Arts Council Is A Cultural Umbrella

By TOM BOOZER
Acadiana Arts Council

The coordination, promotion, support, and encouragement of cultural and creative activities are the purposes of the Acadiana Arts Council. Since its founding in 1974, the council has served as an umbrella organization for approximately 30 arts organizations all over Acadiana. A non-profit, tax-exempt organization, the council is directed by a board of 35 community volunteers and administered by a professional staff of five.

The functions of the Council are divided into two sections: services to member organizations and programming.

Public information regarding activities sponsored by local arts groups is provided through the publication of "INFO," which contains a cultural calendar as well as in-depth articles dealing with the arts. "INFO" is distributed free of charge to the public. Also regular news releases to area and state newspapers, radio and television stations, and other news media, cover arts activities in Acadiana. As a clearinghouse, the council is also used for a central mailing system, telephone service, and administrative functions for many arts groups. In the past, many organizations have made application for arts grants through the Council, which assists these groups in carrying out the forms. Occasional Grant Workshops are conducted.

Programming by the Council follows a policy of not competing with member organizations. Therefore, most programs of the Council are carried out in cooperation with one or more other organizations. In cases where no activity is taking place, the Council may initiate programs on its own.

By far, the largest single programming area of the Acadiana Arts Council centers around the schools. Through a program entitled Bright New Worlds, the Council places local and touring artists and groups in classrooms. As a result, dancers, singers, pianists, actors, painters, poets, ceramists, etc. have visited local classrooms. Such professional touring groups as Earthsage, the Sophisticated Dance Co, Alabama Shakespeare Theatre, Solaris Dance Theatre, Performing Arts Repertory Theatre, and others and have exposed students of all ages to the arts. Also a continuing arts education program which teaches many students in the Art Institute, Schools. Julie Picard, a professional artist, has a full-time studio located at Hamilton Elementary School. From this base, she travels to schools all over the Parish, giving workshops, assisting teachers, planning projects, and involving students in the visual arts. Other education projects include the Visiting Artist Program, the Children's Symphony Concerts, and the spring program. Each of the arts in education programs has cooperating sponsors, including the Fine Arts Foundation, the Lafayette Art Association, the Junior League of Lafayette, the Greater Lafayette Chamber of Commerce, and UL.

Community programs attempt to reach a broad base of the population, and include both adults and children. Downtown Alive!, Kaleidoscope for Kids, Art Happenings, and public concerts by touring groups are made available to the public at various times during the year. The summer Band program for elementary students, Ombudsman Theatre Co. productions of "Taming of the Shrew," "Vincenzo Primi," "Diversions and Delights," and "Shakespeare's People" are all programs sponsored over the past year and presented to the public in concert, at schools, parks, street festivals, etc. Art exhibits also comprise many programs of the Council, with such programs as Down to Earth and Lafayette Day, providing opportunities for local artists to exhibit. Occasionally touring exhibits are presented, such as the Pre-Columbian Exhibit from the New Orleans Museum, as well as tours to other museums, such as the Houston Museum to see the Cezanne exhibit.

The Council is supported by many groups and individuals, including the City of Lafayette, the Lafayette Junior League, the Lafayette Parish School Board, the State Arts Council, local organizations, and private donations from individuals and businesses. The annual fundraising activity is the Spring Arts Ball.

The Officers and Board of the Council are elected by the participating member organizations, who meet once each year to review the programs and projects of the Council. The Board meets on a regular basis throughout the year.

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