

Arts in Arkansas

Exploring issues from the
Community Foundation's
Aspire Arkansas report.

ARKANSAS
community foundation



November 2023

ENGAGE

LEARN MORE  GIVE SMART



Arts & Culture in Arkansas

In this edition of *ENGAGE*, we explore a part of our community that makes our beautiful state vibrant: arts and culture.

Investing in the arts is critical. Data shows us that growth in the arts can have a profound impact on our communities and our lives. Arts and culture inspire creativity, foster empathy and promote dialogue. The arts stimulate economic growth, draw tourists, and support local businesses. In addition, the arts provide a sense of identity and belonging, strengthening the bonds between individuals and communities.

From visual arts and music, to literature, theater, dance and crafts, each art form tells a unique story about who we are as Arkansans. The arts add depth and character to our state and form the rich tapestry of culture to help our communities flourish. In this publication we highlight a variety of art mediums and the nonprofits helping them thrive.

Unfortunately, funding for the arts is often the first to be eliminated during economic distress and when businesses, schools and organizations must make budget cuts. It's in these moments that philanthropy can play an important role.

As we face the challenges of a dynamic world, the arts of Arkansas serve as a source of inspiration. I urge you to embrace the arts and culture that surround you in Arkansas. Attend a local concert, explore a museum, or participate in a community art project. Support local artists and encourage the creative spirit in our youth. By doing so, you not only enrich your own life but contribute to the cultural tapestry of our beloved state.

In gratitude,

Heather Larkin
President and CEO



Excellence, Accountability, Impact.™

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On the cover: Srividya Venkatasubramanya is the founding president and executive director of Ra-Ve Cultural Foundation.



Starting Dreams at Brandon House Cultural Center

By Kim Dishongh



Staff and students from Brandon House Cultural Center explore the arts through various mediums. Their new location in Little Rock has opened new opportunities and new programs for both kids and adults to enjoy.

Driving past the old Brandon House furniture building in Little Rock on her way to graduate school classes, Dr. Patrice Bax dreamed about the opportunities that could be offered inside.

Bax knew that various modes of art to express feelings and share experiences could be life-altering for kids, especially those at-risk.

Brandon House Cultural Center may not be in the location where Bax originally imagined, but it provides spaces for children and adults alike to learn and create things they may not have even realized possible, just like she had hoped.

Bax and her parents, Dr. Pamela and Paul Bax, and her brother, Dion Bax, founded Brandon House Cultural and Performing Arts Center in 2010.

One of their pilot programs was DreamStarters, which began in 2016 at a charter school. Through DreamStarters, students ages 6 to 11, get to learn about visual arts and music through lessons infused with reading comprehension, math and science.

"The Dream Starters program really takes time to expose kids to all types of art, so they can explore where their talent is. It gives them a taste of what it is to be in the realm of being an artist and creating art," said Bax.

DreamStarters meets after school in a small house on 12th Street, but soon that program will be relocated to Brandon House's suite of facilities further west, on Colonel Glenn, where the organization expanded a couple of years ago. The relocation will allow them to raise the enrollment capacity for DreamStarters, just as the new digs have allowed the organization to grow its offerings beyond the original creative program that focused on youth.

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ENGAGE

"The expansion has allowed us to branch out. We can do more programming and meet the needs of our artists and creative professional community as well," said Bax. "It allowed us to have our own production suite. We have a photography lab, video editing suite, podcasting station, music studio, vocal booth, a media lab, and then also an event space. We also have a theater, a dance hall, another production studio for choir and band rehearsals, a café area, art gallery and an art lab and a gift shop."

The pandemic, of course, put a hold on face-to-face instruction for a while, and the pause gave Brandon House's staff an opportunity to "think through some new things," according to Bax. This "re-thinking" led to the plans for career and workforce training along with creative services for small businesses.

"We started with just creative programs, but it birthed a whole other area of service and support that we offer to the community," said Bax. "We want to serve the community in general, but we had to pace ourselves in how we did it."

Brandon House leaders are also considering new ways to generate revenue for the organization.

Their newly-opened event space, for example, is available for public use, and they offer services to artists, musicians and other creative professionals, including marketing, branding and promotions.

"Half of our team is split between my contracted staff who have those experiences and programming staff, those who work with youth," said Bax.

The production suite, where vibrant murals painted by local artist Jose Hernandez, color the walls of hallways and pods. It contains spaces for a gaming system and a media editing suite, a podcast space and a photography pod. Across the hall is a vocal booth, where students can learn the ins and outs of audio production.

"What I've seen is the opportunity to kind of [allow students] to just be themselves," Bax said of the kids who come to Brandon House. "It's a fun space, and they get a chance to learn. We never pressure anyone to stick to one thing, which is why we have different activities every day."

Kids arrive for afternoon activities at 4:30 p.m.

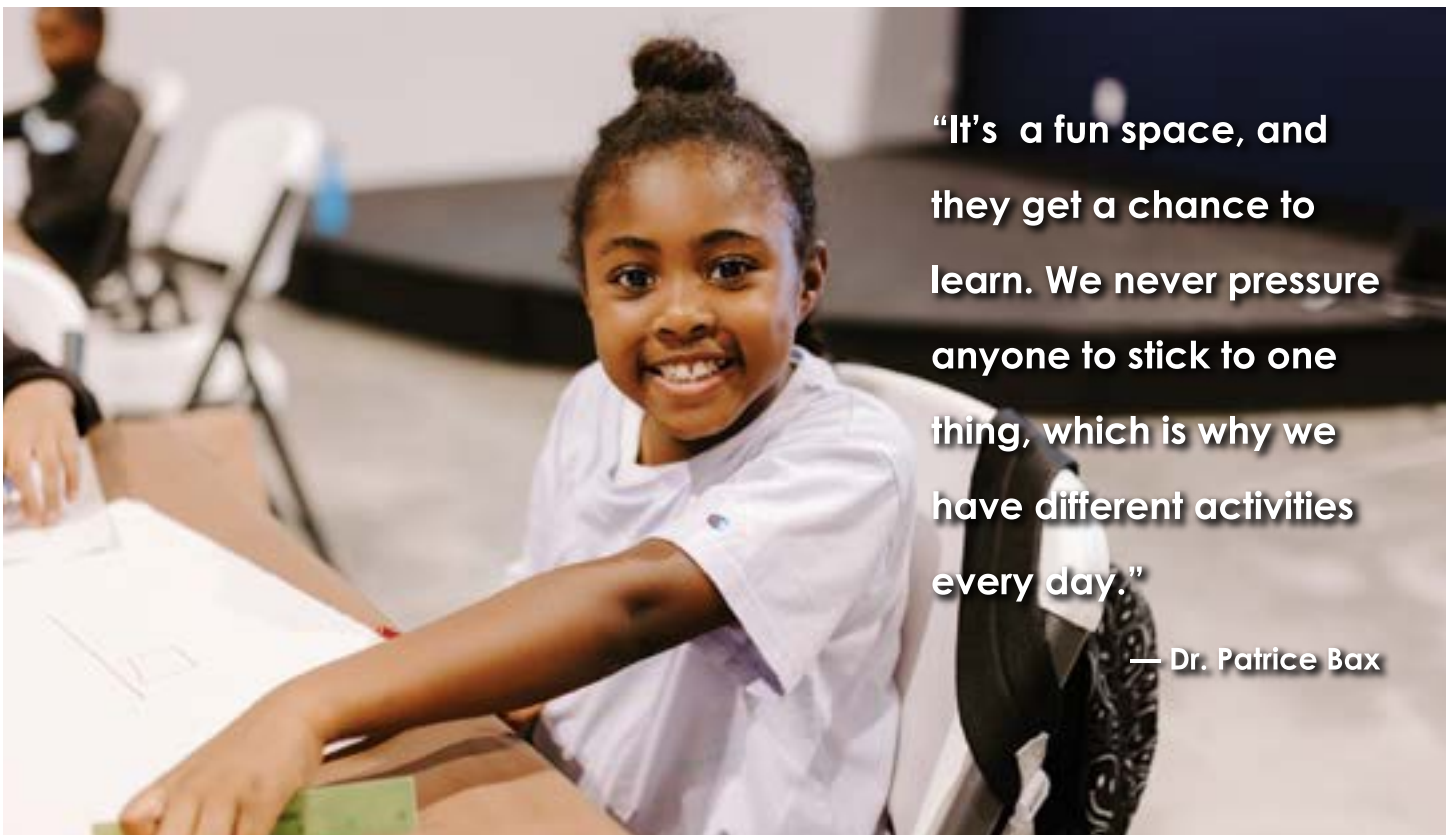
"I like creating music, and I like taking pictures of things," said Destiny Jeffries, 12, during a recent session. "I like cityscapes, especially."

Her friend, Rayleigh Ashford, 11, has not yet decided what activity she likes most.

"I like to check out everything," she said.

That kind of exploration is encouraged, Bax said. The students who come after school and during the summer get a chance to dabble in various types of arts to see what sparks their interest. The lessons learned through Brandon House are intended to give them a way to process how they see their surroundings and, eventually, to find a voice or outlet to share their thoughts and opinions with the world.

"We cooked and made videos, and we made a podcast," said Rayleigh.



"It's a fun space, and they get a chance to learn. We never pressure anyone to stick to one thing, which is why we have different activities every day."

— Dr. Patrice Bax



Making podcasts involves making decisions about what topics to cover, what to call the show, and who to interview.

“For one podcast we interviewed each other — and we would just talk on the show about music and other stuff,” said Destiny.

“The thing I want to focus on is acting,” said Jordin Walden, 12. “I really like acting, and I have drama in school.”

Jordin has participated in Brandon House’s drama program, “Act Out,” as well as “Youth Voices Impact Change.” The latter pairs teens with adults who can guide them in creative expressions about social concerns, using multi-digital media and mixed art.

“I think all in all, kids come out with a better perception of themselves,” Bax said. “And they find a place where they feel accepted for who they are.”

Tony Anderson, Brandon House’s producer, is a chef, and manages the organization’s new artistic café. He leads Monday afternoon’s “Let’s Eat” classes, which include conversations about nutritional facts and tips for safe preparation.

“Sometimes I’m learning new things, and I’ll teach the kids the new things,” said Anderson. “We give them the freedom to be creative. Like yesterday we did charcuterie boards. I gave them a variety of ingredients and gave them a template and told them to go from there.”

He sometimes assigns a theme and lets kids prepare meals that dovetail with those themes. For example, a game night theme might mean serving pizza or sliders.

There is a “Fall In” event at Brandon House every other weekend, giving students who are not a part of the after-school activities an opportunity to “fall in” to activities outside the school week.

“Our large events space is one of our best assets,” Bax said. “It gives us a chance to open our space to the community and also to showcase the work that we’ve done with students and local artists.”

In the future, our café area will be a place for single-stage events or open-mic events.

“We have a saxophonist and when he wants to do a jazz show or something he can do that in here,” Bax said.

There is a majorette dance team at Brandon House, and a choreographer will coordinate fee-based dance classes.

Allan Boston might be one of Brandon House’s strongest supporters. Boston found his way to Brandon House while he was in high school, through what was then a pilot program called “I Have Unique Skills to Learn and Earn” (iHustle).



“After growing up where I did and where I went to school, I was like, ‘I am not going to get tied up with any of this.’ I started doing things at Brandon House and I never wanted to leave. I still don’t want to leave,” said Boston. “We introduce kids to graphic design, multimedia artistry, podcasting, videography, cinematography, photography, personal branding...among other things. We all had an opportunity to try. I went because I had a dream of being a photographer.”

As a student, Boston was surprised when Bax handed him a camera and ushered him off with instructions to take video and photographs of an event, and he rose to the occasion.

Boston helped recruit other teens to iHustle, and together they made a video to promote the organization’s Arts Over Tobacco initiative, encouraging kids to turn their focus from nicotine to creativity. That video led to other videos for other purposes, which spawned further opportunities. Boston built his confidence and his skills through Brandon House, and now he shares his knowledge with the students who are coming up behind him.

Almost seven years after he first arrived at Brandon House, Boston is on staff as videographer and event center auxiliary support.

Through Brandon House’s programs, he said, he learned about accountability, punctuality and how to work with a team as well as some of the skills that brought him there in the first place.

“I hope I’ve made a notable mark here at Brandon House,” he said. “They granted me opportunity after opportunity. I’m trying to give them a decade and then a decade more.”

Harmony in Diversity

Ra-Ve Cultural Foundation promotes belonging, connection in Northwest Arkansas through Indian arts and culture

By Adena White



In five years, we have been able to uplift the Indian community in Northwest Arkansas. We are recruiting Indian immigrants to work in the nonprofit sector, collaborating with other local organizations, and promoting Indian arts and culture.

— Srividya Venkatasubramanya

Through inspiring performances, educational initiatives, and collaborative efforts, Srividya Venkatasubramanya and her team at Ra-Ve Cultural Foundation have worked to create a vibrant, inclusive space in Bentonville where Indian arts and cultural traditions thrive and connections flourish.

Venkatasubramanya is the founding president and executive director of Ra-Ve Cultural Foundation, a nonprofit she established to promote and celebrate Indian performing arts in Northwest Arkansas. Upon moving to Bentonville with her family 15 years ago, she found it difficult to feel a sense of belonging in her new home, even among people who shared her cultural heritage.

"There was a very big gap in being accepted for who I was," she said.

Although popular culture — specifically Hindi cinema commonly referred to as Bollywood — is a way for many

Indian Americans to connect with one another, she believed an overemphasis on these movies eclipsed the traditional dance and music that defined her upbringing. In 2009, she and a friend established an annual event called Sargam to promote and celebrate traditional Indian performing arts.

"A lot of Indian families in the area were investing in traditional dance and music classes, but when it was time for a public performance, they would do Bollywood-inspired acts," she said. "I wanted to give status to traditional Indian performing arts and show that those performances did not only have to be relegated to private viewing."

What started as a mission to connect Indians to their cultural heritage evolved into a need to connect immigrants with the broader community. Personal and business challenges in 2016 led Venkatasubramanya to pivot Sargam from an annual event to a cultural organization that would help remove barriers between Indian and non-Indian residents.

"There is something out there that's not allowing us to connect," she said. "So the idea of Ra-Ve was to overcome these barriers. It was not just about music and dance, but



music and dance makes it a little easier to connect, perhaps.”

The name Ra-Ve is a portmanteau of her parents’ names, who died unexpectedly within months of each other in 2016.

“I named it for my parents because ultimately, sustaining a culture and keeping a culture alive is very much a parenting thing,” she said. “You have to be relentless.”

Through inspiring performances, community showcases, classes, food, and clothing, Ra-Ve Cultural Foundation brings a piece of India to Northwest Arkansas. The nonprofit is housed in the Kalaloka Institute of Fine Arts, or KIFA, which serves as the hub for Indian dance, music and theater in the area. Located at 1380 Southwest Westpark Drive in Bentonville, KIFA offers classes, performances, workshops, informal gatherings and jam sessions.

Many of Ra-Ve’s team members can share a personal story about how the nonprofit connected them and their families with others in the community and gave them an avenue to celebrate their cultural heritage.

Harini Jayachandran is Ra-Ve’s community outreach coordinator. She attended dance and music performances with her grandmother while growing up in India and was able to provide her children with the same opportunity through Sargam. She enrolled her daughter into the dance school and eventually began volunteering and later working for Ra-Ve.

Karthika Mohan Sheela serves as Ra-Ve’s logistics and programming coordinator and supports the organization’s human resources and marketing functions. Before acquiring her work visa, Sheela decided to fill her time pursuing her passion for Indian performing arts. She was naturally drawn to Ra-Ve and its mission to bring the classical arts of India to the area and eventually became an instructor at KIFA. An opportunity arose for Sheela to apply her human resource expertise to the nonprofit.

Vinitha Vijayam Ramakrishnan is a volunteer coordinator for Ra-Ve Cultural Foundation. She participated in Ra-Ve’s events as a classical Indian dancer, and her son also was involved with the organization. After serving as a volunteer, she began working for the organization to support fundraising and development.

As Ra-Ve continues to grow, Venkatasubramanya is hopeful that the organization will garner support from individuals and corporations outside the Indian community.

“In five years, we have been able to uplift the Indian community in Northwest Arkansas, whether it’s in terms of recruiting Indian immigrants to work in the nonprofit sector, collaborating with other local organizations, and promoting Indian arts and culture,” she said. “Our hope is that we can build our support among individuals and corporations in the region — not just the Indian community — so that we can continue to contribute to Northwest Arkansas’s vibrant arts and cultural scene.”

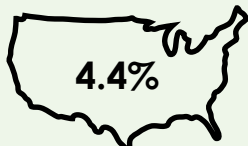


Many of Ra-Ve’s team members have a personal story about how the nonprofit gave them an avenue to celebrate their cultural heritage.

Why Art Matters, How Arkansas Compares

NATIONAL ART FACTS

ARTS AND CULTURE FOR PROFIT AND NONPROFIT SECTORS REPRESENT



of the nation's GDP



4.85 million jobs

The national arts and culture sector was a **\$1.016 trillion industry in 2021** (4.4% of the nation's GDP), representing **4.85 million jobs (3.2% of nation's workforce)**, and **total compensation of \$504.2 billion**.

THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF NONPROFIT ARTS INDUSTRY

\$166.3 billion in economic activity **annually**

\$27.5 billion federal, state, and local government **revenue generated**

Spending by arts audiences generated **\$102.5 billion** to local businesses.

FEDERAL FUNDING FOR THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS

Federal appropriation is **\$207 million**



Congress allocated **\$207 million** to the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in FY23. This amounts to just **.62 cents per capita**. Ideally, Congress should index \$1 per capita funding to the NEA.

Sources for national data: US Bureau of Economic Analysis & National Endowment for the Arts (2023); Americans for the Arts, Arts & Economic Prosperity (2017); Americans for the Arts Action Fund (2023)

ARKANSAS ART FACTS

ARTS AND CULTURE FOR PROFIT AND NONPROFIT SECTORS REPRESENT



of the Arkansas's GDP



30,893 jobs

The Arkansas arts and culture sector was a **\$3 billion industry in 2021** (2% of the state's GDP), representing **30,893 jobs (2.4% of Arkansas workforce)**, and **total compensation of \$1.7 billion**.

THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF NONPROFIT ARTS INDUSTRY

\$67.5 million in economic activity **annually**

\$14.3 million in state and local government **revenue generated**



Audiences of 1.8 million people added another **\$63.7 million** for a total of **\$131.2 million** in commerce for the region in 2015.

PUBLIC FUNDING RECEIVED FOR ARKANSAS' ARTS & CULTURE SECTOR

State appropriation **\$1,372,507**

National Endowment
for the Arts State Grant **\$721,670**

National Endowment
for the Arts Grants
direct to nonprofits **\$917,000**

Sources for Arkansas data: US Bureau of Economic Analysis & National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (2023); Northwest AR Region Report (2017)



The Arts Can Be Found Everywhere in Arkansas

In Little Rock, the Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts, formerly known as the Arkansas Arts Center, offers an inspiring array of visual, performing arts and educational experiences.



In Helena, the King Biscuit Blues Festival attracts hundreds of thousands of people from all over the world to the banks of the Mississippi River for good food and the blues.

In Bentonville, Crystal Bridges is the world's premier art museum dedicated to American art. It attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors each year. The extraordinary artworks, collected by Alice Walton, are housed in an architectural wonder designed by Moshe Safdie.



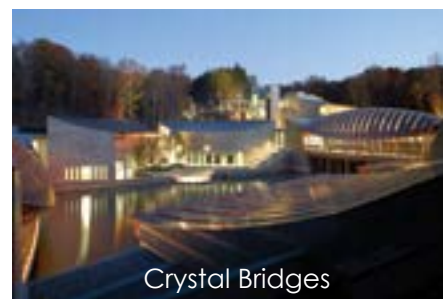
In Fort Smith, the United State Marshals Museum tells the story of our nation's U.S. Marshals.

El Dorado's Murphy Arts District hosts its annual three-day MusicFest every October.

For a full list of arts centers and nonprofit associations supporting them can be found at councilforartseducation.org/Arkansas



Arkansas Museum of Fine Arts



Crystal Bridges



The Arkansas Arts Council was established in 1966 to advance and empower the arts by providing services and funding for programming that encourages and assists artists in achieving standards of professional excellence. It provides technical and financial assistance to Arkansas arts organizations and other providers of cultural and educational programs.

Widows Empowering Widows in Dumas

By Kim Dishongh



Lydia Davis' husband died in 2013, and she struggled to make it through the days, weeks and months without him.

"There was no outreach out there that I could pull from and after being married for 50 years I was just totally devastated," said Davis, who lives in Dumas. "I didn't know what to do."

She tried to keep busy, but evenings were a challenge. For three years, she came home from work and cut all the grass from her lawn each day instead of going inside to the quiet and loneliness.

"It came to me that I needed to start something for other people," she said.

In November 2013, she started hosting dinners at a church, inviting people, mostly women, to just come and eat together and spend time consoling one another and enjoying companionship.

In 2017, she opened the doors to the nonprofit, Widows Empowering Widows and Reaching Others. It was formed

as a support group for other widows who needed an outlet while helping others. One of their goals was to provide grief counseling through quilting projects and community service.

A year later, she bought a long-arm quilting machine and set out to use it to raise money for the organization. The money, she hopes, will allow for more service to the community.

Over the summer, between May and August, the organization offered keyboarding lessons for children.

"I'm interested in music, and we need music in our community, like anything else," said Davis, who through the organization, bought several keyboards and headsets for the classes. "We need musicians in our churches, and we need children to learn music."

Her son, she recalled, took piano lessons and easily used that skill to play the saxophone. There is also some strong research linking music skills and brain development and academic skills.

"I taught them the basics so they can start trying to put together the keys so they can make a melody," she said.



The Widows Empowering Widows and Reaching Others quilting circle meets on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday each week, with four or five regulars gathering to keep each other company and to create quilts in a multitude of colors and patterns.

“We make them, and we sell them and we put the money back in the treasury,” she said. “This is the money we’re going to use to help the widows and unfortunate people.”

The widows in the quilting circle learn from one another, none of them were master quilters before joining this circle. Davis has brought in people to teach them, as well.

“They’re all beautiful when they’re done,” said Erma Evans, who has been part of the circle since its inception. “I come up here and be with these ladies. I enjoy piecing the quilts, and I enjoy the company.”

Shirley Thrash was later in joining, but she brings the skills she gained from sewing clothing for herself and her children as they grew.

“I was still working and didn’t come as often as I should have. I travel a lot. but I’m down here when I can, said Thrash. “I did a lot of stitching with my mom while she was here. I’m trying to relearn it now. There were a lot of things I forgot.”

The time they spend together, making comforting, warm quilts for others, brings warmth and comfort to them as well. “We just sit here, and we talk... it’s really a lot of fun,” Davis said. “It’s really enjoyable.”

Davis hopes to expand the organization into the building next door and create an area in the Widows Empowering Widows building where widows — or others — can teach children’s music lessons and offer some mentoring and homework help as well.

“We want to empower widows to reach out and do things for other folks,” said Davis. “That’s my whole goal, to help this community. We want to come together and draw ideas and feel good about what we’re doing in life. This is what I really want to see happen in this town.”



Erma Evans (right) is a regular at the quilting circles in Dumas. While the group make quilts to bring warmth for others, it brings just as much comfort to those making them.

Beyond the Runway

From sewing classes to manufacturing to fashion shows, INTERFORM drives creative expression in Northwest Arkansas

By Adena White

What began as Northwest Arkansas Fashion Week and the Arkansas Arts and Fashion Forum, has evolved into a multifaceted nonprofit organization that operates at the intersection of art, fashion, and community. INTERFORM transcends the conventional boundaries of fashion recognizing it as a vehicle to connect people across cultures, make the industry more attainable, and empower artists and designers to realize their creative potential.

With a background in contemporary art, INTERFORM founder and CEO Robin Atkinson has worked in the nonprofit creative space her entire career. It wasn't until she took the helm of NWA Fashion Week in 2016 that she began to understand the transformative potential of fashion.

"People connect to fashion in a way they simply do not connect to art," she said. "Fashion is a way for people to self-identify and self-represent while also engaging with one another."

A Three-Part Model of Creative Expression

INTERFORM programs are categorized into three areas that Atkinson likens to the three evolutionary stages of a creative's educational path: learn, make and show.

LEARN INTERFORM offers free classes and workshops that teach sewing and apparel skills at a variety of levels. Courses range from a beginner sewing course that introduces fundamentals such as threading needles and making basic patterns to a clothing design course that dives deeper into elements of fashion design.

Daymara Baker, chief operating officer at INTERFORM, said the majority of the students participating in the courses are immigrants and refugees, most of whom are non-native English speakers or don't speak English at all. Because apparel education and fashion design primarily involve tactile, hands-on learning, language differences are not a major issue.

"We've managed to find a way to create coursework that resonates with anybody who comes in contact with it, as well as creating a safe space for students, designers, and other artists to share their talents," Baker said.



Robin Atkinson, CEO, and Daymara Baker, COO, rely on NWA Fashion Week as their primary fundraiser. The event takes fashion and apparel as an art form, giving the local creative community an opportunity to get involved with the burgeoning fashion industry in Northwest Arkansas.



MAKE “Make” is the second step of the cycle and INTERFORM’s newest initiative. The organization offers small-batch production in its sewing studio, eliminating a barrier for many designers and creatives who do not have the means or expertise to produce more than one item at a time.

“We can help designers bring their ideas to life,” Baker said. “If a creative jots an idea on a napkin, we can turn that idea into something they can sell.”

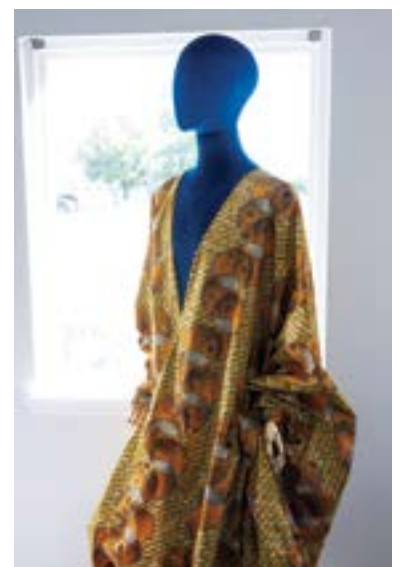
Part of INTERFORM’s vision is to build and sustain a sewn-goods industry in Northwest Arkansas. Training people to develop prototypes and produce garments through its small-batch manufacturing operation serves as an additional revenue stream for INTERFORM, while making a major part of the fashion ecosystem more attainable. The nonprofit partners with local and global brands to produce and repair fashion products, including serving as the North American headquarters for repairs of Rapha cycling clothing.

“Shortening the supply chains and putting manufacturing back in the realm of possibility for everyday individuals instead of just giant conglomerates is empowering,” Atkinson said. “There is manufacturing capacity and apparel-product development capacity right here at INTERFORM.”

SHOW “Show” is where it all began and is the part of the creative cycle where participants involved in INTERFORM’s “learn” and “make” programs can test-drive their ideas, express themselves and showcase their apparel to a captive audience. This entails NWA Fashion Week as well as a recently launched art and fashion biennial called ASSEMBLY.

As INTERFORM’s primary fundraiser, NWA Fashion Week enables the nonprofit to generate revenue through sponsorships and ticket sales, ensuring it is financially viable in the future. The longstanding, public facing-event takes fashion and apparel as a specific form of artistic production and creates a community around it, giving the local creative community an opportunity to get involved in Northwest Arkansas’ burgeoning fashion industry.

“There is something magical about an organization that does such deep community work but then occasionally does something super splashy, fun, and beautiful with a high-production value,” Atkinson said. “Marrying those two worlds has been the magic behind INTERFORM. We believe in always doing both.”



Training people to develop prototypes and produce garments serves as an additional revenue stream for INTERFORM.

Beyond the Canvas — How Art Can Improve Learning In the Classroom

By Kim Dishongh



Patricia Carreras spent the week talking to second graders about how colors can be used to convey emotion and how movement can help tell a story. She stood on the chair so every student could see, and called out different emotions. The whole class responded with movement to convey different feelings.

Arkansas Learning Through the Arts (ALTA) founder Martha Smither is drawing a path to higher levels of student achievement in Arkansas.

Smither, a long-time supporter of the arts, has seen the value of using various forms of art to engage students in lessons about social studies, math, science, literacy and more.

A songwriter, for example, might teach first and second graders about descriptive words, sequencing and stories and work with them to write a story that becomes a song. A theater artist could help with high schoolers to read, understand and perform Shakespeare's *Othello*.

The scientific reason this interlocking of art and academics can be more successful than traditional classroom teaching alone is complex, according to Smither, involving stimulation of the "right brain" and sparking creativity and problem-solving. The simpler explanation is that it keeps kids interested and engaged.

Based in Hot Springs, ALTA serves schools all over the state, offering links to Arkansas Department of Education frameworks standards for social studies, math, science and more — for each of the workshops to make it easier for

educators to decide which would work best for their students.

"Our primary goal is to bring the arts in to teach literacy and academics," said Dan Breshears, ALTA's executive director and a retired school administrator.

But, he said, ALTA's programs can go beyond academics. A poet encouraging middle schoolers to write poetry and share it with the class might be a bonding experience that ultimately helps with student behavior.

"Kids get to know each other better, and they have a more cohesive classroom," said Smither. "The teacher says, 'Oh my gosh, who would have known that this would have such an effect on social emotional learning?'"

Artists working with ALTA typically spend 45 minutes to an hour each day during a three- or four-day session.

"To the extent that we can take the arts into the classroom and inspire students to learn better," Smither said, "it's a tremendous contribution, not only to their personal lives but also to the creative workforce. As they become better educated they have more creative problem-solving. Long term, it has a very significant effect on the life of the community."



Arkansas Community Foundation Supports the Arts in Arkansas

In 2023, Arkansas Community Foundation, in partnership with CACHE, (Creative Arkansas Community Hub & Exchange) invited small organizations doing programming in the arts to apply to the Arts in Arkansas Fund. This funding program was designed to provide arts organizations statewide with two years of general operating support. Grants of \$5,000 were awarded: \$2,500 in year one and \$2,500 in year two.

To be eligible, organizations had to be based in Arkansas and have an operating budget of less than \$500,000 annually. This ensured that smaller, lesser-known arts organizations were funded. Priority consideration was given to organizations led by or prioritizing programs in rural areas of the state and for those led by Black, Indigenous and other People of Color.



Anyone can contribute to the Arts in Arkansas fund at the Community Foundation. Scan this QR code to make a donation or visit arcf.org/arts to learn more about our arts grantmaking.



“Receiving the Arts in Arkansas grant has allowed the Building A Better Life Mentor Organization to offer various forms of art education for multiple communities. We believe that art helps decrease stress, improve mental health and allow creativity in the individuals we serve.”

— Ora Bass, Program Director

GRANTEES

- Youth Advocate Resource Network, Mayflower – Let’s Make Reading Fun, Art Camp
- Mr. Mac’s Learning and Arts Center, North Little Rock – Youth Drum Academy and Choir
- Building a Better Life Mentor Organization, Jacksonville – Art Education Program
- Creative Institute of Central Arkansas, Conway – Conway Art Walk and Emerging Talent Program
- Latin Arts Organization, Springdale – Ballet Folklorico Youth Dance Program
- Art Ventures, Fayetteville – K-12 gallery initiative
- Music Education Initiative, Rogers – Workforce training for music industry careers
- Creator’s Village, North Little Rock – Artist professional development and resources
- Ra-Ve Cultural Foundation, Bentonville – Indo-African music collaboration
- Voice of Arkansas Minority Advocacy Council, Jonesboro – KLEK Performing Arts Project
- DeltaARTS, West Memphis – Art education and K-12 art show
- Chance for Change, Forrest City – T.A.L.E.N.T.S Visual and Performing Arts After-School Program
- Southwest Arkansas Arts Council, Hope – After school programs, community theatre, and arts-based programming
- Widows Empowering Widows and Reaching Others, Dumas – Widows Empowering Youth in the Performing Arts
- La Rosa Collective, Little Rock – Fostering community and support of artists and creators



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Wherever She Went, Charity Followed

Arkansas Community Foundation lost one of its most cherished donors in 2023, Dr. Ruth Marie Allen. However, her legacy lives on. Every step along her illustrious career she left a path of charity and endowments.

While a pioneer in biochemistry and instructional design and technology, Dr. Allen also served in the Peace Corps in Malaysia. She was an esteemed professor and practitioner at various universities across the United States and China. While she worked tirelessly to build her career, she also found a way to be of service to every community where she lived.

One of the many ways she made an impact was through establishing scholarships. At Michigan State University, just one of her alma maters, she endowed several student and faculty scholarships. At the University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service, she contributed to their curriculum, and established the Dr. Ruth Allen Scholarship for students.

One of her greatest passions was orchestral music. A loyal volunteer for the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra, she endowed the Dr. Ruth Marie Allen Concert Series which still provides concerts at UAMS.

Beyond the brilliance of her career, Dr. Allen was also wise with her charitable giving. She used her Roth and traditional

IRAs to create the Ruth Marie Allen Endowment for Wildwood Park. Because of her foresight and smart giving strategies and planning while alive, generous gifts were immediately made to Wildwood Park for the Arts when she passed.

Dr. Allen holds a special place in the Community Foundation's heart. She was a regular volunteer for the Foundation's annual Arkansas Gives campaign and gave generously to various funds.

Our staff worked closely with her to make sure her charitable intentions would continue to be fulfilled long after she passed. It was our honor to work with her, and we are so grateful that Dr. Allen trusted us. Through the power of endowment, her legacy — like our appreciation — will live on forever.



Dr. Ruth Allen

