

Society of Bluffton Artists

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then lived in Maine after retiring from the medical field. There, she rediscovered her passion for creating art, which stayed with her when she relocated to South Carolina. She is a member of SOBA, the Art League of Hilton Head and Beaufort Art Association.

The Society of Bluffton Artists (SOBA) is the heart of the flourishing art hub in Old Town Bluffton's historic district at the

Anderson Arts Center in Anderson, SC, Celebrates 50 Years

The Anderson Arts Center (AAC) got its start in 1972 through the vision and the backing of local philanthropist Callie Stringer Rainey with assistance from Elizabeth Belser Fuller. Originally called the Anderson County Arts Council, it was voted into existence on Sept. 26, 1972, at its founding meeting location of what was then Anderson College - now Anderson University - until it moved to the former public library which had newly vacated the downtown Carnegie Library, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



The historic Carnegie Library was the first home of the Anderson Arts Center. The Arts Center still owns this building. Photo by CT Weiss.

Improvements came quickly as staff pruned plywood off boarded-up windows in the rear of the building, tacked linen and carpeting on the walls, covered the fireplace, and removed the steam radiators. Donations from the community helped fund these improvements. Later, further gallery renovations came after a check for \$64,000 arrived, an unexpected gift from the estate of Maude Barton. Ms. Barton had actually worked across the street at the Calhoun Hotel when that building housed the Chamber of Commerce.

Many changes followed, including the launch of an endowment and the start of a permanent art collection. The number of exhibitions increased, donations for juried show awards grew, and fundraisers like the annual auction of art, items and services kicked off and grew steadily grander, with themes like "Club Hollywood" and "Fire and Ice." "Artlantis" featured a 50-ton sand sculpture and "Fire and Ice: A Glassical Affair" celebrated the art of Dale Chihuly, a world renowned glass artist. The décor included a replica glass ceiling honoring the Chihuly-created glass ceiling of the Bellagio Hotel in Las Vegas.



The Arts Center is known for offering exceptional programs for youth, including summer camps, After School Art Studio and Youth Art Month which reaches students throughout the entire county.

Programs for all ages were developed. Art camp has been a consistent summer-time highlight while a myriad of activities Page 12 - Carolina Arts, May 2022

corner of Church and Calhoun streets. As a non-profit art organization, SOBA offers regular art classes, featured artist shows, exhibitions, scholarships, outreach programs and more.

For further information check our SC Institutional Gallery listings, call the Society at 843/757-6586 or visit (www.sobagallery.com).

reached children during the academic year with artists-in-residence in their schools and the annual Youth Art Month display in March. Children and adults took advantage of the quarterly art school and artist residencies by bringing artists into the classrooms with performances and instruction in areas ranging from sculpture and dulcimer making to storytelling, weaving, and silk screening.

The heart of the AAC has always been its exhibits, which linger in the memory long after they end. One was a national traveling quilt show called "Memories of Childhood." It was timed to draw visitors during the Atlanta Olympics in 1996. The exhibit featured 50 baby-sized quilts along with weekly quilting bees to engage the public. Another notable exhibit featured artifacts of poet and writer Carl Sandburg and the works of his brother-in-law, photographer Edward Steichen, who has been credited with turning photography into an art form. The show featured black and white photographs by Steichen, accompanied by Sandburg furniture and family heirlooms. Local photographer Van Sullivan photographed the Sandburg home in Flat Rock, NC, to contribute to the exhibit. Lilian Sandburg was known for breeding goats, and the special guests at the opening were baby goats from Split Creek Farm.



The Arts Center's Annual Juried Show is now in its 47th year, and the current exhibition on view through May 20, 2022.

Other shows of note included a traveling exhibit of photographs by Ansel Adams and a Smithsonian show called "Please Touch" by artist Willa Shalit which showcased life castings of notable figures such as Whoopi Goldberg, Robin Williams, and Rosa Parks. Students from the South Carolina School for the Deaf and Blind attended the show and were able to experience this rare opportunity of physically touching artwork. The Arts Center's annual juried show is one of the largest in the state, and is currently on view for the 47th through May 20, 2022. This show has received upwards of 500 entries, and the most recent juried show awarded more than \$20,000 in prize money. A more recent exhibit focused on pop art, and another is planned to showcase the pottery fired in an anagama (wood-fired) kiln in Pendleton, SC. The pottery exhibit will also be featured on South Carolina Educational Television's "Palmetto Scene" — yet another example of the AAC's reach.

The Arts Center's influence has been felt downtown and throughout the county from its inception. Being an anchor of Main Street positioned the center not only visually but also as an oasis for in-house as well as public exhibits. The first public art project in Anderson was downtown banners for light poles designed by art teachers and painted by their students, with each school creating a different piece. After this success, the Anderson Artists Guild members also painted banners, making Anderson the first-ever city to have original works of

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art on banners. Another public art project was the two-year-long "Fish Out of Water: Hooked on Arts" display. Local artists decorated 32 large fiberglass-composite bass fish that were displayed around town and ultimately auctioned to raise funds for the Arts Center's new home: The Arts Center Warehouse. The project was so popular with the public that "Fish Out of Water 2" was launched and 30 more giant bass were released.

Another venture - this one permanent and well known to local citizens - is the downtown sculpture of William Church Whitner by Zan Wells. It honors the man responsible for bringing power to "The Electric City." The AAC secured funding from the Duke Energy Foundation, with the county installing the piece on Whitner Street near the courthouse - an illustration of the many partnerships the AAC has become known for fostering. An emphasis on outdoor art has continued with SculptTOUR, a part of the annual juried show. Artists are invited to submit entries for the honor of adding additional outdoor art to downtown.

Additional public art projects and collaborations continued, including the bronze Carolina wrens by Zan Wells placed throughout downtown to help tell stories of historical structures; the Mural on Main at the corner of Main and Orr streets designed by Anderson native Herman Keith, with dozens of volunteers help paint it; a community garden and mural project at the Arts Center; and the Church Street Heritage Project, an installation that tells the story of local black business pioneers. The park features story boxes by Scott Foster, Josh Davis, Sharon Jones, and Diann Simms. Stone benches created to look like people called "Story Tellers" were created by an internationally known sculptor from Colorado, Madeline Weiner.

The Warehouse



The iconic "tower" at the Anderson Arts Center Warehouse, which was renovated in 2005. This is the current location of Arts Center activities.

As programming grew, the AAC needed more space, as well as greater accessibility. The nearby P&N Railway warehouse, built in 1904 for railway storage, had long stood vacant. Located directly behind the Arts Center, it seemed to meet the AAC's needs perfectly. A capital campaign kicked off in 2001 and ultimately raised \$4.2 million for purchase and renovation of the warehouse. The Arts Center moved into the new location in 2006 and expanded into 33,000 square feet. This was the first private-public partnership in the community involving the Arts Center, the city and the county, and this collaboration served as a catalyst for downtown development. (The city maintains the parking lot, and the county built and operates a Farmers Market at the site.)

The warehouse houses not only the Arts Center but also leases to tenants, including The Market Theater, Visit Anderson, the Bay3 Artisan Gallery, Sounds of Carolina Music Academy, Renaissance Interiors, McKay Zorn & Associates Architects, and Living Hope Presbyterian Church. Gallery space is also rented out for special events such as weddings, receptions, and private parties.

With the new, larger home, the Arts Center's budget morphed from \$200,000 to \$400,000 and more. It truly became the cultural hub of downtown Anderson.

The Future

As the AAC celebrates its 50th year, it is stronger than ever. A new capital campaign aims to retire the remaining \$50,000 debt on the warehouse. Much needed maintenance has also been completed, with roof renovations, refinished gallery floors, and improved HVAC service.



The Anderson Arts Center is home to Bay 3 Artisan Gallery, a cooperative of 15 artists.

A master plan to study a renovation of the Historic Carnegie Library Building, which currently houses the AAC's permanent collection and is used for artist studio space and special event rentals, has received grant funding. The goal is to make better use of the space and incorporate it into the warehouse.

Fundraising still includes the annual auction, although it has been moved to August for less competition with other fall events and will now focus exclusively on artwork to better highlight the talent of the local art community. Additional fundraising includes a dinner wine tasting and an art market associated with the annual juried show.



A mural focusing on healthy eating painted on the Arts Center Warehouse, which is located beside the county farmer's market, is a new addition to public art coordinated by the Arts Center.

A new afterschool art studio offers classes for budding artists. A variety of classes are offered for adults as well. While the Anderson Arts Center hosts about ten shows a year in its main gallery, additional shows featuring younger and newer artists are held in the Atrium Gallery on the lower level to encourage their involvement and introduce them to the community.

Community outreach efforts have brought art to the Westside Community Center, an Alzheimer's disease respite program, and a special needs adult daycare group. The goal is to expose as many people as possible to the joys of art. Extra effort is also being made to make the Anderson Arts Center inviting and accessible for everyone.

At age 50, the Anderson Arts Center is more vibrant and inclusive than ever.

Leadership

The First Advisory Board included: Gayle Edwards, Elizabeth Wakefield, Mary Linne Otter, Sara Liverance, Callie Rainey, Bill Bridges, Herman Keith, and Dr. Cordell Maddox.

The First Board of Directors included: Roxanna Albury, Callie Rainey, Grady Kervin, and Mona Jorden.

The history of Executive Directors and their terms included: Jerald Melberg (1972-1974), Unknown at this time (1974-1976), Sue Parks (1976-1982), Don Crawford (1982), Carol Tokarski (1982-1984), Kim Richards (1984-1986), Diane Lee (1987-1993), Kimberly Spears (1994-2017), Leslie Lee (2018 Mar.-Sept.), and April Cameron (2018-Present).

Information for this article was gathered through research and interviews. We have presented the most accurate account of the history given the resources available at the time. If you have additional information to share, please contact April Cameron, current executive director, by e-mail at (aprilc@andersonarts.org).