

MINUTES
City of St Charles
Visitors Cultural Commission Meeting
Wednesday, May 3, 2023

1. Call to Order at 5:15 PM

2. Roll Call

Members Present: Anne Becker; Suzie Remitz; Sharon Spero; Sally Stancati, Lori Stahulak; Jamie Swenson; Harvey Miller

Members Absent: Jodi Manthei;

Also present: Bill Hannah, City of St. Charles; Carylie Forte, City of St. Charles

3. Approval of the Minutes of May 11, 2022

Becker asked for a Motion to Approve the Minutes from the May 11, 2022 meeting. Motion by Chuck Amenta, seconded by Sharon Spero. The Minutes were unanimously approved by the board members present.

4. Public Comment – Sue McDowell mentioned there is a B2B grant process available from the State of Illinois which she thought would be useful to the arts organizations requesting funding from the Visitors Cultural Commission. Ms Forte will send a link to the organizations for their use.

5. Presentations by organizations

Marquee Youth Stage (MYS) – Connie Flores presented and showed video. Now in their 12th year of programming, MYS has produced about 100 shows, to date. Will produce the Broadway version of “Cinderella” this June. Since 2011, they’ve mounted 9 full scale musicals with live pit orchestra accompaniment. Their mission is to broaden the reach and impact of theater so that students of all abilities, ethnicities, skills and economic backgrounds may benefit, thereby increasing the opportunities for theater in order to inspire creativity, support, enrich and empower youth with the skills and knowledge of how the arts can serve and influence the community at large. Melone asked how they get their reporting statistics. Flores said they do that through CMS reporting. Spero asked what they’ll use their VCC funds for this year. They hope to continue to expand their Conservatory program and will use funds to offset the cost of using pit instruments for the musical productions. Spero commented they’ve had great success since they started in St. Charles. Becker asked what programs do they provide to District 303 schools. Flores said they offer audition workshops to any school that will allow them to, but typically are at the elementary schools.

Fox Valley Concert Band – Jan Mamminga presented. Thanked VCC for past support and opportunity to speak tonight. They’re celebrating their 40th season this year which is stellar for any volunteer community group to exist. Feel that they have returned from the dearth during Covid and most of their band members have returned and audiences have been increasing. Their formal concert season expanded to five concerts at the Norris Arts Center and have performed again at retirement communities, as before the pandemic hit. Mentioned that the younger members of the band have been working on using technology to move the band

forward in its exposure to audiences – updating their website and using social media to gain exposure to their concerts. Looking for new partnerships and now are part of the St Charles Arts Council and that synergy should help gain additional awareness to the band. They will be providing a concert in conjunction with a Kane County Cougars game for the first time and hope that garners exposure to a whole new audience. Their mission is still to provide quality band concerts with no admission fee charged. That formula means they have to raise revenue in other ways. Advertisers and donors have expanded over the recent years but grant money is very helpful to offset other expenses, including that of the band longtime conductor's salary. He is a key to retaining the band's excellent musician roster. Questions: Becker asked where they practice. They practice in Batavia for a small fee, and when in Geneva, it is free. Swenson asked where their band roster number is and they are at 60 band members right now.

St. Charles Singers – Executive Director Kay Kendall and choir conductor Jeff Hunt presented. Video shown of the Mozart Journey finale performance. The choir will be traveling to Spain and Portugal to perform choral works. This year they also will perform four concerts, up from three. They will add a “connections” program this year, connecting with six local high schools and performing “with” them as opposed to “for” them. It will be a collaborative effort and the connections program is one they hope to continue into the future. They'd like to connect with the special needs community and perform in a joint concert. The 12-year Mozart Journey was something they wanted to create as a cohesive project for their choir as well as for the St Charles community. The Mozart Journey has never been recorded as a complete genre and so it has become a very important project to build and to share with the community. Total investment during its genesis is around \$800K and has become an important work with a life of its own to share in the choral community as well. Questions: Becker asked how many surveys were sent out – answer was 1,912 with about 112 responses via URL link and 37 responses via email. Miller asked how singers are hired. Hunt replied that they all audition and form a cadre of about 50 singers. They also hire musicians from the Chicago area when the music requires that.

Preservation Partners – Executive Director, Kelsey Shipton and Director of Durant House and Shoal School Museums, Debra Corwin presented. Now in its 49th year as a non-profit educational organization. Their mission is to offer heritage education and to promote the appreciation and preservation of the Fox Valley's architectural and historical resources. They used special events to showcase the two historical properties in St Charles, the Sholes School Museum and the Durant-Peterson House Museum. They host a “Candlelight” event during December to open the museum to the public from late afternoon to after sunset to experience what a candlelit home decorated for the holidays, looks like, smells like and feels like, and it is magical. They're creating new events because the demand for them remains high. They're pushing the boundaries of what they've typically been comfortable with, which is proving to be successful. They seeing more senior groups come out to visit the museums and other St Charles venues as day trips. Questions: Miller asked if they do school presentations. They do visit schools in costume to present historical and preservation stories about St Charles. Melone asked if they partnered with the History Museum. Spero inquired for what their funding request dollars would be used. That will be used for research and presentations. They would use the funds for a paid intern to provide help with the high demand for their services.

Fine Line Creative Arts Center – Executive Director, Lynn Caldwell presented. Thanked the commission for their support for many years now. In 2022 they added two new programs to their course offerings. First was the long-awaited Lapidary addition within the jewelry studio and classes have been sold out since they started. This has opened a lot more opportunities for their jewelry artists. The other studio that was remodeled last year was the fiber studio, due to a very generous donor they were able to make the room much more functional. The Kavanaugh studio continues to create curated shows throughout the year, ranging from national and regional juried shows to invited artists. The Fox River Arts Ramble/Fine Line Festival is on June 3 and is

a self-guided arts tour from St Charles to Batavia this year and they're continuing to partner with the St Charles Arts Council. Fine Line will have 21 artists on campus during the tour. The holiday artisan sale is every December and runs from the Thursday after Thanksgiving to the first Tuesday in December. In partnership with the Kane County Forest Preserve, the Great Orb Hunt will commence within the Fine Line prairie and Leroy Oakes forest preserve boundaries. These are glass blown orbs created by Fine Line artisans. Finders get to keep the orb they've found. Highest number of students were registered at Fine Line last year. Expect that to continue in 2023. Illinois Art Education Association will meet in St Charles this year and plan to attend some Fine Line activities.

Sculpture in the Park – Erika Young, marketing manager for the St Charles Parks Foundation presented for Sculpture in the Park. Their funding request for \$10K will go towards 10 artistic stipends at \$1K each. More fundraisers and marketing have been happening with the trustees of Sculpture in the Park so that is bringing more opportunities for artists and sculptures. Three donated sculptures were added to the list of city sculptures – one is called “The Sentinel” and “I’d Rather Be Swimming” and “Yoga” will be donated at Mount St Mary Park. Through Sculpture in the Park’s efforts, the Park District now has 38 pieces throughout all of the city parks. They’re generating sales which generates more funds to purchase new sculptures.

St. Charles Arts Council – Executive Director, Kathy Hill presented. Concentrating on awareness of the arts this past year. They send a weekly eBlast to their members on what local arts they can share each week. With many responses, that news and images go out and is a great way of sharing the information and spreading the arts that are available to come to St Charles and partake of. They work with the St Charles Business Alliance on developing projects to expand the visibility of the various arts organizations in the city. They strive to be a resource to and share and bring recognition to St Charles arts organizations and grow and develop this within the city. They participate in the Fox Valley Ramble and the student art show, bringing 165 entries to that show with 400 people at the reception. Becker asked if their request for funds will go toward marketing and programming. Yes, that is a part of what they need to do to bring attention to the arts organizations in the city.

Kane Repertory Theater – Executive Director Avery Brown and Mary Kruse presented. Spoke about the impact that Kane Rep has had on the community in a very short amount of time they have been in St Charles as a company, which was founded in 2019. Their mission is to provide intellectually and emotionally stimulating theater to audiences in Kane county and through their other artistic programs. With the pandemic they could not perform to a live audience, so had to be inventive and connect with other artistic companies in the region, so instituted the New Play Lab, a virtual suite of programs. They helped to innovate on the American theater to a degree by workshopping different plays from playwrights across the country. It connected them with other theater professionals which have led to new beginnings for Kane Rep Theater. Ms Kruse handles the community engagement and fundraising that has proved to be very fruitful for the company. Their board has been built up in the last year comprised from the St Charles community and offer insights and direction on programming. Their Shakespeare in the Park productions have been a nice add on in the summer at Pottawatamie Park and that will continue this summer with “A Winter’s Tale”. Next show will be presented at Moonlight Theater downtown. They impact the local economy and the community by partnering with several restaurants and bars to promote upcoming shows. They’re also adding advertising placements in their playbills, which adds revenue and helps local businesses with potential revenue. Partnering with History Museum and the Norris Cultural Arts Center and the St Charles Writers Group to collaborate on artistic endeavors. Questions: Melone appreciates that they talked about their impact on the community, which adheres to the VCC’s guidelines for funding.

Norris Cultural Arts Center – Mark Smith presented. The Norris appreciates the financial support from the city. Many events are happening in their art gallery and the city's support has been very helpful to keep those going. (new video shown at this point and will be posted on their website). Art shows are free and are juried. There are about 30 events scheduled during the year, and the Fox Valley Concert Band also call the Norris their performing home. They typically partner with the St Charles Singers, Preservation Partners, the History Museum and Fox Valley Concert Band. These collaborations extend the life of some programs that soon will end. For example, they collaborated with the St Charles Singers on an offshoot program of the Singers' Mozart Journey. This enabled a typical Norris audience the chance for a "highlights" hearing of the Singers' Mozart program before it wound down in 2023. The Norris' spring event is at the Baker Center on May 20. Then the new season begins again in the fall. Swenson is a D303 educator and commented she appreciates that students are so close to the Norris' Gallery for events and can partake of and enjoy that artistic medium while attending a school event.

6. Adjournment

Becker reminded the commission members to submit their scoresheets by May 5, so that the results can be compiled for the May 10 funding allocation meeting.

Motion by Swenson, seconded by Stahulak to adjourn the meeting at 7:40pm. The motion passed by a unanimous voice vote.

Minutes prepared by Carylie Forte.