

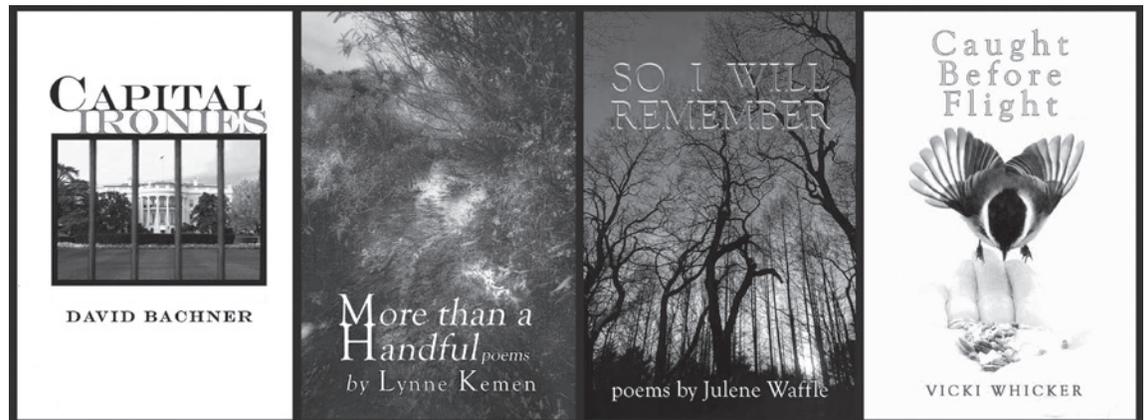
COMMUNITY *News*

Grants Provide COVID Relief for Arts Groups

COVID-19 has dealt a double blow to the arts world. By halting ticketed performances, gallery showings, art classes and other events, the pandemic has reduced many revenue streams to a trickle. And in an era of social distancing, nonprofit arts organizations can't hold the in-person fundraisers that normally supplement sales to keep their budgets balanced.

The longer the pandemic lasts, the harder it will be to win audiences back into arts venues. Even as vaccines become more widely available, it could take a long time before people will comfortably join a crowd to enjoy in-person arts.

In the past, the Community Foundation granted about \$50,000 a year to arts organizations. But, understanding the dire conditions COVID created for the arts in 2020, we increased that commitment, making 10 "Restart the Arts" grants last year for a total of \$100,000. Some of those grants helped organizations buy personal protective equipment (PPE) and modify facilities so staff could work on site and welcome visitors safely. Other awards helped arts groups move some



Poets published chapbooks of work created during the pandemic and read excerpts at Bright Hill Press & Literary Center's Word Thursdays online open mic.

or all of their activities to the virtual world, letting them continue to deliver programs and even find new ways to generate revenue.

For example, our \$5,000 grant to the Orpheus Theatre in Oneonta helped that community theater group continue its Star Struck Players youth program for 2020-2021, while moving much of its activity online. A 16-week program for kids from six to 18 years old, Star Struck Players culminates in a staged musical production. The play this year is "Moana, Jr." based on the Disney animated film.

"It costs about \$18,000 per show to put on a junior program," said Fred Ploutz,

president of the Orpheus Theatre's board of directors. "Five thousand dollars is a big part of that."

The grant will cover some of the cost of renting the Foot-hills Performing Arts Center, where participants hope to stage the production in June if infection rates allow—with audiences held to 150 in the 600-seat theater. If that's not possible, the Orpheus Theatre will produce a video of the musical instead, observing social distancing protocols while filming.

The money will also help to pay the director, stage manager, choreographer and music director, Ploutz said. "And the rest of the money will go towards

lighting and sound."

In Binghamton, The Bundy Museum of History and Art is hosting visitors in limited numbers during the pandemic. But since it can't pack in crowds for art shows during Binghamton's First Friday art walks, the museum has been making a video of each month's featured

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gallery display.

“We record the exhibit just as though you were walking through and looking at it,” said Janna Rudler, director of development at the Bundy. “We pair that with an artist interview, which I conduct.” An editor uses the recordings, plus music, to produce a virtual walk-through of the exhibit,

which the Bundy premieres the day after First Friday and then makes permanently available on its web site.

The grant helps to pay staff for time spent interviewing artists and producing the videos. “We also have invested in better camera equipment, so we’re not just recording video footage on our iPhones

anymore,” Rudler said.

Bright Hill Press and Literary Center in Treadwell also got help developing an online presence. “Since COVID-19, we have had to bring all of our in-person events and programs to digital platforms,” said Beatrice Georgalidis, the organization’s executive director. A \$12,000 grant from the Community Foundation has helped Bright Hill pay a technical assistant producer to convert workshops, readings, art exhibits and other activities to virtual formats and teach participants how to use the technology.

Converting Bright Hill’s extensive portfolio of programs was a huge undertaking, Georgalidis said. “When we were awarded the grant, I breathed a huge sigh of relief.” With someone else to handle the technical work, Georgalidis

could concentrate on running the events themselves and developing new ones for the future, she said. “Without the grant, we would not be able to do as much as we’re doing, or keep the quality as high.”

Because we know how much the arts enhance the quality of life in a community, the Community Foundation’s Board has decided to devote \$100,000 to arts grants each year, creating a special fund for that purpose. As part of our redoubled focus on the arts, we will look to support arts programs and projects that promote the cause of diversity, equity and inclusion. COVID might have given the region’s arts organizations a beating, but we have faith that our arts communities will emerge from the experience stronger than before.



Bright Hill Press & Literary Center of the Catskills

Grantmaking Gets an Update

Organizations that apply for grants from the Community Foundation will find it a simpler job in the future, thanks to some recent changes to our grantmaking process.

As we expedited grants during the COVID-19 pandemic, we learned that responsible due diligence requires less information than we’d thought. So we’ve streamlined our grant applications, cutting the number of questions we ask and the details that applicants provide.

We’ve also converted to a two-step process. An organization seeking a grant will first submit a letter of inquiry (LOI). Based on what we learn from that letter, our grants panels will choose the proposals that look most likely to succeed, and we’ll ask those proposers to send full applications. This process saves applicants the trouble of completing full applications if their programs or projects don’t match the Foundation’s goals, and it lets grants panels focus their efforts on the most promising submissions.

As part of the LOI in our online application tool, we now ask applicants

whether, or how, their organizations are implementing principles of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). This is not a screening tool: applicants don’t gain or lose a chance at funding based on how they respond.

Rather, we ask this question to open a conversation. If organizations want help with DEI—even if that means learning from scratch what those terms mean—we might be able to help them build capacity in this area.

As part of our own commitment to DEI, we’ve expanded our Community Foundation Grants Committee, which in the past drew all of its members from our Board. Now, anyone who serves on one of our grants review panels can also serve on that committee. And we’ve diversified the panels, recruiting members from more geographic regions within our five counties, and from more socio-economic, racial and ethnic groups.

Finally, as you’ll read elsewhere in this newsletter, we have doubled the money we dedicate each year for grants to the arts (see lead story).

All these changes should improve our ability to invest our donors’ gifts in vital community needs.

An organization seeking a grant will first submit a letter of inquiry (LOI).

Grants Promote Racial Justice and Equity

In its premiere funding round, the Community Foundation's new *Racial Justice and Equity Fund (RJEF)* has awarded \$27,300 to five nonprofit organizations. The fund supports grass roots initiatives that work against racism and foster racial justice and equity.

The call for proposals drew 16 applications, an impressive number for a fund's first year. "It speaks to the community's interest in resolving some of these concerns," said Diane Brown, executive director of the Community Foundation. "We received many good proposals, and these were tough decisions."

The steering committee of the *RJEF* started meeting in August 2020, with a major focus on recruiting a grants committee that would truly represent communities in our region. Members of the grants committee reviewed proposals, conducted further research and then held a meeting in December to make grant recommendations.

The *RJEF* had enough money to fund three of the five proposals the committee voted to support. The Community Foundation tapped its Community Fund and the *Harriet Ford Dickenson Fund* to support the final two projects.

One of the grants, for \$10,000, went to the Broome Community Land Trust (BCLT), a housing justice organization that aims to help community members buy homes at affordable prices. The grant will support the second year of BCLT's Youth Story Corps program, which trains young people to speak for their communities through the art of film making.

In 2020, youth from the Grow Binghamton program at Volunteers Improving Neighborhood Environments (VINES) spent Friday afternoons in the Youth Story Corps creating the documentary "Housing is a Human Right." The *RJEF* grant will support a second year of the program, paying wages to young people who participate. The youth will create a film focused on food systems and their connections to housing.

"We'd love to build this into an academy



Youth from the Grow Binghamton program at Volunteers Improving Neighborhood Environments (VINES) spent Friday afternoons in the Youth Story Corps creating the documentary "Housing is a Human Right."

where youth are learning about cinematography and visual storytelling," said Ebony Hattoh, owner of Gilead Media and Marketing and a member of BCLT's steering committee.

People in lower-income communities, especially young people, need to be able to tell their own stories in their own voices, Hattoh said. Organizers hope the program will help youth engage more actively in their communities. "They learn to be more civic-minded, interacting with their neighbors, but also with authority figures, politicians and people of that kind," she said.

Another grant, for \$5,000, went to Support Black Business 607 to help run a series of workshops for Black owners of local businesses.

While most business owners need information and guidance when they're starting out, Black owners sometimes feel that traditional programs for entrepreneurs don't speak to their needs, said Sulaiminah Burns, founder of Support Black Business 607. The workshops will frame discussions in terms that these owners can relate to,

focusing on topics such as how to apply for a business loan, the pros and cons of different business structures and the need for business insurance.

"I want Black people to feel confident walking into a bank," Burns said. "I want them to feel that they belong. And I want them to be able to apply for—and obtain, if they qualify—any and everything that anyone else can get."

Burns, a business consultant and coach, will teach the workshops along with guest experts. The grant will help pay for a printer, laptop and projection screen, fees for the guest consultants and child care for participants who need it. The money will also help Support Black Business 607 develop a web site, which will include a directory of local Black-owned businesses.

"Generations of wealth were lost because of enslavement," Burns said. By encouraging consumers to patronize Black-owned businesses, and giving Black entrepreneurs the tools for success, Support Black Business 607 aims to help repair that wrong.



The Community Foundation for South Central New York serves Broome, Chenango, Delaware, Otsego and Tioga counties.

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Farewell and Welcome!

We're excited to welcome Erica Lawson and Theresa Pipher to the Community Foundation Board.

Erica is a partner at Hinman, Howard & Kattell and is the chair of Hinman, Howard & Kattell's Business and Corporate Law Practice Group. Erica concentrates her practice in advising business and corporate clients on all aspects of their operations.

Theresa is a competitive intelligence research analyst with Dawnbreaker, in Rochester NY. She works from a home office in Waverly NY, where she resides with her husband, two sons and the family Labradoodle. In her spare time, she uses grant writing as an opportunity to tell stories for passionate community leaders who need



Erica Lawson



Theresa Pipher

additional resources to bring their visions to life. Theresa has been a volunteer with the Foundation as a grants panel member for several years.

As Theresa and Erica join the Board, we bid a fond farewell to Patrick Doyle, Elizabeth Horvath and Jon Sarra. Patrick

was with us for nine years, three as Board chair and as chair of our Planning Committee. John has been a Board member for six years, and has served as chair of our Investment Committee. Although Elizabeth was a Board member for only three years, she brought invaluable insight to our understanding of the needs and opportunities in Otsego County. Thanks to all for their commitment to the Foundation and their respective communities. We will miss them!