

Arts and Entertainment

Group examines future state of the arts

by Adam Eshleman

Often, when the economy goes to war on a people, the arts are the first casualty.

Yet, months before anyone could believe how rough it would get, a campus group launched the Arts in Public Life project to focus on the role of art in this community. The group plans to raise community awareness with regard to the arts, to ensure they will continue to flourish throughout the region even during the tough times.

In December, AIPL hosted a public symposium, titled "Live Arts/Downtown Life," at Webster's Bookstore in State College to begin a preliminary discussion of art in Centre County. About 30 community members and representatives of regional organizations attended.

"We started to lay out what we all thought was happening, what some of the benefits and opportunities were and also what some of what the difficulties were," said Gabeba Baderoon, leader of the AIPL project funded by the Penn State Institute for the Arts and Humanities. "It was a way of creating channels of communication and also a basis

for future activities," she said.

"It was very exciting," said Elaine Meder-Wilgus, owner of Webster's. "We had an amazing mix of people from different backgrounds with different ideas."

Mike Negra, executive director of the State Theatre, came to discuss the importance of his theater as a community asset and its role as a "facilitator of other people's dreams."

"I liked it because all these people that are interested in the arts as a whole, which I personally believe holds a big key to the future of downtown State College, were all in one room, thinking towards how we can attract audiences and how we can offer alternative art forms and maintain venues such as the State Theatre," Negra said later.

The State Theatre, Negra said, serves as a "hub of community performing arts for



Gabeba Baderoon

State College, and Centre County as well," because it draws both national and local acts.

"I'd love to see more local acts in the State Theatre, but right now it's a problem of economics," Negra said of the future. He also said he'd like to have local charities, such as THON, use the theater for fundraising events.

Arts groups were not the only ones at the meeting. The State College Downtown Improvement District—a group dedicated to ensuring the prosperity of State College—also has a stake in the future of regional arts. At the meeting, the group's new executive director, Jody Alessandrino, delivered a presentation detailing the economic advantages offered by a vibrant art scene.

Alessandrino said people who prefer to shop downtown appreciate the arts as well.

"When you're talking about downtowns, and you're talking about offering variety of appeals, that goes hand in glove with having a variety of artistic disciplines," he said after the symposium. "It's natural for us to be a part of any initiative to promote the arts."

State College Mayor Bill Welch also

"Much of a satisfying life, I think, is art; the making of it if you can, the savoring of it if you can't."

--Bill Welch,
Mayor of State College

attended the symposium.

"I was simply there to hear what folks had to say and offer my couple of comments based on being the oldest living inhabitant," he said with a laugh. "This was all very preliminary, with the aim of should a group be formed and who would it be."

Welch added that public art installations such as the murals and sculptures in downtown State College could be more visible. He said he'd like to see the "First Thursday" program, which promotes public art events the first Thursday of every month, expanded into an institution that features events

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Galaxy provides schools stellar art class enrichment

by Natalie Ferrigno

In a time of budget crunches and strict academic guidelines, some public schools find it difficult to keep arts programs alive. The Galaxy Program for the Arts, which has an office in State College, has been working for the past 33 years to help out, namely through their artist-in-residency program.

Galaxy currently benefits an estimated 20,000 K-12 students in Centre, Clearfield, and Clinton Counties. While similar programs existed before, none were as substantial as the ones happening today.

Program Director Jennene Lundy explained artists of any discipline can work in a school for 10 or more days as an individual or five or more days as a group.

Galaxy currently benefits approximately 20,000 K-12 students in Centre, Clearfield, and Clinton Counties.

"Unfortunately, the arts are too easily discounted," said Lundy, referring to the lack of attention many public schools give to music, theatre, dance, literature, and visual



Photo courtesy of Galaxy Program
During a multiple-day artists in residency, students use clay to tell a story.

arts.

Lundy has been working for Galaxy, a non-profit run by Central Intermediate Unit

10, for the past 13 years. CIU 10 is one of 29 Intermediate Units here in Pennsylvania. The units are links between school districts and the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

Galaxy also has a partnership with the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, which has provided grants to support the residency programs.

The artists involved with Galaxy find the experience rewarding.

"We have a wonderful group of talented and dedicated artists," Assistant Director Stephanie Hosier said, noting that many of them are full-time, professional artists. "Our artists are willing to travel sometimes an hour and a half both ways to get to these schools to spend an hour, three hours, four hours interacting with diverse populations."

Artists also work together to help students gain self-confidence.

Dancer and choreographer Ann Van Kuren of State College has been working with Galaxy for several years. Through the

program, she met storytelling artist Jan Kinney and has been collaborating with her since.

A couple of years ago Kuren and Kinney worked with a group of students at Park Forest Middle School. At first, Kuren was concerned that self-consciousness would hinder students. However, she and Kinney persisted and were met with stunning results.

The students' project was to split into three groups, tell a story written by a fellow group member, and then dance the story of another group. One group had to dance the story of a sheriff's horse thought to be too slow to come to the rescue.

"I needed a way to visualize the story. [The students] were terrific," Kuren said. "I had them pass a movement to another person. They created their own movement and pointed to the next person, sort of like if you were to have a map. They were so sharp

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'Foxdale Miscellany' allows retirees creative literary outlet

by Lindsay Chew

For some people, retirement might mean long afternoons knitting and evenings of "Murder She Wrote" reruns. But for the writers of the *Foxdale Miscellany* life is full of exciting new literary exploration.

The *Foxdale Miscellany* is an all-volunteer publication produced and distributed within the Foxdale Village Retirement Community in State College.

Ranging from retired English teachers to retired lieutenants of the U.S. Navy, the writing staff of the *Miscellany* brings to life this quarterly publication with short essays, short personal narratives and poetry. The publication also includes children's stories as well as pet profiles, creating a surprise for the reader every issue.

"Miscellany really *means* miscellany," said Charlotte de Lissovoy, a writer, copy editor, and typist for the *Miscellany*.

The *Miscellany* staff builds an atmosphere of community between all the residents at Foxdale by abiding by a mission statement that facilitates the sharing of thoughts, ideas, and feelings in creative

works, as well as inspiring every resident to take up a pen and let their creative writing skills come to life.

"It is a nutritional atmosphere," said William Tomb, a regular contributor.

The staff meets the fourth Monday of every month to read their pieces aloud and help one another improve.

"We all make suggestions and we'll all talk about it," said de Lissovoy.

"When we started out, there was no editing," said Bunny Moon, a writer. "And now we proofread again and again."

Such a thorough editing process would not have been set in place without the guidance of de Lissovoy. Acting as a backbone for the *Miscellany*, de Lissovoy a retired English teacher, has taken a leadership role in the *Miscellany*. Not only does she writes for every issue but also proofreads, types and edits the publication.

"She takes a story, prunes it, changes it, develops it," said Tomb.

Not all the writers for the *Miscellany* intended to become writers when they joined the Foxdale community.



Photo by Lindsay Chew

Members of *Miscellany* writing staff collaborate on stories. From left to right: Bunny Moon, Amy Weber Paul Bixby, Charlotte de Lissovoy and William Tomb.

Paul Bixby, Foxdale resident, familiar to most *Miscellany* readers, had no intentions of writing.

Bixby said he started when a university

student came to Foxdale looking for anyone

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Penn State Downtown Theatre augments art community

by Bridget Monaghan

With its bright white lights beaming on College Avenue, the State Theatre stands as a prominent community performing arts venue. But downtown State College offers another gem of the performing arts world hidden a few blocks away and around the corner.

The Penn State Downtown Theatre Center, nestled modestly among the businesses on South Allen Street, continues to differentiate itself from the State Theatre said Rob Schneider, a theater director and Penn State graduate student.

Schneider said although the theater is “constantly” busy on the inside, people pass it by because it’s tucked away and not a major, more visible venue.

“What people don’t know is that it’s really a small jewel box of a home for the arts,” he said.

Now in its fifth year—and launched well before the reopening of the State Theatre—the theater is the brainchild of Penn State President Graham Spanier.

“I felt some responsibility for the university to contribute to the growing entertainment corridor downtown and to help rejuvenate the viability of the downtown,” Spanier told *Voices* in an e-mail. “I was able to obtain private gifts to pay for the majority of costs, so I think it has been a success all around.”

Although the university already had two venues for its school of theater, Spanier said the existing theaters were located in dark, inaccessible areas of campus with limited parking.

“The fine and performing arts provide the soul of a community and a university and it is important to support and showcase them,” he said.

Dan Carter, a director for the school of theater, said a few members of his college

“[This] is the off off-Broadway theater of our dreams. It’s like 42nd Street in New York right here in State College.”

--Dan Carter, director

walked into an old, abandoned department store on Allen Street and walked out in an arrangement with the Woskob family—owners of the building—to renovate the space into a theater.

“It’s been very exciting and it’s a great compliment to the Playhouse Theatre and the Pavilion Theatre on campus,” Carter said. “[It] provides great entertainment, reveals another window of excellence to the broader community, and makes towns like State College a great place to live,” he said.

Schneider said because the theater only seats a scant 151 people, the intimate setting it offers sets it apart from any other theater downtown or on campus.

In fact, Schneider said the Penn State Downtown Theatre was the perfect setting for “A Man of No Importance,” a play he recently directed which was written for a small audience.

“When an audience is watching a show they are part of the story,” he said.

Some residents worried at the time it opened that downtown couldn’t support two venues. But Carter said Penn State Theatre does not compete with the State Theatre. They have different missions.

“We do a lot of long runs and they do short runs, but we are great friends,” he said. “They are our friends and neighbors and it has made it an even healthier downtown community.”



Photo by William Wellman

Professional actors perform “Lend me a Tenor” at the Penn State Downtown Theatre during a summer theater series.

Mike Negra, executive director of the State Theatre, agreed the two theaters aren’t in competition and even plan to co-present “Menopause the Musical” in July.

“They are an arm of Penn State during the school year and present a different brand of theater during the summer,” he said. “It all works together.”

While it may have fewer amenities than the other theaters in the area, the Penn State Downtown Theatre offers more than a few seats and a stage. Behind its doors, the theater hides the Woskob Family Gallery, a home for various art exhibitions and free entertainment during lunch hours.

The Penn State box office, where theatergoers can purchase tickets to nearly every Penn State event, is also located in the building.

Penn State’s School of Music frequently uses the Downtown Theatre for music events during the beginning of each semester. The space is also used for graduate acting programs throughout the year.

During the summer, the Pennsylvania Centre Stage theater program uses the venue to host professional performances, some featuring Broadway actors.

“It’s really exciting for a cast of graduate students to watch professionals in a professional setting,” he said.

Carter said the theater is similar to many of the places where students are likely to be working after graduation.

“The theater is the off off-Broadway theater of our dreams,” Carter said. “It’s like 42nd street in New York right here in State College.”



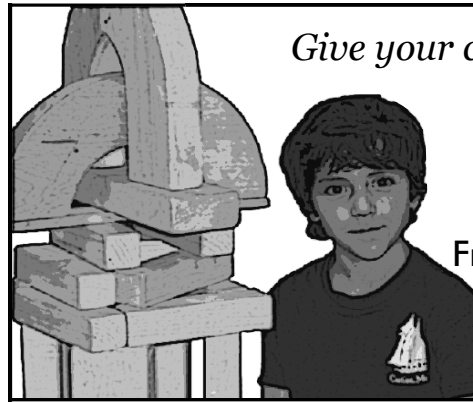
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more regularly.

"Much of a satisfying life, I think, is art; the making of it if you can, the savoring of it if you can't," he said. "It's always helpful to have these kinds of discussions."

Stimulating this kind of community discussion is a big part of AIPL's mission, but the project was formed for different reasons. Baderoon said she and her coorganizers Jonathan Eburne and Dorn Hetzel assembled this project as a response to the diminishing presence of art in the news media.

"Coverage of the arts has been very drastically affected by changes in the media industry," she said, adding that, nationwide, newspapers and other media have cut coverage of the arts in response to dwindling revenue. The group aims to begin discussions of this phenomenon, and in so doing, change the way we as a culture think about the arts.

"If we stop paying attention to the arts, they will slowly stop being a central part of our lives," she said. "I think that is going to be a huge and regrettable change for us all."

AIPL's next event will be Feb. 9 in 102 Kern Building, at Penn State. It will feature nationally recognized bloggers.

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with it...Nobody held back."

"Each school community has a different feeling," said Lundy, pointing out Galaxy artists enjoy working at a variety of schools.

Mostly, Lundy said, the artists "really enjoy the work because they know they're doing something good. They see results. Some of these experiences can be life-changing experiences for students. [They] develop confidence, discovering who they can be through a creative endeavor."

Lundy said many students who struggle in the so-called basic academics might find they excel in the arts.

Working with a storytelling artist, for instance, can help a student who dislikes reading take an interest in books. That same artist can help a shy student gain public speaking skills.

"Students will learn math concepts through dance or paper cutting, history through theatre, multi-culturalism through any of the art forms," Hosier said.

"[The program] is a win for students. It's a win in the educational realm. It's a win for teachers. It's a win for society," Lundy said.

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interested in walking with her as a part of a class assignment. Bixby volunteered and it because a regular habit to walk with her. However, once she graduated Bixby had no one to walk with.

"I tried to walk alone for a while...and started to think about things I could write about," said Bixby. "It has been fun. Some make sense, some don't...but I enjoy it all the same."

Others on the staff, however, came onto the *Miscellany* scene with a resume filled with previous experience.

Amy Weber, a retired secretary and writer, fell into place as a regular writer for the *Miscellany* when she moved into Foxdale. Weber, who wrote for her hometown paper in her youth, has applied those skills and painted the pages of the *Miscellany* with colorful detail and witty phrases.

"I was always interested in newspaper writing and that is how I learned to write," said Weber. "The five Ws in the first paragraph and go from there."

Many of the pieces found in the *Miscellany* come from the writers' personal

lives and experiences. The latest edition, titled "Historic Moments Relived," gave the entire community a chance to depict their memories through their pens and garnered a particularly strong response.

"We got stories from people that have never written before," said de Lissovoy. "It gives us more in depth awareness of each other."

Recalling a loved one's greatest attributes with a poem or remembering a personal hardship through a short narrative, the writers of the *Miscellany* allow themselves the share these memories with other residents.

"There is a lot of reminiscing," said Tomb, who explained that it is easy to say an event happened, but harder to explain what happened. It is how you saw the event that makes the difference, he said.

The memories of the residents bring the past to life in the *Miscellany*. The heart of the publication lies within each of these writers and their willingness to forgo their fear of sharing and to embrace their words.

"Your memories, as you get older get very sharp," said Bixby. "You may not remember the exact words but you remember the images. It is my memory...It may not be the same as the person next to me but it is what I remember."



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