

Tolovana Arts Colony

Shrinking the distance between artists and students

After 10 years, the school continues to bring arts home

By Nancy McCarthy
For Cannon Beach Gazette



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A weaving workshop.



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

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 — 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

A decade to celebrate

Ten years ago, the Tolovana Arts Colony began its quest to support local arts in Cannon Beach.

Now it’s time to celebrate the past decade.

An open house and anniversary party are planned from 6 to 9 p.m. Friday, May 20, in Tolovana Hall, 3779 S. Hemlock St. The hall is across the parking lot from the former Cannon Beach Children’s Center.

The celebration — free and open to all — is a combination retrospective, open house and membership drive, said Andrew Tonry, the organization’s program director.

Music once performed by the colony’s co-founder, Billy Hults, will be played; memories will be shared by those who knew Hults and Mi-

chael Burgess; and art created by artists who have been featured in past art shows will be displayed.

Past directors, including Valerie Vines Magee, Maggie Kitson and Lisa Kerr, as well as former board members and former board Chairman Jeff Womack, who was on the board for eight years and continues as a volunteer, also will be acknowledged.

The program also calls for performances by some students, as well as a brief tour of Tolovana Hall, including the newly upgraded kitchen.

A membership drive also will be launched, Tonry said.

“We’re energized and moving,” he added. “Come join us.”

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.

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