

Come as You Art

DIVA's new executive director organizes costume ball.

On Aug. 1, Mary Unruh became the first executive director of the Downtown Initiative for the Visual Arts after serving on DIVA's executive board and steering committee. She has volunteered at least 30 hours a week at DIVA since November 2003.

Unruh, who has a degree in public administration, first moved to Eugene in 1979. A former stockbroker, she also has extensive experience in management, both public and private. She has a long record of public service as a volunteer, having served on the LCC Board of Trustees for seven years and having coordinated, as a VISTA volunteer, "The Village Project," a plan for developing community-based responses to the needs of children and families. The project resulted in the creation of the Bethel Village Family Center. She developed the Child/Family Interactive Network, a local Internet-based guide to children and family services, before founding her own Internet publishing firm, New Paradigm, Inc., which she ran until 1998.

Unruh started volunteering for DIVA after reading about the gallery's opening in *EW*. "I thought it was a great idea to revitalize downtown with a theme around the arts," she explained. She had always been interested in the arts, and she had begun doing painting and ceramics.

"The DIVA idea rekindled the part of me that wanted to be involved in social change," Unruh said. "The timing was perfect. DIVA found a facility before the organization to run it was in place: the accounting, database, website ... One of the first things I volunteered to do was the website."

To that effect, Unruh contacted Kin Lane, a Eugene programmer, with a list of what the website should accomplish. Lane and his wife Ishbel are the founders of Original Web Solutions (OWS), which specializes in creating customized websites and web-based applications for small businesses and non-profit organizations.

Unruh convinced the Lanes that the DIVA site could become a prototype for all arts organizations' websites.

"They did the website for us as a donation," said Unruh. "Kin liked the idea of supporting the arts. Our hope is that people will see what the program can do and other arts organizations will give OWS their business."

DIVA's website is up and running (www.divanow.org). Designed as a community artists' portal, it provides visitors with full details about DIVA's numerous exhibits, events and classes. One can even register for classes online.

Best of all, each artist member is given a unique login to place an electronic port-

folio on the website (Artist e-Studios). Artists themselves manage their sites, which include room for profiles, products and orders.

As executive director, Unruh has duties other than webmaster. Besides the nuts and bolts of managing the facility, she is in charge of communications, recruiting new members, fund-raising and public relations. "I'm the public face for the organization," she said. "We want DIVA to be a catalyst for revitalizing downtown. We want to work with downtown businesses to create that mindset that downtown is this fabulous place with great food, gift stores, atmosphere and an attitude of successful enterprise — an attitude of initiative."

Unruh praises the DIVA board for its clear goals. "I just help make it happen," she said. To that effect, she has been busy organizing *Come As You Art*, a

Halloween costume-party and celebration of DIVA's first year (Saturday, Oct. 30, from 8 pm to midnight).

"What's unique about it," said Unruh, "is that it involves not just DIVA but five different venues of entertainment within our neighborhood where people can go listen to music, dance, enjoy art and eat great food."

One ticket covers salsa dancing with Caliente at Luna, Celtic Rock with Fianacats at Café Paradiso, tango lesson and dancing at the Tango Center, Rogue's Dead Man's Ale tasting and Jeff Ibach's acoustic guitar at The Broadway.

Besides desserts, wine, beer and jazz music with Cindy Duerfeldt and the Jim Olson Trio, DIVA will offer a unique exhibit of surreal and macabre art on view Oct. 25-30. "That's high-class Halloween art," Unruh said, "with Steve Oshatz' kinetic sculptures, Tenold Peterson's surreal sculptures and paintings, and a lot of other artists' works on the Halloween theme." Cat's Meow will project a multimedia presentation on the wall as jazz is being played. There will also be a juried indoor ArtFest at 150 W. Broadway, co-sponsored by Lane Arts Council.

Costume resources include Actor's Cabaret, Backstage, Nobody's Baby/Time Warp Costume Rentals and tool-leather masks by Newman available at DIVA.

Randy Stender, chairman of the DIVA board, said, "Mary has an incredible amount of energy. She's doing a great job of advancing the mission and goals of DIVA. She almost single-handedly gets credit for the masked-ball endeavor and I think that's going to be a great success. She's also doing a very good job of building bridges with important people downtown and we're very happy that the Oregon Community Foundation matched our fund-raising to finance her position." **EW**



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