

## **EnVision Montpelier Social Systems Committee**

Notes from September 26, 2007

The meeting was convened at 5:30. Those present included: Diane Scolaro, Bill Doegler, Polly, Ginny Catone, Bekha Mandel, and Ashley Pelletier.

Diane Scolaro was invited to discuss the history, mission, and gaps left by the closing of Onion River Arts Council (ORAC). *Her notes can be found on the listserv.*

ORAC was founded in 1974 by Ben Scotch with the following mission:

- Provide cultural events,
- arts education,
- support and employment opportunities for artists and advocate for the arts in all aspects of community development.

Executive directors included:

Mark Greenberg, 1979-1986

- Established ORAC as a presenting partnering with the Barre Opera House.

Janet Ressler, 1986-1995

- ORAC became a “community partner”. Janet added an art component to every community event. Partnerships were made with Central VT Community Action for the HeadStart arts, the Youth Service Bureau for after school programs, and the Barre Opera house to add educational events

Diane Scolaro 1995-2004

- By 1995 ORAC had nearly \$20,000 in debt. This was a result of having over extended programming without the funding. The National Education Association’s (NEA) budget was cut by 2/3rds in 1994. July of 1995, Hurricane Bertha arrived on the day of Midsummer resulting in an \$18,000 loss. With around \$40,000 in debt, trustees considered closing. By making this news public ORAC was able to recover with generous community donations and one anonymous donation of \$25,000.
- Eight months later, ORAC was back in debt.
- Numerous events were created during this time including: the Brown Bag Series, Third Thursdays, October Fest, St. Patrick’s Days, Barre Summer Music Series, and Independence Day.

ORAC’s budget in 2003 was approximately \$200,000

- 25% membership,
- 20% grants,
- 15% fee for service (from city and First Night),
- sponsorships and earned revenue (ticket sales).

### **Nadine Martin, June- December 2004**

- ORAC closed six months after Nadine started.
- Business oriented board members finalized the close

### **Gaps left with the closing of ORAC**

- **Fiscal agent for orgs:** Tickets, contributions & insurance...KidsFest (Haunted Forest & All Species Day), Capital City Concerts, Michael Arnowitz's Millennial Festival, Women's Work Project
- **Education:** Whenever possible, had Celebration Series performers do a matinee at the Opera House for schools or take their program into schools for a residency program; master classes
- **Accessibility:** Made the arts accessible to all by giving free or reduced price tickets to Washington county Mental Health, Woman Centered and various other social service agencies
  - Pre-show tours to familiarize people who don't usually attend arts events
- **Employment for artists:** ORAC hired over 500 artists and teaching artists each year.
- **Community organizer:** Phoenixfest (2003) pulled together in two weeks with everything donated (performances, port-a-lets, tents, tech) raised \$17,000 for fire victims
  - Benefit for fuel assistance fund
  - Fundraiser for Community arts Fund (with Daine Zeigler)

Diane discussed the following challenges of sustainable funding for non-profit arts organizations in Central Vermont:

- An increasing number of arts & cultural organizations creates a competitive environment for membership and sponsorship dollars.
- Many sponsors have merged with larger organizations, moving decision making further from the community. For example: Vermont Federal Bank became Vermont National then became Chittenden and Granite Bank bought by Howard Bank bought by TD Banknorth.
- Typical event costs include: artists, rental, and logistic fees. Admissions cover 40-50% of event costs.

**For the past three years, more than half of the state's 75 community arts organizations that file 990s (have income over \$25,000) have operated at a net loss, and nearly 20% have less than a month's operating reserve and are only one or two payrolls away from closing. Several prominent cultural organizations have closed, merged or "gone dormant."**

Diane discussed the need for these groups to merge, reducing many overhead costs. Montpelier, also, lacks a location to hold arts events. This space would include a black box theater, gallery space, meeting space, and office space.

**The Next Meeting Wednesday, October 17<sup>th</sup>.**

Focus: We will be joined by members of the Human Development committee to discuss overlapping issues. Ginny has asked the committee to look over Human Development's learning objectives, posted on listserv, before coming to the meeting.

Submitted by Ashley Pelletier