

MINUTES
City of St Charles
Visitors Cultural Commission Meeting
Wednesday, April 24, 2024

1. Call to Order at 5:17 PM

2. Roll Call

Members Present: Anne Becker; Jodi Manthei; Suzie Remitz; Harvey Miller; Sharon Spero; Kathy Kortez; Jamie Swenson

Members Absent: Lori Stahulak; Sally Stancati

Also present: Bill Hannah, City of St. Charles; Carylie Forte, City of St. Charles

3. Approval of the Minutes of May 10, 2023

Becker asked for a Motion to Approve the Minutes from the May 10, 2023 meeting. Motion by Spero, seconded by Miller. The Minutes were unanimously approved by the board members present.

4. Public Comment – no public comment was offered

5. Presentations by organizations

Sculpture in the Park – Erika Young, representing the St Charles Parks Foundation, presented for Sculpture in the Park and showed video highlights of current sculptures. They are asking for an increase from their request last year due to the increase in stipends they are offering to the artists who are involved in this year's Sculpture in the Park project. Individual stipends are increasing from \$1,000 to \$1,500 per artist. Also, this is the first year that the program will be run year-round. In the past, the program has run from May to September. Feedback from participants has indicated that their involvement would be better served as a year-round program.

Sculpture in the Park is run annually in cooperation with the Parks Foundation and the St Charles Park District. The Park District funds the program as well as supplies the construction crew, marketing and recreation staff to assist during the run; the Parks Foundation is the key fundraiser for all the stipends for the artists. They have been very active this past year with fundraisers and marketing as part of their efforts to continue to draw interest to the annual event and to include new and emerging sculptural artists to produce a new piece for this event. Board member Remitz commented that she is on the board of the St Charles Education Foundation and would like to get more information from Young to spread the word on their social media to get more young people involved in this program.

Fox Valley Concert Band – Jan Mammaing presented. Thanked VCC for its past support and the opportunity to speak tonight. They're celebrating their 41st season this year and proud to continue to be doing what they do. They perform most of their season at the Norris Cultural Arts Center but also go to some local retirement communities and collaborate with middle school bands and with local artists. Their collaboration with middle school bands has been meaningful and rewarding to allow these students to perform on the Norris Center stage and show that this

can be a lifelong pursuit for a young performer. Final concert is May 5 entitled “Celebration Illinois”. They have no ticket sales so must generate revenue in other ways. They use their website technology more effectively and increased their presence on social media to help initiate donations. They again will perform at a Kane County Cougars game which helps to increase their exposure to a much wider audience. They have been performing as a group since 1984 and at St Charles venues every year since then. They value their relationship with the Norris Center and the St Charles Arts Council and believe the Fox Valley Concert Band contributes to the cultural and economic vitality of the city. Their operations and original formula of performing quality concert band literature gratis to the community still seems to work and continues to get musicians who want to perform and audiences eager to listen to this music. Generating revenue with no ticket sales is a challenge, but with individual donors and advertisers that come from the community, they have been able to sustain their longevity. Vital grant money from the Cultural Commission helps to keep them operating. Retaining their music director is key to making the band what it is and will continue to be so, going forward.

Fine Line Creative Arts Center – Executive Director, Lynn Caldwell presented. Thanked the commission for their continued support for many years now. They continue to look for ways to connect with St Charles and regional residents. The Great Orb Hunt in September 2023 was a huge success, with about 100 hand crafted Orbs hidden at Leroy Oakes and at the Fine Line prairie. This will happen again this September and will increase from 100 Orbs to 150 Orbs to be hidden for people to hunt for. The program brought in a large number of interested people and demonstrated how impactful art can be. The Fine Arts Festival is June 8 and is part of the Fox Valley Ramble with live music and 20 artists selling their wares. Cultural education is their mainstay and last year they offered more than 500 classes and over 1,800 students participated, up 20% from the previous year. They continue to have their weeklong class for the blind and visually impaired and other programs that benefit niche audiences. Last year they used radio to promote their holiday artist market. This proved to be a great way to connect to new audiences and this was the best show they ever had. They will continue to use that medium to advertise. After 45 years in the arts in this community they look forward to continuing to touch lives and create art and look forward to ways they can connect and build through the arts. Becker asked about their glassblowing studio. Caldwell said it is still going gangbusters and they’re the only facility doing glassblowing in the suburbs.

Kane Repertory Theater – Mary Kruse and Bethany Mangum presented. Community partnerships have been helping them to produce stage readings by area playwrights. Actors and writers brought to life some incredible original works. Hunt House Creative Arts Center was the venue for these “page to stage” performances. They will be making some major steps with their future works and one is starting the education leg of their theatre in the coming months of this year. Their first show for the spring opens next week and consider that they are a theater in a beautiful community, not a community theatre. Their goal is of bringing theater of a high caliber and high standards to Kane County and want people to experience that in the intimate settings where these are being performed. The performance venues are very “show specific” and are dictated by the nature and breadth of the show. Becker asked about their vision and partnership with Northern Illinois University. Plan on a collaboration with NIU interns and could start with their Shakespeare in the Park next summer, which would be performing, designing, stage management and assistant directing opportunities. Feel they need to be attached to a professional theater company in order to keep their accreditation in both the bachelor and master of fine arts. That is where KRT comes in and can provide that professional partnership that will benefit both entities.

Preservation Partners – Executive Director, Kelsey Shipton and Director of Durant House and Shoal School Museums, Debra Corwin presented. Preservation Partners is celebrating its 50th Anniversary this year as a non-profit educational organization. Their mission is to offer heritage

education and to promote the appreciation and preservation of the Fox Valley's architectural and historical resources. Special events showcase the two historical properties in St Charles, the Sholes School Museum and the Durant-Peterson House Museum. Their surveys in 2023 helped them to understand from those who responded that they spend money or visit a restaurant in the city in the act of visiting one of their sites. Theme events draw more attendees than just an open day at the museums. There are more events this year that they're developing to draw more visitors and community involvement. Their collaborations with other arts organizations in the city, makes them feel more connected to the community than ever before. Their involvement in Arts Council meetings and a partnership with Marquis Youth Stage, finding actors for their Christmas pageant, was a huge success. Norris Cultural Arts Center invited them to speak at their popular "Wednesdays at One" program and they're redoing landscaping at Sholes School House with the help of St Charles businesses involved in that work. Funding from the VCC is more important than ever since they are no longer hosting fundraising dinners or events as part of their fundraising strategy. The expenses associated with those events have become cost prohibitive. Admission fees are kept low but does not come close to operational costs. They have received permission from the Forest Preserve District to advertise the lawn outside Sholes School as a possible wedding venue, but need to develop this offering before actually advertising it to the public. They will be developing more event days to accommodate visitor interests and to host new private events and showcase special historical activities.

St. Charles Arts Council – Executive Director Kathy Hill presented. Concentrating on awareness of the arts the past year. The Fox River Valley student art show this year has had 215 entries, up from 165 last year, which is a great way to instill the arts in young people in the community. The Arts Council tries to serve as an umbrella to support and promote the arts organizations within the city. They send a weekly eBlast to their members on what local arts they can share each week. This is a great way to share what's going on with all the organizations with images of their current work and events. The signature event this year will be a Plein Air event and will be held Aug 19-25 in the city with a final night fundraiser at the Baker Community Center. This is a deep dive with \$5K in prizes with a goal to have 40 artists involved. They advertised nationwide and have the 40 artists, with 30 artists from outside of the local area. They will again partner with a writer who will create an arts Mystery event in October. Their collaborations with arts and cultural organizations have been generating more interest in the arts in St Charles on the whole.

Marquee Youth Stage (MYS) – Executive Director Connie Flores presented. Established in 2011 and dedicated to empowering youth for life. Their mission to broaden the reach and impact of theater so that students of all abilities, skills, ethnicities and economic backgrounds can benefit and increase the opportunities for theater, and inspire creativity and support, enrich and empower youth with skills and knowledge of how the arts can serve and influence the community at large. With the increase in productions and involvement of many more kids in the community, that has impacted their space demands and has prompted them to embark on the buildout of a new space. This will help to accommodate the increase in performers and allow their families to be able to attend more than one performance. "Newsies' Mamma Mia, and Wizard of Oz are just a few of the recent productions that the kids performed in. Their expansion will be the focus of the funding that is awarded by the Visitors Cultural Commission. HVAC will be the largest part of their buildout expenses. They're continuing to fundraise toward accomplishing their goal of opening in July. They profit a bit from other collaborations with other area theater groups, which utilize their performance space and hope to continue that as well. Manthei asked where the increase in revenue came from last year – was it from increased fees or more productions? Flores said fees were increased but also programming was increased. The combined ensemble grew about 15% over last year. That is their year-round program.

St. Charles Singers – Executive Director Kay Kendall presented and thanked the commission for its past financial support. This week the St Charles Singers are kicking off a year-long celebration of 40 years of choral singing. Forming and growing a choir takes commitment and endurance. Becoming a choir that is well known not only throughout greater Chicago, but even internationally, that is quite remarkable. This choir is really something to treasure and the choir and its director work very hard to produce excellent results year after year. They have collaborated with area high school choral programs, in some part due to the fact that over 20 STC Singer members are choral music educators in their own right. Choral music programs are trying to rebuild after the Covid pandemic caused programs to dissolve. This created a newer audience and a younger audience. Will be partnering with The Graceful Ordinary and The Office so that audience members who dine at these locations can receive 10% discount on their meal. They will be offering underwriting and after party services, so these partnerships have provided economic incentives to all involved. This year, ticket prices were raised \$5.00 and it has helped the budget bottom line. Miller asked what total number of students were involved in their choir partnership – in total it was about 100 people and close to sell-out performances. Seating the choir in those numbers was an achievement in itself. “Choral Connections” concerts will help to grow a younger audience member base.

Norris Cultural Arts Center – Mark Smith and Connie Sherry presented. In the last year the Norris has presented many successful events. They celebrated their 45th anniversary with a successful fundraiser. They’re continuing to produce three series of events: a Saturday evening concert series at the Baker Community Center; three concerts in the fall and three in the spring and a special jazz concert in the fall. Also presenting a series of three art shows showcasing local artistic talent. The audience has been growing for these concerts, with 130 people at the last one. There’s a good variety of shows – jazz, folk and chamber music. Using radio sponsorships has benefitted them in gaining a wider audience. Throughout the year they host a variety of programs, including art shows; concerts (including from the Fox Valley Concert Band), and some historical lectures and educational programs from the History Museum and Preservation Partners. Their ticket prices are low. The art gallery series is only \$20.00 and the Baker concerts are \$30.00.

6. Adjournment

Becker reminded the commission members to submit their scoresheets to Forte by noon, April 29, to be compiled for the May 1 funding allocation meeting.

Meeting was adjourned at 7:20pm.

Minutes prepared by Carylie Forte.