

## Leadership Centre County 2016

### Arts Day Article

Maria Kenney Burchill

What do the arts mean to the quality of life in Centre County? How do the passions of the citizenry help fuel a community, and what can we do as leaders to ensure that they continue to thrive in the Centre Region? These were questions posed to the Leadership Centre County class of 2016 as we travelled from The Palmer Museum of Art, to the Bryce Jordan Center, to Black Sun Studio, ending the day with hands-on activities.

We began at the Palmer, listening to the deep, dark tones of violas played by students from the Penn State School of Music. The students spoke of pop-up concerts, the effort of performing, and the stressful pace of belonging to an orchestra, ensemble, or chamber group. The life of a soloist can be equally grueling. Like a superhero, Dr. Eric Ian Farmer has dual identities. Farmer not only holds a doctorate in Education Policy, but he is also a legendary musician in our region. We had the pleasure of hearing him play at Black Sun Studio. Black Sun is a hotspot of artistic activity. Organized by creative director and photographer, Michael Black, and other artists, the open plan and amazing light is sure to inspire any artist and Farmer sounded superb in the space. Black Sun and spaces like it (The Art Alliance of Central PA and the Green Drake Gallery come to mind) allow artists the space to share their gifts and encourage others to create. While the life of an artist is practice and performance and then more practice, the outcome is felt by the entire community, who are afforded the opportunity to relax and live in the moment. Because we have this time to recoup, we are more productive at work and think more creatively.

What better place to find a moment of Zen than at the The Palmer Museum of Art? More than 8,000 works by master artists from around the globe are housed here. Yet, one third of our class were new visitors. It's a testament to the power of art that it took only a few minutes in the galleries before each member discovered a work that struck them with awe or made them ask, "What is that?" The exhibition "Small Prints, Big Artists..." was a particular favorite. Little gasps of amazement could be heard from classmates, as they pressed closer to view the incredible detail of a Rembrandt or a Dürer. The museum is an intersection for the community, art educator Dana Carlisle Kletchka asserted. It allows us to visualize the continuum of human culture.

Actor and professor of theatre arts, Susan Russell also observed that by supporting and participating in art, we learn to translate a language that is universal and that language allows us to proceed through life with empathy. From musicians, to actors, to visual artists, our community is rich with talented individuals who practice their craft, invest their passion, while leaving themselves vulnerable to criticism. Each class member had the opportunity to

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experience this vulnerability as we participated in dance, sculpting, rhythm, and improvisation instructed by Russell Bloom, Elaine Meder-Wilgus, Tina Konrath, and Amalia Shaltiel.

The act of creating, whether by participating in a choir or solving the problem of proportion for a visual artist, prepares the creator for future endeavors. Because every human is creative, art teaches an understanding of group dynamics, of thinking strategically to solve problems. In our hectic lives, artists' creations bring life and joy to our community and give the viewer, or the listener pause to ponder the message. What do the arts mean to Centre County? It is easy to forget that a passion to create is vital to our happiness and sense of well-being. We relax with visual arts, music, theatre, gardening, writing, you name it. This time allows us to recharge and to return to our jobs revitalized and prepared to innovate. The best way to ensure that the arts continue to thrive in our region is to patronize them. Take a class. Join a choir. Learn an instrument. Draw. Write. Garden. Embrace your passions!

**Maria Burchill, Leadership Centre County Class of 2016**

**Head of Adult Services**

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