multi-skilled, physical-theatre artists.

The organization, housed in the Noyes Cultural Arts Center, is best known for its circus and aerial arts classes and also produces original works of physical theatre. The theatre company has collaborated with such diverse talents as Marcel Marceau, Lookingglass Theatre, the Museum of Science and Industry, and Light Opera Works.

Literature for All of Us founder Karen Thomson is a dedicated teacher who says her organization makes literature the avenue through which low-income teen mothers can develop self-esteem. Thomson was the 1999 recipient of the Studs Terkel Humanities Service Award. Through book group discussions to teen mothers and other young people in underserved neighborhoods, Literature for All of Us builds communities of readers, poets, and critical thinkers.

The Evanston Arts Council Arts and Business Committee will give its 2010 Leadership Award to Jim Nash, president, Farnsworth-Hill, Inc., an Evanston-based real estate brokerage and management firm. Nash was selected because of his participation in Art Under Glass, a program that exhibits local artists in vacant storefront spaces. Currently, Art Under Glass features artwork from Evanston artists in 12 storefronts.

Mayor Elizabeth Tisdahl will deliver her first State of the City speech at the luncheon, which starts at 11:45 a.m. on Friday, Feb. 26, at the Hotel Orrington, 1710 Orrington Ave.

The mayor, who was elected last April, will discuss her administration's accomplishments and the significant challenges ahead caused by uncertain economic conditions.

Reservations for the luncheon may be made on the chamber's website (<http://www.evchamber.com/>) or by calling 847-328-1500.