



ARTS COUNCIL OF  
PRINCETON

## Witherspoon-Jackson Neighborhood Report April 2013



### **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

We are pleased to present this report on the Arts Council of Princeton's activities related to the Witherspoon-Jackson (W-J) Neighborhood. This report covers the year since the presentation of our last Neighborhood Report in May 2012. Because we are presenting this report for the first time to the new consolidated Princeton, and previously have presented to the Borough but not the Township, here is a brief history.

The Arts Council of Princeton (ACP) was founded as an independent nonprofit organization in 1967 and for many years served as an advisory council to Princeton Borough. In Its early years the ACP began to develop cultural programming for the town and in 1971 produced the first Art People's Party, which later became Community. This year's Community Festival of the Arts is scheduled for April 28<sup>th</sup> and we anticipate a crowd of over 40,000 to this major event we produce with participation from the students of Princeton University.

In 1982 the Borough made the building at 102 Witherspoon Street available to the Arts Council and it was turned into an arts center that served the community as an artistic and cultural hub. Ultimately the ACP purchased the building from the Borough (at a substantially reduced price) and developed a wide range of art classes, workshops, community events, concerts, and outreach programs. In 1998 the ACP started to develop plans to renovate and expand the building to accommodate the programs and needs of the growing organization. In June 2008 the Paul Robeson Center for the Arts re-opened to the public with a design by architect Michael Graves. The renovated arts center is twice the size of the original building and includes a gallery, theater, multi-disciplinary art studios and public meeting space.

The Arts Council annually provided a report to the Princeton Borough Council in order to inform them of the activities that specifically serve the Witherspoon-Jackson Neighborhood, in which the Robeson Center is located. This 2013 program report provides an overview of the programs during the past year that serve the neighborhood and the broader community.

The Arts Council's strategic plan provides a roadmap for program development and increased marketing, based on the ACP's core mission of *building community through the arts*. The results of our efforts since opening our renovated arts center have been excellent. For the fourth consecutive fiscal year we have been able to expand audiences, student enrollment and membership, resulting in a positive projected year-end balance. We are proud that once again the ACP has been awarded a Citation of Excellence by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts and we have been designated a Major Arts Organization for the state. Last year the Arts Council received the Governor's Award for Excellence in Arts Education. In addition, for the second consecutive year, the ACP received Discover Jersey Arts' People's Choice Award for the Favorite Art Gallery in the state.

In spite of our recent successes, however, the ACP still faces financial challenges. These include sustaining our free programs given the continued decrease in foundation and government grant funds and the reality that we receive no local government funding. There is also the more immediate burden of a mortgage debt. Our "Burn the Mortgage" Campaign, started in early 2011 to raise \$2 million to retire the mortgage, is not yet complete and this financial challenge must be met in order for the ACP to attain the financial stability necessary to continue programmatic expansion – especially in continuing to provide the free and low cost programming that is so important for the W-J Neighborhood and the growing diversity of the local community. The remaining balance to achieve our \$2 million goal is \$750,000 and this is where we are focusing our current development energy.

During the fall the Arts Council experienced a significant interruption in services and programs because of Hurricane Sandy. The storm destroyed power and phone lines, along with trees, adjacent to our site. We were without power or phones for eight days but our staff was able to operate on a limited basis because of the generosity of the Princeton Public Library who provided an office space for us to use temporarily. Once we had power restored we then discovered that our computer system was down and our server had been severely damaged by a power surge (27,000 volts according to PSE&G). It took more than another week for our email and online registration and payment functions to be operational again which means we were unable to function normally for over two weeks. Although this emergency forced us to cancel and reschedule a number of programs including classes, workshops and special events, the experience also proved that we have a tough, creative and resilient staff, and a supportive and dedicated community.

The importance of the arts and quality arts education for a community cannot be underestimated. Nationally studies conducted over the past twenty-five years substantiate that the arts provide one of the most effective methods of increasing academic achievement and literacy in all students. With that important fact in mind we have continued to provide free afterschool and in-school educational opportunities for 120 – 160 students per week through our partnerships with Princeton Nursery School, Princeton Young Achievers, local schools, and HomeFront.

The arts also function as a powerful engine for economic development. National studies by Americans for the Arts indicate that the arts nationally are a \$166.2 billion industry. To determine the exact amount of economic activity generated by local arts in the Princeton economy, the Arts Council led the local arts community in the Arts and Economic Prosperity Study. With additional support provided by Princeton University and the Princeton Regional Chamber of Commerce, the study was completed last June and states that the 16 arts organizations based in Princeton collectively generate a remarkable \$51 million and employ close to 2100 full time employees.

As reported previously, the ACP has also worked to establish an endowment fund to ensure the future stability of its programs. The cornerstone contribution for our endowment was a \$250,000 Legacy Grant awarded in late 2007 by the J. Seward Johnson Sr. 1963 Charitable Trust which produces income specifically for W-J Neighborhood programs. In 2011 we received our second major endowment grant of \$150,000 from the Charles Evans Foundation. The income is designated specifically to fund scholarships. In December 2012 we received a major \$700,000 grant from the Galbraith Trust for programs that serve disadvantaged youth.

### **W-J Neighborhood Representation**

The location of the ACP's Paul Robeson Center is ideal to serve to W-J neighborhood and the history of the location is relevant and important to keep present and alive. This is accomplished through the permanent exhibit "Neighborhood Portrait" which includes the W-J Neighborhood Quilt, created by Gail Mitchell with the assistance of a committee of neighborhood residents. A photography display of historic pictures from the archives of the Historical Society of Princeton was curated with the assistance of Shirley Satterfield and Eileen Morales. An additional photograph was added by a contribution from Hank Pannell. Finally, a plaque in the Robeson Center's Barbara Sigmund Lobby provides information about the legacy of Paul Robeson, with a statement by Shirley Satterfield.

During the year, in spite of economic challenges, we focused on increasing our capacity to serve local Princeton residents, particularly members of the W-J Neighborhood. We have managed to continue to provide consistently excellent programs that enhance and benefit residents of the W-J Neighborhood. In order to be responsive and relevant to neighborhood needs, during the past year we have had three neighborhood residents serving on our board of trustees: Gail Everett, Orlando Fuquen, and Jim Floyd, Jr. (who recently ended his term). In addition, we are pleased to count three current and former neighborhood residents as staff members. Maria Evans, a long time ACP employee and neighborhood resident, serves as our Artistic Director, organizing and coordinating community events, our gallery and outreach programs. Stephanie Nazario, the ACP Financial Manager, grew up in the neighborhood and continues to live just a few blocks away. Our staff member, Kim Webber, who has now worked for the ACP for over two years, grew up in the neighborhood and continues to live on Clay Street. In addition, regular volunteer shifts are worked by several neighborhood residents who volunteer at the ACP's reception desk, help at events, and assist in classrooms. Although this report is designed to primarily cover our activities as they relate to the W-J Neighborhood, we also deem it relevant to include a number of important achievements that positively impact the entire Princeton Community.

## **SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES: May 2012- April 2013**

During this past year the Arts Council produced numerous events, and many of them were well attended by neighborhood residents. We attribute much of the success in event attendance to placing announcements in local church bulletins, actively participating in local groups such as the Youth Concerns Committee, the Black History Month Planning Committee, and by producing some of our flyers in Spanish as well as English. Funding for our free programs for the W-J Neighborhood was provided largely by income received from the investment of the Johnson Charitable Trust grant. This funding allowed for us to partially cover the expenses of the "free" programs listed below and allowed us to offer free admission to W-J Neighborhood residents for ticketed concerts. Over thirty residents were able to access concerts during fall and winter, including a recent dynamic Paul Robeson Legacy concert by the Grace Little Band. Additional funding for free community programs was provided by Target and Novo Nordisk.

### **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 Tyco, Horizon Foundation, 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 40 – 50 students two days per week. Four artists worked with 75 – 90 PYA students per week in our Creative Fridays program.

We also continued to offer programs for PYA youth beyond traditional visual arts. We provided music workshops through the Robeson Community Music Series, supported by Wachovia Wells Fargo and ET Cone Foundation grants. During the summer we provided a week long intensive poetry and music workshop series for teens.

### **"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. Kids at Work is funded through a grant from the Gartenberg Family Fund. The students mostly came from Community Park and John Witherspoon Schools (some classes also came from Riverside, Littlebrook and Johnson Park).

### **Annual Community Play**

Collaborating with Stone Soup Circus and Princeton Theatre Experiment, the Community Play put on four public performances of an original play and used local sponsors for funding such as small world coffee, Jazams Toy Store, Ace Hardware, Halo Pub and more.

### **PHS Community Service Group**

For the fourth consecutive year a group of 15 – 20 high school students volunteered at many of our events throughout the school year.

### **Witherspoon Middle School Tours**

In September, for the fifth 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 6<sup>th</sup> grade students from John Witherspoon Middle School. This tour program is now a regular activity designed to introduce students to the facilities and programs offered by both the Arts Council and the Library.

### **Martin Luther King Day,**

Our annual collaboration for MLK Day was offered as a partnership with KidsBridge of Trenton, and The Historical Society of Princeton. We provided activities that taught

tolerance, civil rights history, and the lessons of Dr. King for all ages. The afternoon of free art-making attracted over 250 people including dozens of neighborhood children.

### **Black History Month**

Our February programming included a sculpture workshop by artist Mike Gyampo, a family art making workshop and a gallery talk by exhibiting artist Ben Colbert.

### **Cinco de Mayo**

Our annual Cinco de Mayo celebration was offered again as a collaboration with the Princeton Public Library. Hundreds came out to celebrate Mexico's Cinco de Mayo with art making and folk dancing by Princeton University's Ballet Folklorico de Mexico dance troupe.

### **"Continuum" Mural Project – Artist in Residence Illia Barger**

The mural, "Continuum" painted by Illia Barger on the wall of the Terra Momo Bread Company in spring 2012, commemorates three collaborative temporary public art installations located in empty lots on Paul Robeson Place between 2002-2009: Herban Garden, Writers Block and Quark Park. The muralist, Illia Barger, was the ACP's Anne Reeves Artist in Residence.

### **September Open House at the Robeson Center**

Our annual Open House event featured art making, dance performances, circus entertainers, 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.

**Hometown Halloween Parade:** In October we held our annual parade through downtown Princeton featuring the Princeton University marching band. We partnered with the Princeton Public Library and the parade marched from Palmer Square to Hinds Plaza where we featured music by the Kaleidoscope Band. The large crowd was estimated at over 1500.

### **Artist in Residence – Nancy Shill**

During spring 2013 our Artist in Residence, Nancy Shill is working with a crew of volunteers to collect material from the community to include in a community collage mural project. The mural, entitled "Princeton Mix" will celebrate our consolidated town and will be installed on a wall in Witherspoon Hall.

### **"What's up Princeton" Programs for Teens**

Now in its third year, the Arts Council, along with the Princeton Public Library, HiTops, Corner House, and the Recreation Department, has partnered on "What's Up Princeton," a collective effort to increase programs for teens. Recently the Arts Council hosted a teen open mic night in which numerous high school students shared their talents by performing. Coming up in June What's Up Princeton will present the third annual Battle of the Bands on Albert Hinds Plaza. Collaboratively we plan quarterly teen events hosted by the Arts Council, the Library and the Recreation Department.

### **Creative Aging Programs for Seniors**

The Arts Council received a Church and Dwight Employee Giving Fund grant to continue our Art for Caregivers program, designed to assist family members and professional caregivers with creative projects specifically for seniors. With a grant from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts we also ran a program for seniors in partnership with Brandywine, Elm Court, and Stonebridge Assisted Living residences. For the second consecutive year we are sending artist Eva Mantell weekly to work with seniors in the Acute Care for the Elderly Unit at the Princeton Medical Center. And, last year we were host to a training session for over fifty artists in partnership with the National Center for Creative Aging (a Washington DC agency funded by the National Endowment for the Arts).

**COMMUNIVERSITY Festival of the Arts:** On the last Saturday in April Princeton's annual festival of the arts was held once again in downtown Princeton, organized by the Arts Council with participation from the students of Princeton University. It had an estimated attendance of close to 40,000. The festival featured artists, musicians, performers, crafters, merchants and food vendors, nonprofit and student organizations, and numerous free activities for children. A highlight was a Bollywood style "flash performance" organized by ACP instructor Uma Kapoor. As mentioned earlier, this year's Communiversity will take place on Sunday, April 28.

**Scholarships:**

During the summer we provided scholarships for W-J Neighborhood children so they could attend summer art and drama camp, which we held offsite at the Princeton Junior School. The campers' artwork was featured in an end of the summer exhibition at the Robeson Center. During the summer and through the school year the Arts Council provided scholarships to 74 students with a total value of \$14,862. Eight students from the neighborhood received scholarships valued at \$1,330. Scholarships are funded through our George Dale and Waxwood Scholarship Funds and by a grant from the Evans Foundation. As reported last year, we received a \$100,000 grant from the Charles Evans Foundation to establish a new scholarship endowment fund that provided five high school students with free art classes during the year. We also received another \$50,000 from this foundation so we are able to provide scholarships to more students in the current year.

**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 150 to over 600.

**Street Party:** In September the Arts Council again participated in the annual Jazams street fair. We made crowns with the kids and had a photo booth, which was a huge hit.

**Princeton ArtWalk:** In collaboration with the Princeton University Art Museum, the ACP has helped to organize quarterly "ArtWalks" since fall 2011. These events have included art venues and related businesses and draw hundreds of art lovers to downtown Princeton on a Thursday night. the next scheduled ArtWalk is on May 2nd.

**Additional Community Events at the Paul Robeson Center for the Arts:**

In addition to the activities listed above, the Arts Council was host to a wide range of events from meetings to non-profit benefits. Included were: Princeton Area Arts and Culture Consortium bi-monthly meetings; Monthly Youth Concerns Committee meetings; Christmas Eve Caroling on Palmer Square; Behind the Music event with the Princeton Symphony; annual Valentine's workshop; and a series of concerts, films, and exhibition openings. Additionally, throughout the year community groups and families used our facility for meetings, benefits and events including: HiTops, Habitat for Humanity, Princeton Symphony, bar mtizvah parties, a baby shower and many more.

**Conclusion:** This has been another year of improvement and growth for the Arts Council of Princeton, as well as a time to strategize in the face of economic challenges. The ACP has successfully managed to maintain a high level of service to the community while working to stabilize the organization's operations. We look forward to improving and expanding our programs for the Witherspoon-Jackson Neighborhood and to continuing to serve the greater Princeton community.

Submitted by: Jeff Nathanson, Executive Director  
April 22, 2013