

October 14, 2019

From: Arts Council of the Valley

To: Harrisonburg City Council

RE: Remarks to City Council on October 22, 2019

Mayor Reed, members of Council, City Manager Campbell, and staff, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak before you this evening. My name is Jenny Burden and I am the Executive Director of Arts Council of the Valley. First, I am not seeking any additional funding from you. Rather, I am here to thank you for your support over the years and to show you why it is important to continue supporting the arts into the future.

Nearly one year ago today, Arts Council of the Valley underwent strategic planning, facilitated by Rick Larson, Assistant Vice President of HR, Training and Performance at JMU. After two days, ACV walked away with a three-year plan that we implemented immediately. Our new mission is "Cultivating the Arts; Connecting Communities." That is what we do through our programs:

Smith House Galleries is where we champion the work of emerging as well as established artists by way of 11 exhibitions each year. This past year in April (National Poetry Month), we brought the Virginia Poet Laureate Dr. Henry Hart to Harrisonburg during the opening reception of an exhibition aptly titled, "Two Artists and a Poet." Currently on view is a show titled "Seven Ceramic Artists." Included is work by Professors of Art from six colleges and universities in Virginia. Last fiscal year, more than 2700 visitors came through the gallery, including out of town guests, school groups, and local citizens.

First Fridays Downtown: All of our exhibitions open on the first Friday of the month, to coincide with First Fridays Downtown. This past year 33 venues participated in this community event that drew hundreds each month to the Smith House Galleries alone. Those visitors ate in our restaurants, shopped in our retail stores, and no doubt saw a performance or movie at Court Square Theater.

Any Given Child: Two years ago, Any Given Child Harrisonburg came under the Arts Council's umbrella. JR Snow deserves the credit for bringing this program to Harrisonburg. It has now expanded into Rockingham County. Hence, the new name Any Given Child Shenandoah Valley. Any Given Child provides two live arts experiences for every child between the ages of kindergarten and 8th grades. All experiences take place during the school day so as to reach as many children as possible. This past school year, Any Given Child reached 6,500 K-8th grade students, introducing them to an array of live arts experiences at 40 events/workshops. Three times each year, AGC takes entire grade levels to see a performance at the Forbes Center. For many, it is the first time they have stepped foot inside a performance arts hall.

Advancing the Arts grants: From my understanding of history, ACV was formed in 2000 to help revitalize downtown, operate CST, and to be the arts granting agent for the City. To date, ACV has awarded more than \$350,000 to artists and art educators. In 2017, we started offering two grant cycles in order to better serve our constituents. This past year, we awarded \$10,935 to 13 recipients, reaching some 3,000 people.

Court Square Theater: I'd like to invite Mark Finks, Court Square Theater Manager, to speak to you, after which I will close out with ACV's vision for the future.

Mark

Mayor Reed and members of Council, thank you for giving us this opportunity to speak tonight, and for the past support this body has shown for Court Square Theater. In 2018, Court Square Theater was open nearly every day of the year and had over 20k attendees for various events, plays, concerts, and movies. In the past year we made the theater available for rental to a variety of local organizations like JMU, The Shenandoah Valley Black Heritage Project, Harrisonburg City Schools, RISE Faith Church, Rockingham Ballet, HDR, and many others. We hosted or helped put on community events like The Super Great Film Fest, Women In Focus, The 24 Hour Project, The Hispanic Film Festival, and Harrisonburg First Night. In 2019 we are continuing our successful partnership with Valley Playhouse, with productions of "Peter Pan", "The Diary of Ann Frank", and we are currently hosting "Annie" The Musical. Our Music Series, and Film Series continue to bring residents from all over the valley to downtown Harrisonburg. Through a capital campaign based primarily on donations from our patrons over the course of two years, we were able to replace all of the theater's seating in 2018. We will continue to focus in 2020 on bringing quality affordable arts and entertainment to the residents of Harrisonburg and Rockingham County.

Vision for the future

In addition to our existing programs, the Arts Council is collaborating with artists and community members to bring an **Artist in Residency** program to Harrisonburg. The mission of the two-week residency is to bring professional artists to the Harrisonburg/Rockingham communities by offering residencies focused on collaboration and exchange. We are very excited to host our first two artists this coming spring 2020.

Secondly, we have made progress on the **Language of Love sculpture** that HDR, HCPS, and the Arts Council of the Valley brought to you this time last year. We finally have a design that we like and hope you will to.

I'd like to read a statement written by the artist Jeff Guinn:

Language of Love Sculpture ("Waves of Love") Artist Statement - October 2019

The Language of Love sculpture is meant to visually represent the inclusive and multicultural nature of Harrisonburg and the surrounding area. By virtue of the wide variety of cultural heritages, ethnicities, and countries of origin present, our city has a unique culture that should be celebrated and cultivated. I hope that this sculpture will help contribute to that cultivation.

The sculpture itself will be a series of 3 structures offset from each other in a row, located in the grassy area behind the Arts Council building in downtown Harrisonburg. Each structure will consist of a wooden platform elevated on steel posts and crossbeams. The top of each platform will rise and fall along an organic line, mimicking the silhouette of surrounding mountains, or flowing water.

The shapes are meant to represent the physical geography of our area, as well as the movement of shared language and experiences between people. Language is not static. It is a medium that is used and exchanged and experienced. It serves practical functions, but it also allows for more ethereal experiences, much like music.

The structures will be painted in a palette of blue colors, to reinforce the natural themes. The blue colors will be applied through a series of stencils, by members of the community during the Celebrate Local Arts event. The shapes and images for the stencils will be chosen through conversations with students at Harrisonburg High School, and will be representative of many cultures represented by the population of the city.

It is my hope that by viewing the sculpture and engaging with it, that people will be reminded of the rich heritage of our local culture, and also inspired to continue to welcome and draw in new people, experiences, and ideas.

-Jeff Guinn, October 2019

Finally, 2020 is ACV's 20th Anniversary. We will be celebrating all year long. However, the first weekend in October will be especially celebratory. That weekend we, in collaboration with the Virginia Quilt Museum, who will be celebrating their 25th anniversary, Oasis, H/R Tourism, Larkin Arts, and several other nonprofits and businesses downtown will host a **Celebration of Local Arts**. Among many other community activities will be the communal installation of the *Waves of Love* sculpture.

The Arts Council of the Valley Board and staff are 100% committed to cultivating the arts and connecting communities. We thank you for your continued support and believe your return on investment is priceless.

I will end with this Americans for the Arts' image of the *Top Ten Reasons to support the Arts*. Thank you.