

Editorial Commentary

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projects. But giving money is as far as they seem to want to go, they don't seem to provide central marketing or publicity - at least not for the visual arts - as there is no center place of information where you can go to find out what's being offered as far as exhibits go in Spartanburg, except maybe *Carolina Arts'* gallery listings, but like I've said, we can only tell you about what we know about by our deadline. And, Spartanburg has been one of my long time frustrations.

The Chapman Cultural Center also helped bring an award-winning light and digital media artist Erwin Redl to Spartanburg in 2016 to create nine public art installations, a temporary art project, funded by \$1 million from Bloomberg Philanthropies Public Art Challenge, but I could never get anyone there to send us a press release about the project.

Now all of the visual art venues in Spartanburg are not off our radar, some have been sending us info about their exhibits on a regular basis, such as the University of South Carolina Upstate, who run the Curtis R. Harley Art Gallery and the USC Upstate Outdoor Sculpture Collection (on campus) and the UPSTATE Gallery on Main (in downtown Spartanburg). USC Upstate is also a regular advertiser, which means they are the reason we can cover what's going on in Spartanburg - not the Chapman Cultural Center. Remember we are not a non-profit supported by any government agencies. And, we hear on a regular basis about exhibits taking place at the West Main Artists Cooperative in downtown Spartanburg. We hear from them courtesy of the former marketing guy at the Chapman Cultural Center, Steve Wong. They should have never let him go or gotten rid of him. And, sometimes we hear from a few of the other colleges in Spartanburg, but not on a regular basis. It all seems to depend on which of the art professors are responsible for the galleries each year.

Now that means each month we can tell our readers what's being offered at the two USC Upstate galleries, the West Main Artists Cooperative, which can present four exhibits at a time, and maybe one or two of the other galleries. But, here is a list of the other non-profit facilities offering or have offered exhibits at one time of another in Spartanburg:

The Milliken Art Gallery at Converse College (We just happened to get a press release from them this month, but we don't always.)

The Ellis Hall Gallery at Spartanburg Methodist College

The Martha Cloud Chapman Gallery at Wofford College

The new Rosalind Sallenger Richardson Center for the Arts at Wofford College, which has an art museum and two other gallery spaces

The Sandor Teszler Library Gallery at Wofford College

And, sometimes the Great Oaks Hall in the Roger Milliken Science Center at Wofford College

And then there is the The Johnson Collection Gallery

There are the AT&T Exhibition Lobby Gallery and the Upper Level Gallery at the Spartanburg County Public Libraries' Headquarters Library

And let's don't forget the facilities connected to the Chapman Cultural Center:

The Spartanburg Art Museum, which we hear from, from time to time.

The Artists' Guild of Spartanburg Gallery, which we no longer hear from.

The Stairway Gallery

The Student Exhibit Gallery

And, the Showroom at Hub-Bub, which is located on Morgan Avenue in downtown Spartanburg

And, recently I began hearing about the new Mayfair Art Studios, which the Chapman Cultural Center is developing, which when opened, will be a dynamic arts incubator in the Arcadia village of Spartanburg, bringing together a diverse constituency to learn about and make art, discover each other's cultures, and build a new, vibrant and economically sustainable community in Spartanburg County. It's projected to feature two new gallery spaces, that I may never hear from.

That's a lot of gallery spaces that we're not able to tell you what they are offering each month. We've heard from them all at one time or another, but not on a regular basis.

Now, here's the chicken or the egg question. Is it my responsibility to contact all these facilities and drag the info out of them or their responsibility to provide info to us? I'm covering the visual art communities in two states each month. I don't have time to track all these people down. And, I'm sure all these facilities listed above are getting funding from the Spartanburg community, some from the State of SC, and I'm sure a few from the Federal government, which in many cases means our tax dollars.

In my 31 years of offering a publication to all of these venues to publicize what they are offering to the public for free, I have come to the conclusion that they should be contacting me, and that any facility who receives funding from any public group - city, state, and national, or any commercial group - should be required to publicize what they are offering - every exhibit. And, that info should be offered to any outlet - print, broadcast, or internet, that wants it. I have never understood why anyone would organize an exhibit and then not publicize it. That's just stupid, but that's what's going on in SC and in Spartanburg. It's a secret that shouldn't be kept to themselves.

In 2015, the SC Arts Commission, SC's official state arts agency, awarded cultural district status to the City of Spartanburg for Downtown Spartanburg. It says, this area includes 21 indoor live performance venues; nine outdoor performance venues; 43 galleries or exhibit spaces; 38 murals and other public art displays; five museums; 64 studios and workshops; six historic sites; 15 green spaces and arboretums; 251 creative industry and cultural jobs; and 1,335 events and festivals open to the public.

And according to this claim, beyond the 16 art spaces I've mentioned here there are 27 others I'm not hearing from on a regular basis. So, things are worse than I think.

What's the point of this commentary? I've tried reaching out to Spartanburg, but they don't seem to be interested in responding - at least on a regular basis. I think the community is doing great things there and offering a lot of support, but some folks are not doing their job in promoting what they have there, and that's a shame. Tourism opportunities are being missed and locals are going uninformed. I've reached out, but now I'm calling Spartanburg out - "Are you doing all this, funding all this, for yourselves or are you hoping others will stumble upon your secret? I'm waiting to tell our readers your good news - don't hide it from the rest of us."

My last word on this problem is that things could be improved if there was a list of outlets willing to provide free info in their outlets in South Carolina. I put that responsibility on the shoulders of the SC Arts Commission. And, the problem in every organization out there where someone is doing marketing or publicity is that no one trains their replacement. So every time someone leaves that position, whether paid or a volunteer - that info is lost and

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it takes a lot of time before the new person can catch up - if they ever do. I've seen it happen hundreds of times and many times new people don't even know which outlets they should be dealing with. I can guarantee you that if this commentary is brought up at an art venue in Spartanburg, you're going to hear someone say - "I never heard of *Carolina Arts!*". And, all I can say to that is if you're working in the visual arts in SC and you haven't heard of us - who's fault is that? We've been doing this 31 years here - how long have you been in our visual art community?

The Flip Side

Some people have asked me if I'm an official agent for the pottery community in Seagrove, NC. My answer is usually - not technically. Those potters do support us with advertising, but the main reason you read so much about them in our publication or on our social media outlets, is that they keep us well informed. Seagrove is a small town in NC where close to 100 potters work - a tradition that has been going on in that community for many generations. There's not much else there, but that's OK. People who have discovered Seagrove fall in love with it and make lifelong connections. The Seagrove pottery community is no best kept secret. If you know pottery, you know Seagrove. It's called the Center of Pottery in North Carolina, but it's more like the center of the pottery community in the South. That didn't happen on its own, those potters learned long ago to tell their story, where ever and when ever they can. And that is key to their success - beside the talents of the artists making the pottery.

This large community of potters in a small community are very organized (most of the time). I say that because when I first heard about Seagrove the potters were having a fight over an old pottery festival - the community was split in half. Now, no event (with one exception - that one old festival) happens there that I'm not well informed of - in advance. That's why you've heard about them so

much from me and in our publication.

They're always ready to send or post beautiful photos of their works on social media and I share them. If I need something at the last minute, there are people I can contact and they'll respond with what I need - instantly.

Except for the dead of Winter, they have filled their yearly schedule with a host of events which are designed to bring pottery lovers into their community.

They spend money supporting *Carolina Arts* and I spent money with them by collecting pottery, but more importantly, they keep me informed and I return the favor by keeping our readers and followers on social media informed about what's going on in Seagrove. It's that simple.

Are You Part of a Best Kept Secret?

If after reading this, you feel like you, as an artist, an art gallery, a non-profit artspace or art museum, are part of a best kept secret, but you don't want to be - it's simple - create reasons for people to come check you out and inform us of those events, well in advance, so we can inform our readers.

Of course we'd love for you to advertise your events with us - advertising is how we exist, but your first step is to send us information, make contact, give us a call, or send an e-mail. You have to inform us, before we can inform anyone else.

We've got info posted on our website at (www.carolinaarts.com), just check out the section called, "How the Paper Works". We've got info there about what we need for gallery listings, press releases, and advertising.

Again, we're not a "you pay - you play" type of publication - sometimes I wish we were like most of the other publications, but we think it's more important to get the information for our readers, so you don't have to be an advertiser to get in *Carolina Arts*. Look, we treat our advertisers better than all the others, but that just makes sense.

So reach out to us - tell us and our readers your secret - we'll tell all we know. Carolina Arts, January 2019 - Page 5