FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 17, 2026

Chen Dance Center Announces Co-Founder Dian Dong's Retirement and Next-Generation Transition

Co-Founder Dian Dong to Step Down at End of 2026

Dian Dong Dance Education Fund Established to Mark Nearly Five Decades of Cultural and Educational Impact

NEW YORK, NY — Chen Dance Center today announced that Co-Founder and Artistic Director Dian Dong Chen will step down from her executive role at the end of December 2026, closing nearly five decades of transformative leadership in modern dance, public school arts education, and Asian American cultural advocacy.

Founded in 1979 by Dian Dong Chen and her late husband, H.T. Chen, Chen Dance Center has served as a vital cultural anchor in New York City. From its long-standing home at 70 Mulberry Street, the organization has premiered groundbreaking choreography, provided essential resources for Asian American dance artists, and brought rich dance curricula to thousands of K-12 school students across the city.

Through devastating challenges over the last six years—including the catastrophic 2020 fire at 70 Mulberry Street, the global pandemic, and the passing of H.T. Chen—Dong Chen's steadfast leadership preserved the institution's core mission and ensured the continuity of its educational residencies and artistic programming.

"When H.T. and I began this journey, our vision was to create a home where modern dance, cultural heritage, and community could thrive together," said Dian Dong Chen. "Watching generations of young people grow through movement in our programs has been the privilege of my life. This is the right time for this transition—as 70 Mulberry Street is being rebuilt, preparing Yeeli and Evelyn to take the lead now ensures that the next generation is fully equipped to guide Chen Dance Center into our restored home."

Next-Generation Leadership

Following Dong's retirement, the organization will transition leadership to her daughters, Yeeli Chen and Evelyn Chen, as incoming Co-Directors effective January 1, 2027. Both have grown up within the center and bring experience in dance, theatre production and arts administration. They will guide Chen Dance Center into its next chapter alongside the Board of Directors and staff.

"Chen Dance Center has always been more than an institution—it is our family's life work and a vital community home," said Evelyn Chen and Yeeli Chen in a joint statement. "We are honored to step forward to uphold our parents' legacy, nurture our dance company, and serve the next generation of students and artists."

The Dian Dong Dance Education Fund & Celebration

In honor of Dong's legacy as a master educator, Chen Dance Center is establishing The Dian Dong Dance Education Fund. The fund will directly support the K-12 school assembly and residency programs, curriculum development, and teaching artist training, ensuring dance education remains accessible to NYC students.

The community will gather on January 19, 2027 for a special winter celebration and fundraising event honoring Dian Dong Chen's 47-year legacy, celebrating long-time board members, and welcoming the transition in leadership.

About Chen Dance Center

Rooted in a nearly 50-year legacy, Chen Dance Center's mission is to move, educate, and inspire through modern dance and Asian American cultural heritage. Established in 1979 in New York City's Chinatown, the organization carries a rich history of presenting groundbreaking moving art, nurturing emerging Asian American creative voices, and bringing transformative arts education into public school classrooms.

###

Media Contact:

Chen Dance Center
PO Box 777, New York, NY 10108
Email: info@chendancecenter.org
Website: www.chendancecenter.org