



ARTS COUNCIL OF  
PRINCETON

## Neighborhood and Community Report April 2014



*Arts Council of Princeton Spanish dance students perform on the Paul Robeson Center's Terrace at the Free Fall Open House in September 2013.*

### **Introduction**

We are pleased to present this report on the Arts Council of Princeton's programs for the Princeton community and activities related to the Witherspoon-Jackson (W-J) Neighborhood. This report covers the year since the presentation of our last Neighborhood Report in April 2013.

The non-profit Arts Council of Princeton (ACP) has grown tremendously over the past six years, since opening the renovated and expanded Paul Robeson Center for the Arts in 2008. We have more than doubled our student enrollment, membership and overall programming during this time. Our current operating budget of \$1.5 million is well over twice the ACP's operating budget in 2007; however, in order to successfully deliver the scope of programming we provide to the community during the year, we must raise roughly 50% of our operating

budget through private, foundation and corporate donations, as well as through fundraising events. Needless to say, the climate for fundraising has been difficult in recent years, and the ACP, like all non-profit organizations, has had to work harder to raise the funds necessary to keep our doors open and expand programming to meet community demand. It has been particularly challenging for the ACP because of the high number of free and low cost programs we offer. We are grateful to our many members and donors, but we need to expand and strengthen our base of support.

Additionally, in order to deliver the scope and number of programs we produce, we rely on an army of over 350 volunteers who log in over 3,000 hours annually. We also rely on the generosity of in-kind donors, including police and public works services, without whose support we would not be able to produce our many free public events. The largest of those is *Communiversy Festival of the Arts*, coming up on April 27<sup>th</sup>. The Arts Council is clearly central to cultural life in Princeton, with over 50,000 people served by our programs throughout the year.

### **Background**

The Arts Council of Princeton was founded as an independent nonprofit organization in 1967 and for many years served as an advisory council to the 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 was renamed *Communiversy* in the early 1980s. For this year's *Communiversy Festival of the Arts*, we anticipate a crowd of over 40,000. This major event has grown over the years to be the largest annual cultural event in our region. We are grateful to the town of Princeton and the students of Princeton University who are partners in presenting this signature event.

The ACP has operated at 102 Witherspoon Street since 1982. In 2008, the ACP re-opened the renovated and expanded Paul Robeson Center, designed by Princeton architect Michael Graves. The Robeson Center serves the community with studio space for education programs including visual arts, photography, digital arts, ceramics, literary and performing arts. Its gallery has been named Favorite Art Gallery for three consecutive years by the Discover Jersey Arts People's Choice Awards; the ACP received the 2012 Governor's Award for Excellence in Arts Education; and, for multiple years, the NJ State Council on the Arts has awarded the ACP its Citation of Excellence. The ACP's Solley Theater, located on the Robeson Center's second floor, has been the venue for countless professional and student concerts, plays, readings, rehearsals and classes. Without a doubt, the Robeson Center has become an important and invaluable location for community performances, meetings, gatherings and events.

As successful as the ACP has been in managing and programming the Robeson Center, we have been equally successful in the expansion of ACP programs in the community. These programs have included free after-school art classes in partnership with Princeton Young Achievers, free art sessions 2-3 times a week at the Princeton Nursery School, and free community events such as the annual Hometown Halloween Parade, Black History Month events, Martin Luther King, Jr. events, Cinco de Mayo and Day of the Dead events. Perhaps most visible to residents and visitors to Princeton is the Arts Council's largest public art project, the mural "Continuum," by artist Illia Barger on the wall of the Terra Momo Bread Company. Completed in spring 2012, the mural 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 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.

As reported last year, the arts also function as a powerful engine for economic development. The Arts Council led the local arts community in the Arts and Economic Prosperity Study in 2012. With additional support provided by Princeton University and the Princeton Regional Chamber of Commerce, the Arts and Economic Prosperity Study reported that the 16 arts organizations based in Princeton collectively generated a remarkable \$51 million in economic activity and employ close to 2100 full-time employees.

In an ongoing effort to achieve greater financial stability, the ACP has worked to establish an endowment fund to ensure the future 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 from this endowment fund is designated specifically for scholarships. In December 2012 and in November 2013, we received two gifts totaling \$700,000 from the Galbraith Trust for programs that serve disadvantaged youth.

### **Programs and Events 2013/14**

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, even as we are engaged in the process of updating the Strategic Plan. For the fifth consecutive fiscal year we have been able to expand audiences and student enrollment, resulting in a positive projected year-end balance for the fifth consecutive year.

During this past year, the Arts Council produced numerous successful events. We attribute much of the success in event attendance to distributing announcements through our network of community and neighborhood volunteers, through committee and board members who belong to local churches and community organizations, and actively participating in local groups such as the Youth Concerns Committee, the Princeton Merchants Association, the Princeton Area Arts and Culture Consortium, and the Princeton Regional Chamber of Commerce.

Many free programs and scholarships are provided for the benefit of members of the Witherspoon-Jackson Neighborhood. 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. Additional funding for free community programs was provided by 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 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.

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 Wells Fargo and ET Cone Foundation grants. During the fall, we provided a ten week-long intensive spoken word and music workshop series for teens, in partnership with Corner House, Princeton and LifeTies, Trenton.

**"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 was funded this past year through grants from Target and Debbie Gartenberg. The students mostly came from Community Park and John Witherspoon Schools (some classes also came from Riverside, Littlebrook and Johnson Park schools).

**PHS Community Service Group:** For the fifth consecutive year, a group of 15 – 20 Princeton High School students volunteered at many of our events throughout the school year.

**Witherspoon Middle School Tours:** In September, for the sixth 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.

**Creative Aging and Arts in Healthcare Programs:** 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 third 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. This program recently received approval and additional funding from Princeton Healthcare to expand the program. In addition, we have been sending an artist weekly to Elm Court to work with seniors.

**Cinco de Mayo:** Our annual Cinco de Mayo celebration was offered again as a collaboration with the Princeton Public Library on Hinds Plaza. Hundreds came out to celebrate Mexico's Cinco de Mayo with art-making, a piñata, and an appearance by "Frida Kahlo."

**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 26<sup>th</sup> year of this annual publication formerly titled "UnderAge."

**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.

**Hometown Halloween Parade:** In October, we held our annual parade through downtown Princeton featuring the Princeton University marching band. We began the parade on Hinds Plaza and marched to Palmer Square, where we held a costume contest, complete with artist designed "applause-o-meter" and prizes contributed by local businesses. The large crowd was estimated at over 1500.

**"What's up Princeton" Programs:** Now in its fourth 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.

Last spring, the Arts Council hosted a Teen Open Mic Night and the third annual Battle of the Bands, in which numerous high school students shared their talents by performing (the next Teen Open Mic Night is scheduled for May 2<sup>nd</sup>.)

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

**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 new owner of the Shopping Center, has been very supportive in continuing the series.

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

**After-School Teen Programming:** Last fall, we piloted a new after-school program for teens. Called "Junk Jam," it was a collaboration with Corner House (Princeton) and LifeTies (Trenton). Students in the program spent ten weeks in after-school sessions writing poetry and developing a spoken word and music program that was presented in a final performance to family and friends at the ACP's temporary Pop-Up Studio at the Princeton Shopping Center.

**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 for all ages. The afternoon of free art-making attracted over 200 people including dozens of neighborhood children.

**Annual Community Play:** The Arts Council sponsored the Princeton Variety Theatre's (a new collaboration of members of Stone Soup Circus and Princeton Theater Experiment) Community Play in February 2014. The company presented three sold-out public performances of an original interpretation of "Jack and the Beanstock" in the 150-seat theater at Stuart Country Day School. Over thirty community members participated in the production, including Mayor Liz Lempert. Local sponsors who provided funding included small world coffee, Jazams, Ace Hardware, Halo Pub and more.

**Black History Month:** Our February programming featured a screening of the film "The Princeton Plan: Fifty Years Later" hosted by Princeton historian Shirley Satterfield, who moderated a lively discussion following the film.

**Paul Robeson Birthday Event:** Earlier this month, in celebration of Paul Robeson's 116<sup>th</sup> 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.

**COMMUNIVERSITY Festival of the Arts:** 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 municipality of Princeton. The police estimated attendance of 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 27.

**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 with a total value of \$14,276 to 76 students. Three students from the neighborhood received scholarships valued at \$320 from the Waxwood Scholarship Fund and eight additional students from the neighborhood received scholarships valued at \$1,330. 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.

**Additional Community Events at the Paul Robeson Center and beyond:**

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 meetings; Monthly Youth Concerns Committee meetings; Christmas Eve Caroling on Palmer Square; Behind the Music events 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 mitzvah parties, a baby shower and much more.

**New Programs and Initiatives**

**Public Art:** The ACP, building on the successes of its previous public art projects, is planning for two public projects in the coming two years. A mosaic mural by local artist Antonio Seldon is being planned for a wall on the corner of John and Leigh Streets in the W-J Neighborhood. Work has already begun on the design.

A larger, and more involved project is being planned for the AvalonBay development on the former hospital site. AvalonBay has commissioned the ACP to design an art-themed construction fence which will be installed 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 planned to go out shortly after the approvals for the project are finalized. The plan is to create a small artist-designed community park on the corner of Witherspoon and Franklin. The concept is to create a "sense of place" at the site for families and the general public.

**CAPS (Community Art and Performance Sessions):** CAPS is an after-school program for teens that has been developed in partnership with Corner House, as a continuation of the Junk Jam pilot that ran last fall. Teens are meeting this spring in ten after-school sessions learning to write and perform original music. A final concert is scheduled in May in the Solley Theater at the Paul Robeson Center.

**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, have recently begun sending an artist to Carrier Clinic psychiatric hospital, 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 is scheduled for Communiversity weekend.

**Afterschool Art Club:** This spring, the Arts Council is running a pilot “Art Club” afterschool program at Riverside School. Our goal was to have twenty students sign up for afterschool art sessions, but to date over thirty have signed up. This new program is intended as a model for similar afterschool programs that could be offered at other district schools.

### **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, we worked on increasing our capacity to serve local Princeton residents, particularly members of the W-J Neighborhood, many of whom attended Arts Council events and participated in programs. We have managed 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 individuals with neighborhood connections serving on our board of trustees: Gail Everett and Orlando Fuquen, who are neighborhood residents, and Ben Colbert, who is co-chair of the Robeson House board and is a former W-J neighborhood resident. In addition, we are pleased to count two 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. 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.

### **Conclusion**

In spite of our many recent successes, the ACP still faces challenges. The ability to continue to deliver free programs has been challenged by the continued decrease in foundation and government grant funds and the reality that we receive no local government funding. In addition, we are closing in on paying off our mortgage through the “5 in 5” Campaign, started in 2009, but still have over \$700,000 to raise. Our goal is to pay off the mortgage this year and then to focus on the fundraising necessary to maintain and increase our capacity to more effectively serve the community through continued and expanded free and low cost programs.

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

Submitted by: Jeff Nathanson, Executive Director  
April 18, 2014