

FAIRFIELD ARTS ARE A JEWELL IN FAIRFIELD'S CROWN

Do you grow misty eyed with memories of when you strung a sheet across the garage door or first wore your favorite superhero costume or dance tights? How about those days of wailing karaoke with reckless abandon, painting your first masterpiece in crayons on the dining room table cloth or getting an Oscar nod for your incredible imitation of a drama queen? Oh, well perhaps that was only me.

How about this? Remember attending your first stage production, going to your first art gallery of any kind or the first time you heard a symphony or got up close and personal to any instrument? They all had that special zing where dreams and imagination become melodies, words become lyrics and librettos, and pictures and portraits of human creativity take shape.

Why have arts flourished since antiquity? It's in our wiring. The arts are an umbilical connection to the world around us. We are healthier when we choose to create, and in some manner, perform on the grand stage of life rather than die languishing in the mezzanine.

The arts are pivotal for a vibrant, happy and well educated community. They not only offer enjoyment, but “stimulate critical thinking, increase cultural understanding, preserves ethnic heritage, encourage personal and community creativity and pride, and contribute to lifelong learning in adults and the well rounded education and development of children while strengthening local economy.”

The arts also flourish in Fairfield owing to you-the taxpayer. Fairfield has a jewel in its crown. It's big, it's beautiful, it's rare and it is well tended. It is the Cultural Arts Awards Program (CAAP) and the article by Ben Antonius in the March 23rd Daily Republic thoroughly tells a tale which all of Fairfield should know.

There is a lot of grant money annually budgeted by our little burgh for the arts and we are one of very few cities with such a history. Over twenty one years, \$2.5 million dollars has been awarded to more than fifty projects and groups ranging from the local symphony, choral societies, dramatic and musical theatre, dance, opera and the visual arts. A generation of politicians and devoted hard working, talented citizen volunteers on commissions and committees and an admirably strong and innovative community services department is to thank for this.

A bit more than \$100,000 is available for what are referred to as the larger CORE grants which are intended to either develop a significant artistic project or assist in the organizational development of promising production companies. Later in the year, there will also be about \$5000 available for SEED grants intended for smaller projects and/or not as yet well established artists. A mandatory help workshop to apply for CORE funding is April 3rd

I have had an opportunity for some time now to watch the machinations of both the city government and talented citizen stewards in developing and administering the process for awarding these grants. Fairfield is fortunate that such an exemplary process exists for doing what seems right in a responsible and comprehensible manner.

This is no pork barrel enterprise. This is a solid process for cultivation of artistic professionalism and good business, while providing a vibrant and diverse artistic climate and maintaining good stewardship of community funds. The guidelines for this process

are on the community services web site and I believe the city council is still looking for one more city resident to join the team.

If you have a notion to start a project or develop an artistic organization or a dream, there are a people and a process in this city available to help you. There are many ways to get engaged, whether it is asking to join the team, attending and supporting the rich artistic menu made possible in part with your tax dollars or letting producers, artists and city staff know what you like.

To learn more call Maureen Lillemoe at Community Services at 428 7538.