Suffolk County Community College was the big winner at last week’s Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival finals in Washington, D.C. Oya Bangura of Copiague won the top prize in the prestigious Irene Ryan National Acting Scholarship competition over 15 other finalists from across the country and more than 2,500 student-actors in the eight regional competitions.

“It’s like a community college making the Sweet 16 in basketball,” says Steven Lantz-Gefroh, Bangura’s drama professor and acting coach at Suffolk, “and then winning the championship.”

In addition to the $3,000 Irene Ryan scholarship — named for the late actress who played Granny on “The Beverly Hillbillies” TV series — SCCC came away with five other prizes. Robert Doyle was runner-up in both the National Partners of American Costume Design and the Barbara awards.

Michael Fales was one of three National Distinguished Actor Award winners for his role in “The Foreigner,” which the theater department performed at the festival. Also for their work on “The Foreigner,” sound designer Spencer Barth won a scholarship for a University of Nevada-Las Vegas intensive program and Lantz-Gefroh was recognized with a Distinguished Director Award.

“We cleaned up,” says Lantz-Gefroh. “We could hear them murmuring in the audience, ‘Who are these guys?’”

**COLLEGE THEATER HONORS**

But the Kennedy Center is well aware of the Suffolk’s reputation. The Ammerman campus theater department held in the record for two years in a row for placing actor scholarship finalists at the Kennedy awards — eight out of the past 18 years, according to Kennedy Center spokesman Stephanie O’Neill — all under theater department chairman Charles Wittreich.

SCCC alum Gabriel Fazio, currently in a supporting role in the monologue. Her character, a black woman divorcing a white man, tells him she would have “bashed the brains out of the child they never had. Pregnancy ‘is not in the text,’ Bangura says, “but saying this while she’s obviously pregnant by another man is powerful.”

**‘SUFFOLK’S THE BEST’**

The child that Bangura and her husband are expecting, due July 7, will be their first. Bangura returned to the Suffolk college on the recommendation of Theatre Three’s Jeffrey Sanzel, who hired her as a choreographer for his company’s Musical Theatre Factory summer program for kids and teens. “I was going to go to a four-year school, but he said Suffolk’s the best.”

Next, Bangura plans to get a bachelor’s degree at Hunter College. “Then I want to teach dance and be a working actress,” she says, adding, “and a mom.” Meanwhile, you can see Bangura and Nee in Molière’s "Tartuffe" through Saturday night at Suffolk’s Shea Theatre.

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**WHAT “Tartuffe” WHEN | WHERE 8 p.m.**

Thursday-Saturday, Shea Theatre, Suffolk County Community College’s Ammerman campus.