

Diamond Delight

Beachwood Arts Council, a Northeast Ohio gem, celebrates 60th anniversary

By Noell Wollgram Evans

There is a time-honored trope in the movies of a group of plucky residents coming together to



Frankel

put on a show and save some community fixture. Sixty years ago, a variation on that idea played out in Beachwood. And we're still benefiting from their efforts today.

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Beachwood Arts Council is in the midst of celebrating its diamond jubilee. For 60 years, the organization has been supporting the arts community in Beachwood and beyond. Artist and board member Carolyn Frankel says she believes there is a simple reason for the longevity of the BAC.

"Art has the power to unite us," she says. "It's the soul of a society."

It all started on Oct. 25, 1964, when several Beachwood parents organized a fundraiser. The proceeds of that artistic-focused festival went to support the Beachwood High School PTA. This was the seed from which the Beachwood Arts Council grew.

The success of that first event convinced the group that Beachwood had an interest and appreciation for the arts that really hadn't been explored or harnessed up to that point. So they explored ways to meet that need.

"Those first members saw an arts organization as a way to create a sense of community," Paula Rollins, BAC president, says.

Those first proto-council meetings were held in members' homes, which was borne of necessity, but also provided opportunities for true community input around what people wanted to see next. By 1968, the foundation had been laid and they became an official nonprofit.

The group was given space inside of the original Beachwood Village Hall, where it stayed until 2007 when the organization moved to its now familiar home in the Beachwood Community Center.

Rollins says that the BAC's support of the arts has been possible thanks to a true "partnership" with the city.

"They have always been so supportive," she says. "Everything has been in-kind, including the use of the community center."

In that spirit of partnership, the BAC has provided the city with permanent art installations, including the sculpture *Family Suite* which was installed on Richmond Road in front of city hall in 1991.



Aurora High School senior Lauren Baka won first place with her charcoal artwork, "Persona" at the 29th annual Ileen Kelter Juried High School Art Show, hosted by the Beachwood Arts Council. Submitted photo

A TRUE CENTER FOR THE ARTS

The BAC is more than a space that exhibits work. It also holds workshops for adults and children, hosts musicians as part of its Sunday Sounds series and organizes tours to expose people to different types of art throughout the broader community. It visited local galleries, museums, artist studios, and recently toured Lake View Cemetery. While there is generally a small cost for off-site activities, most of the events that take place at the BAC are free.

"We are located in Beachwood, but we really represent all of Northeast Ohio," Rollins says. "I think Cleveland is such a wonderful cultural city. We try to take these opportunities to bring people closer to it."

Of course, if you do want to sit and enjoy a work of art, the BAC hosts four full shows a year. Two of those shows feature professional artists, one dedicated to local talent and the other to those with a national profile. An art exhibit committee selects those to be exhibited from a group that has been nominated, applied, or suggested. The process has resulted in exhibits of paintings, mixed media, pottery, illustration and more. The shows not only provide an opportunity for the community to experience new artistic styles, they also provide a unique opportunity for artists to experience the response their work elicits.

"I love explaining what's behind my paintings, so one of my favorite things about showing my work at the BAC is seeing someone have that ah-ha moment when they finally realize what a painting is all about," Frankel says.

Rollins adds, "We are always looking for ways to offer new artistic opportunities to a range of different people. We have a diverse population in our community and it's important that we try and promote our programming accordingly."

To illustrate that point, she calls out the recent rakhi bracelet making workshop that was held in February in honor of the Hindu celebration Raksha Bandhan.

CELEBRATING YOUNG ARTISTS

While two of the BACs yearly shows are dedicated to professional artists, the other two celebrate those just starting to explore their artistic talents.

The Beachwood Schools K-12 Art Show provides an opportunity for students in the district to perhaps have their artwork shown for the first time in a setting other than their parents' fridge.

"The BAC is very encouraging. It helps give artists visibility," Frankel



The interactive "Free Little Art Gallery" designed by Leah Gilbert, Lili Bosler and Arlyne Bochnek, invites visitors to place their own art or take a piece of art in the miniature gallery. Photo courtesy of Beachwood Arts Council

says. "It's a necessary organization that can foster local creativity."

For over 20 years the BAC has also hosted the Ileen Kelner Juried High School Art Show. That show is open to students who attend one of the 25 area high schools. The most recent show, which wrapped in March, featured nearly 100 pieces. In 2018, this traditional exhibition was renamed in honor of Ileen Kelner, past president of the BAC.

The BAC also is the custodian of the The Si and Shirley Wachsberger Arts Scholarship Award. This is a \$1,000 scholarship supported by the Wachsberger and the BAC and provided to a young artist on a rotating basis in the performance, visual, or musical arts.

FINDING NEW WAYS TO CONNECT THE COMMUNITY

All of the art at the Beachwood Art Gallery isn't hanging on the walls. You'll find some of it tucked inside of a box right outside the side door. There, visitors will find a delightful Free Little Art Gallery where anyone can pick up an artistic treasure for their home and aspiring artists can leave a piece of their own to share with the community. It's a way to get to what Rollins sees as one of the goals of the organization - "You have to experience art to become an artist."

"We need more venues like this," Frankel says. "I think every city should have an arts council." 🎨