



ARTS COUNCIL OF
PRINCETON

Neighborhood and Community Report April 2015



Introduction

We are pleased to present this report on the Arts Council of Princeton's (ACP) programs for the Princeton community and activities related to the Witherspoon-Jackson (W-J) Neighborhood. This report covers the year since our last Neighborhood Report in April 2014.

Highlights of 2014/15 include an exciting new initiative, the Witherspoon-Jackson Neighborhood Stories Project. We also increased our public art programming during the past year with the Underground Railroad Mural and the Bee Banner on the construction fence of the Avalon Princeton project at the site of the former hospital. Teen programming and our Arts in Healthcare programs were expanded as well as our education programs for children and adults. The ACP once again was recognized by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts with its Citation of Excellence and we received the Discover Jersey Arts People's Choice Award for Favorite Art Gallery in the state for the third consecutive year. This report provides a summary of our many services to the community and our achievements during the past year.

Programs and Events 2014/15

COMMUNIVERSITY ArtsFest: On the last Sunday in April last year, Princeton's annual festival of the arts was held again in downtown Princeton, organized by the Arts Council with participation from the students of Princeton University and support from the town, the police and public works. The police estimated attendance of well over 40,000, the largest event ever. The festival featured artists, musicians, performers, crafters, merchants and food vendors, nonprofit and student organizations, and numerous free activities for children. As mentioned earlier, this year's Communiversity will take place on Sunday, April 26 and as promised we are taking extra steps to reach out area churches and the local neighborhood to offer assistance in minimizing any impact the event might have on church attendance or residents.

Hometown Halloween Parade: In October, we held our annual parade through downtown Princeton featuring the Princeton University marching band and hundreds of costumed Princeton residents. We began the parade on Hinds Plaza and marched to Palmer Square. A new feature was a large puppet performance by teens from our CAPs program. The crowd was estimated at over 1500.

Free Fall Open House at the Robeson Center: Our annual Open House event in September featured art making, dance performances, refreshments, and music -- all free to the public. The event showcased our programs and provided residents with ways to get involved, including information on scholarships. A major highlight of the event was the completion and dedication of the Underground Railroad Mural painted by the artists of the SAGE Coalition from Trenton. The event also featured a live band, a DJ, free food and drink. In a related event, the Arts Council assisted with the Joint Effort Block Party in August and hosted a tribute to women reception in our gallery.

El Dia de los Muertos: Our annual El Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) event was held last November again at the Princeton Shopping Center, with generous support from Edens. Hundreds of attendees enjoyed mariachi music, art-making activities, sugar skulls, and food provided by the Taste of Mexico.

Artist-in-Residence Program: The Anne Reeves Artist-in-Residence Program provides opportunities for artists to create and complete new works, and offers the public a forum in which to meet and interact with the artists. During the year, we featured playwright James Christy, a resident of the Witherspoon-Jackson neighborhood. James completed a new play entitled "Egyptian Song" and presented it as a free staged reading in the ACP's Solley Theater. During the fall of 2014, Flamenco master Lisa Batalico was in residence and ran a series of performances and workshops, including a performance at the Fireman's Ball benefit event.

Martin Luther King Day: Our annual collaboration for MLK Day was offered as a partnership with the Historical Society of Princeton. We provided activities that taught tolerance, civil rights history, and the lessons of Dr. King to all ages. The afternoon of free art-making attracted over 200 people including dozens of neighborhood children who created a collaborative mural on the theme "I will change the world by..." that was on display in the Robeson Center for two months after the event.

Annual Community Play: The Arts Council sponsored the Princeton Variety Theatre's (a collaboration of members of Stone Soup Circus and Princeton Theater Experiment) Community Play in March 2015. The company presented three sold-out public performances of an original musical interpretation of "Cinderella" in the 150-seat theater at Stuart Country Day School. Over thirty community members participated in the production and local business sponsors provided funding support.

Witherspoon-Jackson Neighborhood Stories Project: Our Black History Month program in February featured the inauguration of a major new initiative, the Witherspoon-Jackson Neighborhood Stories Project, funded in part by a grant from the NJ Council for the Humanities. Neighborhood historian Shirley Satterfield presented a slide show history of the African American community followed by Michele Tuck Ponder, who moderated a lively discussion with panelists Florence Broadway and Tommy Parker. Then, in March, a second event featured a “Story Slam” with students from Princeton High School’s Poetry Club, a reading by Dr. Cecelia Hodges, and stories presented by Joe Moore, Dana Hughes, Olivia Giles and others.

Paul Robeson Birthday Event: In celebration of Paul Robeson’s 116th birthday, the Arts Council partnered with the Paul Robeson House in presenting a screening of the classic film “Show Boat” – the film that made Paul Robeson an international star. ACP Board member and Robeson House co-chair, Benjamin Colbert, hosted the event along with Shirley Satterfield.

Pinot to Picasso: The annual benefit art event, Pinot to Picasso, raises funds to support many of the programs that benefit the local community such as the residencies that resulted in the murals in Witherspoon Hall and on the wall of Terra Momo Bakery across from the Robeson Center and our Artist in Residence programs. Last year’s theme was “Blank Canvas” and this year’s event, with the theme “Spring”, is scheduled for April 18th.

Spring Fling: Because of the success of Day of the Dead at the Princeton Shopping Center, the Arts Council was invited to take over the shopping center’s Spring Fling event. Activities included hands-on art making, music and food.

Goldberg Lecture in Architecture: Now in its eighth year, the Goldberg Lectures have featured some of our greatest architects in a series presented every spring. Last June, we presented Princeton University architect Ronald McCoy. Sadly, we had two recent losses to the world of architecture: Bunny Goldberg, whose family started the series, and Michael Graves, the designer of our building whose talk was the first in the series back in 2008.

aMuse: Our annual anthology of poetry, prose, and art by students in grades K-12 included submissions by over sixty students from local and regional schools. We are now in the 27th year of this annual publication, which was formerly titled “UnderAge.”

Maria Evans, YWCA Tribute to Women Award: We are very proud of Maria Evans, ACP’s Artistic Director and a Witherspoon-Jackson neighborhood resident, who was the recipient of the prestigious YWCA Award in a benefit event last month. The award recognizes women of excellence who live or work in the greater Princeton area, and who have made significant contributions in their professions and communities.

CAPs (Community Art and Performance Sessions): During the past year we have continued to present our after-school program for teens. Called CAPs (Community Arts and Performance sessions), we worked with teens from Princeton High School and Corner House in music and theater/puppetry projects in the spring and fall.

Creative Aging and Arts in Healthcare: The demand for arts programs for seniors and those with disabilities has seen a steady increase in recent years. We will continue our weekly Art for Caregivers sessions, and will continue sending artists to Elm Court, Greenwood House and the Acute Care for the Elderly Unit at the Princeton Medical Center on a weekly basis. We have recently begun sending two artists weekly to Carrier Clinic, behavioral health facility, and have proposed an increase in arts programs for the Princeton Medical Center. A.R.T (Art Realization Technologies) has used our painting studio for art sessions for adults with disabilities, and an exhibition of artwork from that program was recently on view in our gallery.

Bee Banner/Public Art: AvalonBay commissioned the ACP to design an art-themed construction fence which is installed over the entire length of the construction fence on Witherspoon and Franklin Streets. The Arts Council will organize a permanent public art project for the development, with a Request for Proposals that is now in circulation to select artists. The plan is to commission a permanent sculpture that will create a “sense of place” at the site.

Arts Exchange and ArtReach: During the past year, we continued our ArtReach programs, providing free in-school and after-school arts education programming to up to 140 students at the Princeton Nursery School (funded in part by the PNC Foundation) and partnering with Princeton Young Achievers (funded by Horizon Foundation, the J. Seward Johnson, Sr. Charitable Trust and Janssen) to provide art programs for students at PYA learning centers and at the Paul Robeson Center. At the Princeton Nursery School, artist Libby Ramage worked with an average of 50 students per week. Four artists worked with 75 – 90 PYA students per week in our Creative Fridays program. In addition, we continue to provide free art classes to an average of 25 students per week from HomeFront of Trenton through our ArtsExchange program.

Summer Camp/Education/Scholarships: During the summer we provided scholarships for W-J Neighborhood children so they could attend summer art and drama camp, which we held in the Paul Robeson Center, with outdoor activities held at the YMCA. The campers' artwork was featured in an end-of-the-summer exhibition in the Robeson Center's main gallery. During the summer and through the school year, the Arts Council provided scholarships to 70+ students. From the Evans Scholarship Fund, seven Princeton High School students received scholarships for a total value of \$4,500. Scholarships are funded through our George Dale and Waxwood Scholarship Funds and by a grant from the Charles Evans Foundation.

Exhibitions: We are proud that the ACP's Exhibition program was selected as Favorite Art Gallery in the state of New Jersey for the third consecutive year in the Discover Jersey Arts People's Choice Awards. We presented a diverse range of exhibitions during the year in the Taplin Gallery at the Robeson Center and in local artist exhibitions at the Princeton Public Library.

Outdoor sculpture and Parklets: Our outdoor sculpture program currently features “B Homes” by Peter Abrams. There are three on view at the Robeson Center and additional works are being placed in other community locations including the Suzanne Patterson Center and Witherspoon Hall. The first of the public installations last year in front of Small World Café on Witherspoon Street inspired a new initiative, the Parklet Project. In the coming months the Arts Council, in partnership with the town and Stuart Country Day School, will develop a temporary public art/gathering space that will be placed in front of Small World as a pilot program.

Kids at Work: Discovery through Art: During the school year, over 200 local elementary students came with their teachers for gallery tours and art-making sessions in our program “Kids at Work: Discovery through Art.” In these workshops, school classes visited our gallery exhibitions, learned about the significance of the artwork, and engaged in hands-on art activities to make work based on what they saw in the gallery. The students mostly came from Community Park and John Witherspoon Schools (some classes also came from Riverside, Littlebrook and Johnson Park schools).

Summer Concerts: We had another successful Courtyard Concert Series at the Princeton Shopping Center. Free concerts were presented every Thursday from mid-June through the end of August with audience sizes ranging from about 200 to over 600. Edens, the owner of the Shopping Center, has been very supportive in continuing the series.

Concerts in the Solley Theater/Paul Robeson Center: Jazz and Beyond and other concerts during the past year have been well-attended and have introduced an expanding audience to the Solley Theater, which is arguably the best room in New Jersey for live music. The current spring series features CD release concerts by local and regional musicians. WPRB FM and the Princeton Record Exchange are partnering with the Arts Council on these concerts.

Witherspoon Middle School Tours: In addition to these other programs, in September, for the seventh straight year, in partnership with the Princeton Public Library and John Witherspoon Middle School, we provided tours of the Paul Robeson Center for over two hundred sixth grade students. This tour program is an annual activity designed to introduce students to the facilities and programs offered by both the Arts Council and the Library.

Conclusion

The Arts Council continues to grow and provide accessible arts programming for the community. But, in spite of many recent successes, the ACP still faces funding challenges. Although the ACP has raised over \$1.5 million towards the paydown of its mortgage, there is still \$500,000 to raise. In addition, the ACP is now in need of additional space for many of its programs, which are outgrowing the Robeson Center.

We greatly appreciate the support of Princeton in enabling us to further serve our community and look forward to working together with town officials and staff to improve and expand our programs to better serve the Princeton community.

Submitted by: Jeff Nathanson, Executive Director
April 13, 2015