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Apr  
03  
2009

Arts organizations offer helping hand to each other



Written by Rory T. Marcus

Compare strategies at Arts Foundation conference

The Cape's arts organizations, always dependent on donations, are especially hard hit by an "unprecedented withdrawal of philanthropic support" in these tough times.

Arts Foundation of Cape Cod President Maggie Van Sciver urged the more than 200 artists and members of art organizations at the Second Annual Creative Collaborative Conference in Hyannis last week to celebrate their successes and share new ideas. "Smart, creative people are pleased to work with other smart, creative people to survive and thrive in this environment," she said.

The panel of executive directors of 12 of the Cape's vibrant arts organizations spoke of their successes in collaborating with non-arts organizations. However, collaboration between the arts organizations themselves is just beginning to be discussed.

Almost every group has a program with local libraries. After a major restoration in 2007, Highfield Hall in Falmouth recently opened aided by a partnership with the local library. Barbara Milligan said the library contributed 50 programs during their first year and that created a new audience of 7,500 people.

Working with schools is very high on the list of collaborations. One of the longest running is Cape Cod Museum of Art's School-to-Careers Art Internship Program. AFCC awarded the Collaborative Arts Project of the Year to this program that places high school students with working artists and results in a major exhibition at the museum. Liz Hunter credits this program with helping to develop new professional artists for the Cape.

Cherie Mittenthal of the Truro Center for the Arts at Castle Hill spoke about their successful program that brings art teachers into the schools to work with the school's curriculum.

Cape Cod Symphony Orchestra has been conducting several exciting educational programs with Cape students for years and is leading the way in innovative new programs. Jerry Karter spoke of their newest initiative, MusicWorks! Everyday. With this "special collaborative gift they bring to the community," school children will have the opportunity to listen to five minutes of classical music every day.

Several directors spoke of their work with human services groups.

Jeff Zinn of Wellfleet Harbor Actors Theater talked of adding new shows now that they have expanded from a summer to a year-round program with the opening of the Julie Harris Stage. But the theater still reaches beyond its core mission to conduct a special Yule for Fuel program that benefits the community.

Bob Nash of the Cultural Center of Cape Cod in Yarmouth is especially proud of the 16-week arts program they held with CapeAbilities and the Duffy Health Center. He said it "tugs at the heart strings to see the disabled learning and mentoring each other. We had the most incredible exhibit of their work." In their latest experiment to entertain and inspire audiences, Chris Duren of Cotuit Center for the Arts will be taking the musical *SchoolHouse Rock Live* on the road to libraries, senior citizens centers and nursing homes.

Haorld Tobey of the Zion Union Heritage Museum in Hyannis, which at one year old is the newest museum on the block, spoke of his eagerness to collaborate with other organizations.

In the spirit of working together, Karter offered to make the Cape Symphony's new on-line ticketing system available to others. Hunter suggested that the organizations band together to create a health plan that would greatly lower costs for all.

Artist Robert Cook of Hyannis, who wasn't part of a panel, sees "the artists as a great collaborative force for all." The Cape is "alive with local artists willing to volunteer," he said, and he hopes that AFCC will help to harness their volunteer efforts.

Van Sciver said that AFCC will continue to work diligently to promote the Cape's outstanding cultural community. If there is any doubt that these arts organizations contribute more than education and entertainment to the Cape's quality of life, she pointed out that "every million dollars in nonprofit arts expenditures results in the creation of 30.4 jobs which support our multi-generational workforce."