

TOLOVANA ARTS COLONY

Shrinking the distance between artists and students

After 10 years, the school continues to bring arts home

By NANCY MCCARTHY

CANNON BEACH — On Sunday mornings, yoga enthusiasts head to Tolovana Hall in Cannon Beach. For 80 minutes, they stretch their bodies and calm their minds, meditating on the possible.

Later on Sundays — and throughout the week — students of belly dancing, Zumba, qigong or creative writing spend an hour or so at the hall with teachers who want to share their talents.

They are participating in a decade-long experiment to, as Tolovana Arts Colony Program Coordinator Andrew Tonry calls it, “shrink the distance” between the artist and the student.

For Jean Sells-Williams, who teaches ukulele at Tolovana Hall, the classes mean an opportunity to share skills and have fun.

“We sing, we play,” Williams said. When they all perform the right chords and complete a song correctly, “everybody celebrates.”

INSPIRATION

There may be only one word to explain why the Tolovana Arts Colony started 10 years ago: inspiration.

Arts colony founders Billy Hults and Michael Burgess were inspired to start an arts school in Cannon Beach after they organized a show of painter Steve McLeod’s work at the Wave Crest Hotel in Tolovana.

“People volunteered to help, brought food and donated time and materials to show a local working artist that they appreciated him and his work,” Hults wrote in a story that appeared in the September 2005 issue of *Hipfish*.

“That was encouraging, and it reminded some people of how things used to be in Cannon Beach when it was known more as an artists colony than a tourist destination.”

The inspiration was to create a place where, according to the

colony’s mission statement, a “community of artists” could gather in an “intimate, informal setting for students of all ages to pursue their talents, focus their energies and hone their craft.”

To commemorate the Tolovana Arts Colony’s first decade, a “founders party” is planned from 6 to 9 p.m. Friday, May 20, at Tolovana Hall, 3779 S. Hemlock St. (See sidebar.)

IN THE BEGINNING

The first classes, begun Sept. 21, 2005, featured Burgess’s writing course, which was popular until his death in 2010; Peter Lindsey’s exploration of Northwest literature; McLeod’s drawing and painting sessions; Jackie Quint’s watercolor painting; and Marilyn Rooper’s calligraphy. Most of the classes were held in Tolovana Hall, a city-owned building dedicated to community gatherings.

Inspiration kept the Tolovana Arts Colony going through the ups and downs most any shoestring nonprofit experiences, including the founders’ deaths (Hults died in 2009) and the recent renewal of energy by those who didn’t lose sight of the school’s purpose.

“I think the creative energy has always been there,” said Watt Childress, chairman of the Tolovana Arts Colony board. With some new board members, a new program director and several people interested in teaching, “things have come together, and we’re able to make it happen,” Childress added. “And we’re really glad that it’s happening right now.”

The key to the organization’s mission is to provide an affordable, accessible path to art for residents and visitors and for “struggling artists to supplement their income and keep up their struggling artists lifestyle,” Tonry said. The artists receive 75 to 85 percent of students’ tuition.

PUTTZING AROUND

To pay part of their \$29,250 annual budget, the colony applies for a city Community Services grant every

year. It also puts on the Puttz, a silly citywide golf tournament — another Hults innovation — where business owners erect creative holes for participants to master. The holes are made from whatever scraps of material or bit of junk the business operators can put together. Last year, Brian Taylor, from Bruce’s Candy Kitchen, blew up a photo of the store’s late owner, Bruce Haskell; participants had to chip the ball into a hole cut out at Haskell’s mouth.

The tournament, along with a raffle

and silent auction, earns about \$4,000 for the colony, said Nancy Teagle, board member and Puttz chairwoman. The colony, she added, is “one of the most nonprofits I know.”

But, she added, the Puttz, which is June 7 this year, “reminds people that we’re here.”

The colony also conducts an annual art show featuring local artists. It is organized by board member Debra Carnes, who displayed her hand-woven baskets at the colony’s first art show 10 years ago when the show

also included McLeod and painters Ken Grant and Don Osborne

GET LIT

Five years ago, the arts colony stretched its boundaries beyond Cannon Beach’s city limits through a weekend workshop called “Get Lit at the Beach.” Started by Cannon Beach Book Co. owner, the late Val Ryan, and local fantasy fiction writer Terry Brooks, the annual workshop brings in regional authors to discuss their books. It is supported by a grant from



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The Tolovana Arts Colony board: from left, Leslie McLannahan, Andrea Mace, Allyn Cantor, Debra Carnes, Walt Childress, Nancy Teagle and Tracy Abel



SUBMITTED PHOTO

The original founders, from left, Michael Burgess, Steve McLeod and Billy Hults.



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Tolovana Hall sign



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A weaving workshop.