

Museum and Cultural Advisory Board - Meeting Minutes

The Museum and Cultural Advisory Board met in a regular meeting at the Mesa Arts Center, One East Main Street, third floor, south Studios conference room, on October 28, 2010.

Members Present:

Douglas Brimhall
Joe Cooper
Vincent DiBella
Merlin Ellis
Dr. Robbi Venditti
Lars Nielson, Jr. (via phone)

Members Absent:

Amanda Buscas
Keiko Dilbeck
Dr. D. Kent Layton
Rebecca Nolan
Pamela Williams

Staff Present:

Cindy Ornstein
Tom Wilson
Jean Kaminski
Rob Schultz
Sunnee O'Rork

Guests Present:

Chris Rhodes, Southwest Shakespeare Company

Douglas Brimhall, Chair, called the meeting to order at 4:07 p.m.

Approval of Minutes

Douglas Brimhall, Chair, called for any corrections/additions/deletions to the minutes from the August 26 meeting. There being none, Dr. Robbi Venditti made a motion to accept the minutes of August 26 as written, Merlin Ellis seconded, and the Board members present unanimously approved the minutes of August 26. They will be posted on the City's Webpage.

Items from Citizens Present:

There were no citizens present.

Hear Presentation – Southwest Shakespeare Company – Chris Rhodes

Chris Rhodes, Managing Director for Southwest Shakespeare Company and former Museum and Cultural Advisory Board member, opened her presentation by saying that Southwest Shakespeare would not have existed for the past 17 years, if it were not for the Museum and Cultural Advisory Board who awarded them a \$3,000 Arts and Cultural Grant at that time. Southwest Shakespeare has performed exclusively in Mesa; however, this June, they will be performing at the Biltmore. They used to do three shows a year and now they are doing five, and they perform in three of Mesa Arts Center's (MAC) four theaters. Southwest Shakespeare is MAC's largest tenant. This year, they will do over 80 performances, over 16 student matinees, and have introduced over 100,000 children to Shakespeare since the organization's founding.

Southwest Shakespeare has two programs – a performance program and an education program. They go into the schools and do workshops and also do an 80 minute Romeo and Juliet performance. Students come to MAC from all over the state – Douglas, Yuma, Four Corners area, etc. School performances are the same as those the general public sees – they are not scaled down or simplified in any way. Southwest Shakespeare uses professional actors, which brings the dialogue to life and students have no trouble understanding it. Ms. Rhodes added that William Shakespeare was not a novelist; he was a playwright and wrote for the stage. He also wrote for the masses, not the aristocrats.

Approximately 40% of the cost of producing a show is covered by ticket sales. The rest of their funding comes from donations, foundation grants, fund-raisers, etc. This Friday, November 12, as part of 2nd Friday in downtown Mesa, 6:00 p.m., at 12 W. Main, Southwest Shakespeare will be having a fund-raiser that will include a fire dancer, wenches, and knaves. The festivities begin at 6 p.m. at 12 W. Main Street and will be highlighting the downtown restaurants.

Southwest Shakespeare also has an actor intern program that consists of college and post-graduate students who perform Romeo and Juliet in the schools.

February 19, Southwest Shakespeare will hold another fund-raiser at Mesa Country Club – Midwinter Nights Dream Gala. There will be a silent and a live auction that has unusual items, such as lunch with the cast of *Lost*, in Hawaii; lunch with Annette Bening, in LA; and many more surprises.

Ms. Rhodes again expressed the gratitude of Southwest Shakespeare Company for the grant 17 years ago. Now that the City no longer funds Arts and Culture Grants or Mini-Grants, it has been tough. They are most appreciative of the funding that was found this year, by the City Manager, to assist them and the other Founding Resident Companies with in-kind marketing support or rent discounts. Southwest Shakespeare rehearses at 55 East Main Street – they share the space with Mesa Encore Theatre and rely heavily on their devoted volunteers.

Discuss and Provide Direction – Consider Holding Museum and Cultural Advisory Board Meetings bi-monthly – Dr. Robbi D. Venditti

Dr. Robbi Venditti suggested conducting the regular Board meeting on a bi-monthly basis. She added that doing so would free up staff to attend to other duties, and in the past two years, Board attendance has been low; several meetings were cancelled because of lack of a quorum. Meeting bi-monthly may increase attendance, as it is only a six-month rather than a twelve-month commitment. Douglas Brimhall, Chair, agreed and added that half the duties of the Museum and Cultural Advisory Board have been eliminated when Arts and Cultural Grants, Mini-Grants, and the Public Art Program were no longer funded by the City. The Board members in attendance agreed. It was decided to add the item to the November agenda as an action item; Board members will vote on whether or not to move to a bi-monthly meeting schedule. The Board was reminded that the November meeting has been moved up one week due to the Thanksgiving Holiday; meeting date is now November 18 rather than the fourth Thursday of the month (just for November).

Staff Reports

Arizona Museum for Youth (AMY) – Sunnee O’Rork

- The NASA exhibit, on loan from the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibit Service, includes 70 works of art from a wide range and variety of artists. This is a collection from when NASA administrator James Webb invited artists to create works of art that would showcase the excitement of space exploration and some of its different aspects. The Museum has also created interactive activities to compliment the exhibit that includes a glow in the dark room and some augmented reality items that were donated by a Board member; funded by General Dynamics. The opening reception will be held Friday, October 29.
- Kylan Maney and an art teacher from the New School of Art & Academics, along with some students, will be creating a sidewalk art piece that evening as well. Denise Currier, a Mesa artist, has created a quilt that is displayed in the lobby. The Museum also has been working, from time to time, with Beads of Courage, an organization that works with children who have cancer. Glass artists donate beads for the organization, and the organization then gives a specific bead for each test/treatment experienced by a child who has cancer. An astronaut whose child had cancer, in order to raise funds and raise awareness, took some beads into space. The actual beads that went into space will be in the exhibit at AMY. Mesa Public Schools is also collaborating on the exhibit. Their Space Integration Module Program, that won the PBS innovation award, will be there.
- Jump to Japan had 20,538 visitors that included a special Grandparent’s Day that had 3,000 in attendance – the highest day ever for the Museum. The exhibit has been de-installed.
- The Museum has been voted the Best Children’s Museum in the Valley by *Phoenix New Times*.
- Beth Bartholow, after 23 years of service to the City, retired. She will be back until the end of the year as a part-time contracted employee. Her position will be separated into two positions – Museum Accounting Specialist and Office Assistant II. The Museum is in the final stages of making an offer to a candidate for the Office Assistant II position; a part-time benefited position. The Museum Accounting Specialist position will be opened and advertised tomorrow through November 4.
- The vacancy caused by Laura Matzer’s move to Abu Dhabi was advertised as a promotional opportunity for City employees. The position was offered to, and accepted by, Dena Cruz, who was a staff member at AMY. Her old position, in the education area, will be filled by two part-time benefited Museum Education Assistants, which will open soon.
- The Museum has three Americorp positions coming to the Museum in the Gallery Education area. The Arizona Museum for Youth Friends will match Mesa United Way, through a Federal program of Americorp, to fund the positions.
- The “Play Ball” exhibition will be de-installed on November 7 to return with a new version in February 2011. In its place, the Museum will expand the popular Art Zone area.
- Sunnee O’Rork, Youth Museum Administrator, was asked to make a presentation on Board development as part of a panel to the American Association of State and Local History conference, in Oklahoma City; she also attended the Roundtable for Executives in St. Louis.
- The Museum will be opened Veteran’s Day and Veterans will get in free.

Arizona Museum of Natural History (AzMNH) – Tom Wilson

- In the area of archeology, the Museum has done a lot of field work for the City in the last couple of years and has been included in the planning for the potential Waveyard and/or Cubs Stadium at the Riverview park site, and has conducted studies on two of the parcels. The Museum has given clearance for any construction work to proceed there. There is one more parcel (south parcel by the lake) that the Museum will begin to do the archeological fieldwork on in the next week or two.
- In paleontology, staff continues the work on the 95M year old site in southeastern Arizona and Dr. McCord is in the process of completing the report of the first year’s activity and submitting the plan for the third year.
- Opened the Lon Magargee exhibit last Friday – the Board members were invited to come see the exhibit if they missed the opening. Lon Magargee is a famous Arizona artist known for his murals in the State Capitol building, as well as for painting the image that is used inside the Stetson hat – cowboy giving his horse a drink from his hat.

- The permanent exhibit “Origins” has also opened at the Museum. The concept is deep time and partially deep space. Another idea presented in the exhibit is prehistoric landscapes that surround us – all we have to do is look, i.e., the Painted Desert, Canyon de Chelly, etc. Dr. Wilson brought an example of a stromatolite from the exhibit. “In many respects, stromatolites are the most intriguing fossils that are our singular visual portal (except for phylogenetic determination of conserved nucleic acid sequences and molecular fossils) into deep time on earth, the emergence of life, and the eventual evolving of the beautiful life forms from Cambrian to modern time.” The specimen that Dr. Wilson brought is from Globe and is approximately 1.2 billion years old.

Mesa Arts Center/Mesa Contemporary Arts – Rob Schultz

- Out-to-Lunch had its first concert of the fall series today. The concert will take place every Thursday, 12:30 – 1:30 through December 16, with the exception of Veteran’s Day, November 11; and Thanksgiving Day, November 25. Today’s concert had 232 people attending – a good start.
- Day of the Dead festivities are this weekend, October 30 and 31, 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. The festival will include a Mercado, live music and dance, a community altar, an altar contest, and will end with a procession on Sunday afternoon to begin around 4:30 p.m.
- Classes are doing well for fall. There have been substantial increases in youth and adult classes, attendance, and revenue.
- Mesa Contemporary Arts (MCA) continues with their series of exhibitions on Native American Art through the first of the year. Rob Schultz reminded everyone of free Thursdays at MCA, when they are open until 8 p.m. and Target’s 3 for Free the first Sunday of each month.
- Education Outreach program continues with “Pedro’s Magic Shoes.” The show is traveling to Mesa and Gilbert schools through November 12. The show will open to the general public at Mesa Arts Center in January.

Director’s Report – Cindy Ornstein

Cindy Ornstein, Executive Director, reported on Mesa Arts Center’s Performing Live.

- Ravi Shankar took ill prior to his scheduled performance. If his health permits, the performance will be rescheduled. We are expecting to reschedule the festival with AZ India that was planned in conjunction with the Ravi Shankar performance as well.
- Ticket sales have been softer than hoped; however, after a recent analysis we find we are on target, or even a little ahead, over last year at this time. Vince Gill drew a large crowd; Sufjan Stevens sold out; Eric Bibb had a phenomenal performance; Spencer Day drew a nice crowd, as did our first of four National Geographic Live performances of the season; and Perlman and Bailey had an artistically magnificent performance.
- MAC’s marketing staff has a new employee, Sean Ornelas, who comes to us from US Airways arena. Sean is a talented professional, and we are pleased to have him on our team. His presence will allow us to explore new ways of getting information out to the people and create excitement.

Douglas Brimhall, Chair, asked if people are buying more at the Box Office at the last minute. Ms. Ornstein replied that people do continue to purchase at the last minute, but not just here, nationally. This is the trend that has appeared within the past ten years; it doesn’t have as much to do with the economy as it has to do with the use of the Internet and having information at your fingertips. People also seem to be more oriented toward impulse buys and working on shorter time frames for everything – information exchanges rapidly.

Joe Cooper asked if marketing is more concentrated closer to MAC than to businesses further out. Ms. Ornstein said that we could do a better job at extending our reach outside of the area. We do have volunteers who distribute some flyers and brochures to businesses further out. Marketing is working on a plan to increase that outreach.

The Mesa Arts Festival is coming up in December (December 10 and 11). This year there will be a few augmentations to the festival that will tie downtown to the festival. Center Street will be closed, and on the street there will be kid’s activities, a community stage, and food vendors. A direct link between downtown merchants and the festival will be a gingerbread house silent auction. Non-profits are being invited to create a gingerbread house that will be displayed in downtown retail locations. The gingerbread houses will be up for bid in a silent auction. The silent auction will be that weekend, premiering on the evening of December 10 for the 2nd Friday event, and run through the festival weekend. The gingerbread houses will be on display throughout the week following the festival, and the highest bidder for each house will pick up their prize on Monday, December 20. There will also be a People’s Choice Award that citizens can vote on. The money from the silent auction, and the People’s Choice Award, will go to the non-profit organization that sponsored the gingerbread house.

2nd Friday in downtown Mesa has been growing with each month; increased visitors, artists, quality of artists, and participation from restaurants and merchants. From January through May/June, Mesa Arts Center is looking at creating mini festivals to make us part of 2nd Friday, help build momentum for downtown, and enhance our partnership between MAC and downtown Mesa.

On Wednesday, October 27, Ms. Ornstein, Dr. Tom Wilson, Sunnee O'Rork, and Nancy Wolter made a presentation for a Crystal Vision Award (\$30,000); MAC was one of five finalists. The award is for an innovative program that involves working with the community. Arts and Culture Department's proposal was for three residencies at each of our facilities (MAC, AMY, and AzMNH). The concept is to work with community partners in an equitable partnership where there is shared decision making – selecting the theme/issue of the project, the art form, and the artist, and reaching out to constituencies in working with the artist to create the project (visual, performing, multidisciplinary). This type of project models equitable partnership among organizations and brings diverse constituencies from different walks in the community together to create something new and exciting. Even if we do not get the grant, this is work we hope to do in the future.

Along that same line, there is a project brewing that began with Mesa Historical Museum planning an exhibit on aviation heritage and history and how that connects to economic development in Mesa today. The Historical Museum has joined with the City's Arts and Culture Department and The Boeing Company to envision a project that would serve to engage citizens around the idea of flight, create excitement about our community's assets and prospects, and serve to associate Mesa with creativity and innovation. Conversations with numerous community partners have taken place and everyone feels the project has potential as a catalyst for community engagement and promotion. If the core stakeholders agree, it offers a large umbrella that could provide a way to focus the community's celebration of Arizona's Centennial while attracting attention and visitors to Mesa. Ms. Ornstein's suggested title for the project is "Mesa Takes Flight." She distributed a copy of the concept document for the Board to read at a later date.

Numerous partners have already committed to participate in helping to shape and implement this community project. Some of them are: The Boeing Company, Commemorative Air Force Museum, Gateway Airport, Falcon Field Airport, Nammo Talley, and folks from educational institutions. Our Museums already have exhibits in place that will tie in to the project – Arizona Museum of Natural History is having a Hubble Space Telescope exhibit coming this summer, and AMY has an exhibit called "Wing it: All things that Fly" scheduled toward the end of the project.

Ms. Ornstein commented that she sat on the panel to select the finalists for the new Director of the Downtown Mesa Association. She was thrilled to hear that David Short was hired for the position and stated that he will be fabulous for Mesa. We also have a new person in charge of the downtown portion of Economic Development – Melissa Woodall, who is also impressive and full of energy.

Merlin Ellis asked about Mesa Bucks – he was under the impression that it was over at the end of the year. Rob Schultz stated that it was scheduled to end in December 2010, but the deadline has been extended to December 2011. He asked how it works – Chris Rhodes, Southwest Shakespeare, responded – a customer can take their Mesa receipts to the Mesa Arts Center Box Office and for the total of City sales tax on the receipt(s) they will receive Mesa Bucks for that amount. With their Mesa Bucks, they can purchase a second ticket to certain performances at Mesa Arts Center or receive a second admission ticket to Mesa Contemporary Arts, Arizona Museum for Youth, or the Arizona Museum of Natural History. Basically, you get a two-for-one deal – you purchase the first ticket and use Mesa Bucks to purchase the second ticket.

Report on Conferences and/or Meetings/Performances Attended: Board Members – Information Only

Douglass Brimhall, Chair, reported that he sat on the panel to select an artist for the Mesa Drive Light Rail station. Each station will have its own theme and/or historical reference. As Mr. Brimhall is an architect himself, he reported that the architect for the Light Rail stations is good, and he anticipates that the stations will look great. There are some public meetings planned to view the design scheduled and there will be meetings next year where the public will be able to meet the architect and offer their input. If there is an occasion where the Board members may be interested in attending a meeting, Mr. Brimhall will forward that information to Jean Kaminski, and she will forward it to the Board members.

Sunnee O'Rork reported that this evening there will be a Planning and Zoning meeting at the Museum to discuss the Central Main Street Plan and Form-Based Code. There will be an open house at 6:30 with the meeting to follow at 7 p.m.; the public is invited to attend.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 5:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Cindy Ornstein, Director
Arts and Culture Department