

COMMUNITY *News*

On the Road Again: the Return of Site Visits

One of the happiest jobs for the Community Foundation's staff and volunteers is the summer round of site visits, when we look in on some of the non-profit organizations that enrich our communities.

Site visits send us wading through streambeds in the Catskills, walking the aisles of historic theaters, touring nature centers and browsing through public libraries, museums and historical societies. We chat with executive directors and program staff at preschools, food pantries, community centers, health facilities, after school programs, humane societies and other institutions across our five-county region.

We make those visits largely to see the Foundation's grants at work. When we invest in a local program, it's thrilling and instructive to learn first hand how that investment pays off.

We also travel to get acquainted. If a group we haven't funded before requests a grant, it's good to spend time on that organization's turf, getting an in-depth picture of its mission and methods. We report what we find to the Grants Committee, and to the Grants Panel



Cooperstown's Clay Studio "Open for Business"

that will review the application.

Sadly, COVID-19 halted all site visits in 2020. But as quarantines eased in 2021, we started planning new excursions. Our first visits were to Bright Hill Press and Literary Center in Treadwell; the Susquehanna SPCA and the Smithy Gallery and Clay Studio, both in Cooperstown; and the Oxford Memorial Library. It was a pleasure to meet the people there who held down the fort during a most unusual year.

At the Smithy Gallery and Clay Studio, a \$7,000 grant from the Foundation funded

several purchases to help the studio operate safely despite COVID. With two new air purifying systems in place, potters could work on premise in the winter, when windows had to stay closed. "We also bought containers, so people could take bulk materials away and work from their homes," said Adam Jennett, the Clay Studio's manager. "And we bought computer and video equipment to do video lessons." In addition, the studio offered one-on-one, in-person instruction.

Such provisions helped Clay Studio maintain some of its

revenue during the height of the pandemic, Jennett said.

With warmer weather and fewer restrictions, potters now come in more often, and the space can accommodate more people at once. "And we are starting to reintroduce in-person instruction, going back to programs similar to what we had before, with six to eight people in a class," Jennett said.

The Susquehanna SPCA saw no slowdown at all during COVID. Animal adoptions increased, and when Otsego County stopped holding rabies clinics due to the pandemic, the shelter took over, providing shots free of charge.

The SPCA also filled a gap in emergency medical care. "Veterinarian offices were really limited in what they were doing," says Stacie Haynes, the Susquehanna SPCA's executive director. "There were a couple of cases where folks had animals that were suffering, that we were able to help."

To maintain social distancing, shelter staff developed new practices, such as having visitors come in only by appointment, and using

On the Road Again (continued from page 1)



JESSE KING/WAMC



Susquehanna SPCA's new state-of-the-art shelter

Zoom or the phone to interview people who wished to adopt. The shelter plans to continue many of those practices in the future. "They lead to a better experience for everyone, and our staff are much more efficient when we have these kinds of operations in place," Haynes said.

A \$9,000 grant from the Community Foundation helped the Susquehanna SPCA maintain operations during the pandemic. A second grant, for \$5,000, bought cameras and other security equipment the organization installed as it moved into a new, state of the art facility in July.

When COVID shut the Oxford Memorial Library for three months, starting in March 2020, youth services coordinator Jessica Tefft started holding story times on Facebook Live from her back yard, five days a week. "I would raid the library for books, go home and read to the kids," Tefft said.

Summer 2020 brought some outdoor, in-person story times, enhanced with sidewalk chalk and bubbles. By the summer of 2021, Tefft was scheduling a mix of indoor and outdoor events, although numerous downpours foiled some of her outdoor plans.

Besides dual roles as a library for the public and the Oxford School District, the Oxford Memorial Library is the closest thing Oxford has to a youth center, Tefft

says. In that capacity, it rules its community as a prime site for Halloween fun. This October, for the 15th year, the library building—a 19th Century mansion—will transform into a haunted house overrun with ghosts, zombies, a mad doctor and horror character Michael Myers, among others.

A recent \$873 grant from the Community Foundation supported the purchase

of fog machines, strobe lights and other equipment for the event, which usually draws about 300 people and gives young volunteers a chance to learn new skills.

With more visits on the schedule, we look forward to getting more close looks at the amazing variety of programs we support, thanks to our generous donors.

Jessica Tefft, youth services coordinator at Oxford Memorial Library

Spring Grants from the Community Fund

In April, the Community Foundation Board approved \$256,168 in grant awards to 38 organizations from the Community Fund and Special Funds. Grants ranged in size from \$800 to \$20,000 and were for projects and programs throughout the region. Here are some highlights from among the programs funded through the Community Fund:

Candor Emergency Squad \$20,000 for operations. *(Tioga)*

Catholic Charities Food Bank of the Southern Tier \$10,000 for the food pantry at Benjamin Franklin School in Binghamton *(Broome)*

Habitat for Humanity of Delaware County \$15,000 for a construction trailer *(Delaware)*

Literacy Volunteers of Broome-Tioga \$12,275 for the *Digital Literacy Skills Program* *(Broome/Tioga)*

Memory Maker Project \$8,800 for a weekly art program for 65+ adults *(Broome/Tioga/Chenango)*

Roxbury Central School District \$20,000 for summer programming *(Delaware)*

Tioga Central School District Summer Program \$18,960 for summer programming. *(Tioga)*

Project Uses Arts to Nourish the Brain

While COVID-19 is especially dangerous to older people, going into quarantine to avoid the disease can be dangerous as well. “We knew that people were going to be very isolated, and that is so terrible for brain health,” said Christina Muscatello, co-founder and director of the Memory Maker Project in Johnson City.

The Memory Maker Project uses arts and culture programs to help aging adults express themselves, build community and maintain the brain. It organizes trips to museums for art discussions and to the Tri-Cities Opera for special performances. It holds workshops in painting, poetry and music and delivers “culture kits” to care communities. Its creative aging specialists lead elders and their loved ones in conversations meant to stimulate good memories, ideas and emotions.

While the Memory Maker Project first designed its programs for adults diagnosed with memory loss, the pandemic spurred the group to extend its scope to all aging adults. “A lot of people were starting to exhibit signs of memory loss without having a formal diagnosis,” Muscatello said. Those people needed help to keep their brains active and healthy.

Like many other organizations, the Memory Maker Project stopped in-person programs in 2020 because of the pandemic. But the project’s staff knew that, given the need, shutting down completely was unacceptable. So, like

many other organizations, it turned to the internet.

“There’s a stigma that older adults don’t want to or can’t use technology,” said Muscatello. The pandemic proved that assumption wrong. “We had folks who were Zooming, Skyping or FaceTiming with loved ones. So they were learning to use the technology, if they didn’t already know it, and getting more comfortable with it.”

That’s why it was easy to entice elders and their loved ones into the virtual world for a new, weekly program called Art Talks.

Launched two weeks after the COVID shutdown, the Art Talks series started with just two participants but soon grew to 20 or 30 people per session from throughout the project’s multi-county service area. Each week, a creative aging specialist led a discussion of art works, organized around a theme—for example, “Street Art Named Desire,” a session held over the summer. “I showed street art from all around the world and asked open-ended questions attached to each image that led back to people’s lives and their own stories,” said Muscatello.

The Memory Maker Project ran Art Talks through July, and it plans to restart the series in

the fall. An \$8,800 grant from the Community Foundation will help pay a creative aging specialist and an artist in residence to run the program, and pay for marketing materials to reach more participants.

The Memory Maker Project uses arts and culture programs to help aging adults express themselves, build community and maintain the brain.

Muscatello and her team had assumed that once New York lifted COVID restrictions, participants would clamor to hold Art Talks in person. But many people wanted to stick with the virtual format, she said.

Their comments revealed a previously unrecognized need. “There are folks who have technology access who don’t have transportation access,”

Muscatello said. The virtual format also helps people with memory loss who suffer from the “threshold effect,” which makes it hard for them to get out the door. They and their caregivers can attend a virtual program without the added stress the comes with trying to leave the house.

So, starting this fall, Art Talks will meet once a week in person and once a week on line. There will also be a low-sensory version of Art Talks online, for people who respond better to a less-free-wheeling discussion.

With grant money to expand its capacity, the Art Talks program will be able to serve more people, Muscatello said. “The Community Foundation is enabling us to continue this program and to grow it this coming year.”



Artist in residence Rosemarie Oakman led botanical silk bundle dyeing workshops with the Memory Maker Project’s participants and advisory board.



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

Board of Directors

James C. Daniels, CPA, *Chair*
Whitney Racketta, *Vice Chair*
Paul F. Wood, *Secretary*
Tyrone Muse, *Treasurer*
Dr. Tomás Aguirre
Dr. Laura Bronstein
Susan A. Burtis
Rajesh Davé, MD
Kerstin Driscoll
Mark S. Gorgos
Erica Lawson
Jean Levenson
Jamyé L. Lindsey
Theresa Pipher

Executive Director

Diane L. Brown

Finance Officer

Darlene M. Cempa, CPA

Program Officer

Tina M. Barber

Administrative Assistant

Stacy Mastrogiacomio

Ceremony Salutes First RJ&E Grants

The Foundation's new *Racial Justice and Equity Fund* celebrated its first round of grants with a virtual celebration on June 10, on Facebook.

Angela Riley and Christina Archie-Brown, two members of the fund's steering committee, explained the fund's mission and urged viewers to become donors.

The program also included short videos from the five organizations that received support from the fund. Grant recipients described how they're using the money and explained the impact they expect to make.

It was disappointing that the COVID pandemic prevented an in-person ceremony for the fund's inaugural grants, said Rob Egan, LGBTQ program manager at the Southern Tier AIDS Program and also a member of the steering committee. "But I think the team came up with a great solution, so we could highlight and celebrate the programs that got the funding in a way that was still acceptable to people."

The event was uplifting and inspiring, said Archie-Brown, a longtime community activist who

has served with the Binghamton Board of Education, the NAACP and the Elks Club, among other organizations. Her observations focused especially on grants to organizations that help minority-owned businesses excel. "It's enough to give young wannabe entrepreneurs the mindset to move forward, because there is help out there," she said. "I think it's a step in the right direction to help all businesses prosper and grow."

It's significant that many of the fund's first grants went to programs and projects that were developed at the community level, said Egan. "It's important that we support the people on the ground doing the work, and not only by wishing them well, but actually with money, so they can continue to do that great work. We know that a lot of the problems in our community get solved by the people living there. They know best what needs to happen."

To see the celebration and learn more about the grants, visit the Community Foundation's Facebook page and check out the video we posted on June 10.