

## Challenging times for arts groups

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**HYANNIS** – Faced with the dire economy, Kathleen Fahle has decided not to be daunted.

“The recession is something we’re not choosing to participate in,” joked the managing director of the Cape Cod Center for the Arts, noting the Dennis facility’s 80-year-old Cape Playhouse opens a new summer season in June.

The remark got a laugh from area artists gathered Thursday at the Arts Foundation of Cape Cod’s second annual Creative Collaborative Conference, but was indicative of the as-optimistic-as-possible stance represented there about today’s financial hard times.

Conference host Margaret G. Van Sciver, the foundation’s president, acknowledged in opening remarks that arts groups are dealing with an “unprecedented” drop in financial support, with constant stories of donors “retreating.” But she said everybody was aware of the bad news, so let’s move on.

The conference instead focused on sharing strategies that would raise needed support, cut costs and attract members – “to thrive and survive,” as Van Sciver put it – and the ideas were wide-ranging.

A group of directors of museums and theaters talked about collaboration – with other cultural groups, human-service organizations, schools and libraries. Most discussion revolved around programming, but Elizabeth Ives Hunter, executive director of Cape Cod Museum of Art in Dennis, wondered if cultural organizations with small numbers of employees could band together to get a better rate on health insurance – a cost that

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she said “is killing us.”

Directors spoke about the importance of diversifying programs to draw in new audiences, such as the movies, music and opera telecasts that Wellfleet Harbor Actors Theater now offers; seeking new patrons; and expanding more into the community, as Cotuit Center for the Arts is doing with the on-the-road show it’s creating with its coming theatrical production of “Schoolhouse Rock Live.”

Using technology to reach additional, distant and younger patrons was also broached, with Cape Cod Symphony Orchestra and the Cahoon Museum of American Art in Cotuit expanding to Facebook and YouTube, and Provincetown Art Association and Museum offering podcasts of its exhibits so faraway members won’t miss events.

A panel of artists’ groups talked about similar challenges, with Hugh Thompson, president of Cape Cod Jazz Society, saying the recession has been a discouraging time to find new members. Representatives of groups that concentrate more on hobbies, though – Cape Cod Wood Turners

and Cape Cod Viewfinders Camera Club – said membership has been soaring.

As much as the day’s program focused on the positive, the arts directors tried to be realistic about the economic challenges, also sharing strategies to let supporters know that their donations were more vitally needed than ever.

Symphony executive director Jerome Karter recounted a recent concert when he had 60 percent of his musicians stay off-stage for the start of the program.

“What you’re looking at – that’s all your tickets pay for,” he told the audience. “If we don’t get donations and funding, you won’t see the other 60 percent.”

The conference also honored local artists at a dinner Thursday night. Receiving awards were: LaVada Studley of Lawrence School in Falmouth as arts educator of the year; Cape Cod Museum of Art’s School-to-Careers Art Internship Program as collaborative arts project of the year; John Sullivan, drama director at Barnstable High School, for community leadership in support of the arts; and Provincetown artists Robert Henry and Selina Trieff for lifetime achievement.