

Arts & Entertainment

NJ Arts Council Announces 14 Percent Reduction in Grants

By KAREN SCHULTZ
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD — The New Jersey State Council on the Arts (NJSCA) recently announced that funding for all organizations awarded grants would be reduced by an average of 14 percent in 2007.

The cuts come only a year after the arts council received an appropriation of \$22.68 million from the State Legislature, the largest funding ever provided to the arts council. This year, the council received a \$19.1 million appropriation. In addition, Grants Committee Chair Sharon Harrington said in a report that the council was "addressing the highest ever demand for council

Very Special Art Festival for special education students. Although the loss will have an impact on how much money is re-granted to these local arts programs, Ms. Coen said it would spread awards as much as it could so none of the organizations are affected "lethally."

She also said that the organization was fortunate for having applied for special projects funding in connection to its partnership with the Mental Health Association in Cranford. Ms. Coen noted that the "Arts and Well-being" initiative would proceed as planned with its program, "Language and Mind" on November 3.

The Westfield Young Artists' Co-

operative Theatre (WYACT) saw a reduction of \$3,500.

"It's always a disappointment when we don't get as much (funds as we have in the past). But everyone else got cut, too, and we're very grateful we got what we got," said Artistic Director Cynthia Meryl.

She added that WYACT switched from annual funding to a three-year plan, which allots the same amount for the next three years.

According to Ms. Meryl, WYACT also lost three of its regular grants this year from various sponsors.

"We have to make it up somehow," she said, though Ms. Meryl emphasized that WYACT production "tickets are very affordable and will stay affordable."

The company's latest production, *Ragtime*, received glowing reviews this summer and did very well in the box office, according to Ms. Meryl.

She said that the WYACT is toying with different ideas for the program next year, which hopefully will have the same success as this year's program. She also mentioned she hopes to have many students continue to enroll in its programs.

"It's never-ending," she said. "We need all the help we can get to keep the program free - WYACT is the only free program of its kind."

Other casualties include the Westfield Symphony Orchestra, which lost close to \$9,000 in grants. The Union County College also lost more than \$2,000.

Marguerite d'Aprile-Smith, director of external affairs for the NJSCA, said the council's grant selection process is "quite involved." After the opportunity for grants is promoted to more than 3,000 groups statewide, a panel of experts reviews and evaluates each grant according to published criteria.

The grants committee of the council deliberates over the panel's comments and numerical ranks assigned by the panel, based on funding principles adopted prior to the process. Finally, the grants committee makes its recommendation to the full council and a public vote is taken at the annual meeting.

Despite the significant cuts, the council was able to add 20 new applicant groups, support 14 new Arts Education Special Initiatives and 20 new art projects.

"It's gonna be hard (to make up for these cuts), and hopefully some private industries will recognize (this) and will help a little more," said Ms. Coen.

Crafters, Vendors Needed for Festival
MOUNTAINSIDE - The Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders is looking for artisans, crafts people and food vendors to demonstrate colonial or Native American work and craft skills and to sell their wares at Union County's 25th Annual Harvest Festival.

The event is a celebration of colonial and Native American life featuring music, dancing, children's crafts, colonial food, games, a petting zoo and much more. The Harvest Festival will take place, rain or shine, at Trailside Nature and Science Center in Mountainside on Sunday, September 24, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The Union County Harvest Festival is a popular event that draws approximately 5,000 visitors. By participating, vendors and demonstrators receive excellent exposure and the opportunity to educate others about their craft or work skill and the colonial time period in general.

Examples of the craft and work skills being sought are: blacksmithing, kick-wheel pottery, broom making, shoe making, hat making, jewelry making, and quilting or other colonial or Native American crafts or skills.

For details about how to participate, call the Department of Parks, Recreation and Facilities at (908) 527-4900.

ART SHOW...New Jersey Artist W. Carl Burger will showcase his exhibit, "Mixed Bag," in the Elizabeth B. McGraw Gallery at Newark Academy this September. This painting, "Race-track-Thanks Rhoda," is an example of his watercolors.

CHILD'S PLAY...Little Children, starring Kate Winslet and Patrick Wilson, and 20 more not-yet-released movies will premiere in Filmmakers Symposium. For information, call 1-800-531-9416 or visit PrivateScreenings.org.

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Irish Painter Peter Dee: 'A Portrait of the Artist'

By MEGHAN GILL
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD — Artist Peter Dee grew up on a tiny, bucolic island called Carrig off the coast of Kerry, Ireland. Mr. Dee paints still-life, seascapes and cityscapes with acrylics and oils, and now his American debut begins in Westfield, at Evalyn Dunn's Gallery.

"Since childhood I've had a great interest in painting, but it wasn't until about seven years ago, back in 1999, that I took up art seriously," he said.

Carrig Island (carrig is Gaelic for rock) has "only four families living on the island, no shops or pubs or anything except peace and quiet," Peter told *The Westfield Leader and The Times*. "There is a bridge, which links the island to the mainland and the village of Ballylongford."

"I used to love copying the Marvel comics and making up some of my own action heroes. I did make several attempts to pursue art throughout my teens, 20s, and 30s, but other commitments always came first, so art



Peter Dee's "Racing at Laytown"

successfully achieved mastery in this is a great inspiration to me," Mr. Dee said.

He now lives in Drumcondra, a neighborhood north of the River Liffey in Dublin. He works for Dublin City Council and paints in his leisure.

He first exhibited his work at the People's Art Exhibition at St. Stephen's Green in Dublin City in 2002. This is an "open air" market, where artists display their work on the railings along the park. "The positive feedback I got really encouraged me," he said.

This exhibit proved to be a great success for Peter, and he has been showing his work at exclusive galleries throughout Dublin and rural Ire-

land since. "I would count being invited to join the Dublin Painting and Sketching Club as one of my greatest artistic achievements. This one-hundred and twenty eight year-old club has had such illustrious members as Bram Stoker and Jack B. Yeats," he said.

"I am also very proud that my work is sold in fine art auction houses and many galleries in Dublin and recently has been accepted by the Evalyn Dunn Gallery in Westfield, New Jersey," he said. "I am very excited about that."

Evalyn Dunn's Gallery is located at 548 South Avenue in Westfield. Art enthusiasts can view Mr. Dee's work there and on his website, dublin.ie/peterdee.



Peter Dee

was something that got put on the backburner," he said.

After turning 40, Mr. Dee decided he would make some life changes and follow his dreams. "A friend suggested that I try some art classes to get going and this proved to be just the catalyst that I needed," he said.

"I'm a Kerryman, having been born and reared in that beautiful county," he said. "Growing up in rural Ireland was great. We had a small family farm with a collection of animals: cattle, horses, pigs, turkeys, chickens, ducks etc. I was an ambitious young man, however, and a different life beckoned in the city," he said.

Mr. Dee worked in construction for many years and spent one hot summer in New York on a building site working side-by-side with many New Yorkers and Irish alike. "I loved the excitement of New York," he said.

"My next trip to New York was in 2004 to The Arts Student League for a workshop given by David A. Leffel. The workshop gave me an opportunity to learn more about the painting techniques used by David," he said.

"Artistically, I am most inspired by the effects of light on different subjects, whether it is a shaft of light through a forest clearing, or the skin tones on a beautiful face or on everyday objects such as a bowl of fruit on a dining table," he said.

"This is something I try to capture in my work and artists that have suc-



IMMIGRATION REFORM...At center, Kevin Sebastian (Tateh) and Sarah Sheikh (Little Girl) lead the Immigrants in the opening number of WYACT's production of Ragtime.

WYACT Performing Arts Classes Begin in September

WESTFIELD - Cynthia Meryl, artistic director of the Westfield Young Artists' Cooperative Theatre (WYACT), is proud to announce WYACT's 15th season of professional classes in the performing arts. Registration for acting, musical theatre and dance classes will take place at 728 Westfield Avenue in Westfield (formerly Lincoln School, behind Kehler Stadium), on Wednesday and Thursday, September 6 and 7, 4 to 8 p.m.

WYACT's Beginners, Intermediate and Advanced Acting classes concentrate on improvisation, character development and scene study. Three levels of Musical Theatre class focus on song selection and interpretation, ensemble work, voice and musical theatre movement. Ms. Meryl, a professional actress in the New York and national theatre arena for 33 years, oversees all classes and teaches Advanced Acting, all Musical Theatre classes and private voice.

WYACT Musical Theatre classes have a new musical director/accompanist this season. Hailing from San Antonio, Tex., Christ Littlefield has been musical director for a variety of productions that range from *Chicago* to *Die Fledermaus*, *Batboy* to *Seussical* and *The Threepenny Opera* to *You're A Good Man, Charlie Brown* at theatres such as the Vexler Theatre, the Buena Vista Theatre and the Watson Fine Arts Center.

He played keyboard at the Lee and San Pedro Theatres for *Cabaret*, *Kiss Me Kate*, *A Chorus Line* and *West Side Story*, among others. A graduate of the University of Texas at San Antonio, Mr. Littlefield was musical director, vocal coach and pianist for the University at San Antonio Lyric Theatre and the Northeast School for the Arts, assistant musical director, pianist and percussionist for the Texas Shakespeare Festival and pianist and featured vocalist for the Jason Robert Brown Master class.

Michael Raine's tap classes have become so popular that WYACT has found it necessary to add yet another level of tap class. WYACT will now offer Tap I, II, III, and IV. Mr. Raine has been teaching at NYU's School of

the Arts in the CAP program since 2001, having graduated from the program in 1996. As a performer, Mr. Raine toured the United States and Europe in Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* (Lefou) and *West Side Story* (Baby John). His choreographic credits include *You're A Good Man, Charlie Brown* and *The Prince of Grand Street* in NYC, *Pajama Game*, and *Gypsy*.

Kathryn Cuca returns for her third year as an acting instructor. Holding a Bachelor of Arts degree from Boston University, she currently teaches theatre workshops and participates in independent theatre projects and films. Heather Bially, Bachelor of Fine Arts graduate from Mason Gross School of the Arts and choreographer for Bridgewater/Raritan High School returns to teach WYACT's Ballet and Jazz classes.

Ms. Meryl stage-directed and, with Ted Agress, WYACT executive director and Broadway veteran, produced all 29 of WYACT's past productions including last summer's *Ragtime*, the *Musical* at NJPAC in Newark and the Algonquin Arts Theatre in Manasquan, and WYACT's highly-acclaimed 2003 production of *West Side Story*, winner of the Music Theatre International Award of Excellence.

Also, in regards to its summer program, WYACT was one of 28 companies nationwide to receive a \$25,000 "Summer Schools in the Arts" grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. WYACT was one of only six performing arts companies. WYACT was also honored to receive \$30,000 from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation.

WYACT classes are designed to prepare young performers for auditions and the professional stage. Ms. Meryl likes to see young performers develop the commitment and discipline to learn an art form well, whether it be in music, dance or drama, and in so doing, build the confidence students need not only for a career in theatre, but to face any challenge in life. For information on WYACT, see wyact.org, call (908) 233-3200 or e-mail at wyactnj@comcast.net.



NEW ROCHELLE...WYACT will see a reduction of \$3,500 in grants money after The New Jersey State Council on the Arts announced that funding for all organizations awarded grants would be reduced by an average of 14 percent in 2007. Above, from left to right, starting in the front row, Joseph Byrne (Younger Brother), Lauren Palmeri (Mother), Alex Diaz (Father), Adam Casner (Edgar) lead the "New Rochelle" cast in the opening number of WYACT's production of Ragtime.

support." At the NJSCA annual meeting, Chair Carol Herbert acknowledged "extremely difficult circumstances surrounding the state's budget."

Organizations in Union County alone lost more than \$65,000.

The Union County Division of Cultural and Heritage Affairs suffered the largest loss in the county—almost \$37,000.

"We knew, of course, that the state's budget was facing difficulty and we were prepared for cuts," said the organization's Director Susan Coen.

The Division of Cultural and Heritage Affairs supports 57 local organizations that have applied for grants. Other groups it co-sponsors, include: the Union County Teen Art Festival, Senior Citizens Art Show and the

operative Theatre (WYACT) saw a reduction of \$3,500.

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She added that WYACT switched from annual funding to a three-year plan, which allots the same amount for the next three years.

According to Ms. Meryl, WYACT also lost three of its regular grants this year from various sponsors.

"We have to make it up somehow," she said, though Ms. Meryl emphasized that WYACT production "tickets are very affordable and will stay affordable."

The company's latest production,

Party Dolls to Conclude County Summer Festival

COUNTY - The 2006 Union County Summer Arts Festival concert series will conclude on Wednesday, August 30, with an evening of retro-rock and dance music performed by the ever-popular Party Dolls.

The Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders, led by Chairman Alexander Mirabella, invites the public to attend this free concert, which begins at 7:30 p.m. in Echo Lake Park.

The Party Dolls are one of the finest examples of a 1960s "girl group," with distinctive hairdos and costumes complimenting the girls' dancing and terrific harmonies.

Their music consists of the best dance and party songs from the early Motown sound, disco, New Wave and contemporary. The Party Dolls' show is highly choreographed, and their costumes reflect the fashions of the times - from poodle-skirts and sequined evening wear to mini-skirts and go-go boots.

The return of the Party Dolls to Echo Lake Park is sponsored by the ConocoPhillips-Bayway Refinery.

Freeholder Chairman Mirabella recommends "bringing the entire family, packing a picnic basket, bringing lawn chairs or blankets to sit on and enjoying an evening of jukebox favorites in Echo Lake Park." The Union County information van will be at the concert site, with representatives from the Union County Sheriff's Department available to offer fingerprinting for Kids, answer questions about Project Lifesaver for senior citizens and demonstrate the skills of the K-9 Search and Rescue Unit.

If it rains, the concert will be held in the air-conditioned auditorium at Cranford High School on West End Place off Springfield Avenue in Cranford at 7:30 p.m. For up-to-date concert/rain information call the Parks and Recreation hot-line at (908) 352-8410 after 3 p.m. on the day of the concert.

For more information, call the Union County Department of Parks, Recreation and Facilities at (908) 527-4900.

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