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## Endangered arts

### County center struggling to survive sponsorship cuts

By Christine Engstrom

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Tuscarawas County — Poet Langston Hughes once wrote that “money and art are far apart.” In these tough economic times, the Tuscarawas County Center for the Arts at New Philadelphia is hoping to bring the two a little closer together.

Like many other non-profit groups that depend on financial support from individual and corporate sponsors, the center, which was founded in 2001 “to promote, operate and program local arts and cultural programs,” is struggling to stay afloat amid what some have called this country’s worst recession since World War II.

Over the last two years, the mortgage on the facility at 461 Robinson Dr. SE, New Philadelphia, has been reduced from \$480,000 to \$371,000. The arts center receives financial support from private donors, grants, membership and class fees and corporate sponsors. Recently, however, some corporations have had to withdraw financial support in an attempt to tighten their own belts in the struggling economy.

“Right now, we stand at about \$371,000,” said Jeannine Kennedy, executive director of the arts center. “Our monthly payment is \$3,500, and our corporate support is being reduced by \$1,400 a month in January 2009.”

Kennedy, a retired Dover art teacher, is the center’s only paid employee. Class instructors are considered contract labor, paid by student fees. Other operating expenses are paid by grants and volunteer work.

“We are grateful to the foundations that have supported us and individual donors over the years, plus our members who renew annually,” said Kennedy. Nonetheless, the loss of sponsorship money has posed a threat to the center’s continued operation.

“The operations are self-sustaining, but the mortgage payment places the center in a deficit spending situation,” said board President Steve Jenkins, who believes art is much more than a luxury or amusement. “The greatest contributor to the gross national product is art. We eat it. We drive it. We look at it on the wall.”

Jenkins sees a direct link between art and the economy.

“Nothing happens in the economy without art,” he said. “We create potential for industry and for jobs and prosperity in the Valley. The arts center is the basis for encouraging those artistic talents. As they continue to grow, that creates current and future industries. It’s very important that we develop it to grow this economy in the Tuscarawas Valley.”

The center’s facility serves as a learning center, offering child and adult classes in a variety of artistic mediums, including painting, music, pottery, sculpture, theater and dance, and has offered accredited courses in partnership with Tuscarawas Campus of Kent State University and Ashland University. The center’s professional development courses are attended by art instructors across the state. It also serves a meeting place for a variety of groups, such as the Tuscarawas County Writers Guild.

Typically, the center hosts 12 gallery shows a year, with many offerings from local artists available for sale.

“We provide lectures, poetry readings, dance, music, cultural enrichment,” said Kennedy. Notable past guest speakers/lecturers include Lee Sandstead, host of the Travel Channel’s “Art Attack” program, and poet David Hassler, named 2006 Poet of the Year by the Ohio Poetry Day Assn.

This Sunday from 2 to 4, the center will host a send-off party for Miss Ohio, Karissa Martin, as she prepares for the Miss America Pageant. Martin first won the Miss Clayland Pageant. The center also has provided a venue for art shows for the board of Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities and also has worked with autism groups and Personal & Family Counseling of Tuscarawas County.

Jenkins is hopeful the community, which has a strong history of supporting the arts, including the Tuscarawas Philharmonic and the Little Theatre of Tuscarawas County, will invest in the center's longevity.

"Our hope is that the community will rally around (the center) and support it, knowing that it's kind of the elementary education of the economy," said Jenkins, who provided donation examples based upon multiples of the \$371,000 mortgage debt.

For example, the debt can be eliminated if 100,000 people donate \$3.71 each or if 1,000 people donate \$371. "Whether it's \$3.71 or \$3,710, everybody in every walk of life can contribute something to the foundation of this economy. Anybody that contributes in their bracket, it's going to pay them back many times over by growing this economy," said Jenkins, adding, "No gift is too small."

Membership options vary from \$10 for child memberships to \$1,500 Director's Circle memberships and many levels in between. Member benefits range from free art classes to admission to special events, depending on the membership level.

"It's an investment, not a bail-out," said Jenkins.

"This arts center is for everybody," said Kennedy. "It's not exclusive, not a private club; it's for anybody."

For more information, visit [www.tuscartcenter.org](http://www.tuscartcenter.org).

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