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Waterfire Sharon—Weekend Fun in Mercer County

*By Michael J. Hillman,
Office of State Rep. Mark A. Longiotti*

The City of Sharon sits unassumingly in the Shenango Valley of Mercer County, nestled against Pennsylvania's border with Ohio. It has been a blue-collar town since its founding: first, as a home for coal miners and, later, an industrial center of iron and steel production.

But Sharon is not a community that can be defined solely by its history or its industry. Sharon has also nurtured actors, singers, painters, writers, and artists of various stripes. In 2013, the Rhode Island-based artist Barnaby Evans recognized the fertile artistic ground of Sharon and brought his award-winning art installation, WaterFire, to the shores of the Shenango River.

WaterFire Sharon is one of a series of Evans's art projects that combines the contrasting elements of flame and water in a public display to inspire the spirit of local populations in towns as far-flung as Kansas City and Rome. The multi-sensory centerpiece performance, featuring flames floating on the surface of the river, accompanied by an energizing soundtrack, draws tens of thousands of visitors and volunteers each year.

The 2018 edition of WaterFire Sharon incorporates the contributions of dozens of local galleries and works of art lining downtown Sharon. The family-friendly event offers an opportunity to walk the main streets of the city traffic-free and surrounded by art bathed in the glow of the river's stunning display of fire.

Each year, WaterFire Sharon presents three unique,

themed shows through the summer and early autumn. The first of 2018, titled "Magical Moments," was held July 21, and featured street performers and river activities to create new magical moments to cherish as magical memories for years to come.

The next WaterFire Sharon event was on August 18. This iteration honored the "Everyday Heroes," such as teachers, doctors, nurses, volunteers, and mentors, who live their lives in quiet, steady service of others. Visitors were welcomed to browse and consider purchasing the works of artisans including craft vendors, fine artists, jewelry makers, and more. The food court offered a selection of delicious street food and countless sweet treats.

The final performance of 2018 will be held September 22. The theme is "Hands Across the Water," and the special attraction will be a tribute to the Beatles by a national touring Beatles tribute band that will recreate the early days of Beatlemania, complete with those groovy costumes from the 1960s.

WaterFire Sharon is a perfect way to enjoy a Saturday of good food, good music, and soul-nourishing artistic inspiration in a small city where you might not expect to find such an innovative display. The artist and food vendors are open on performance days from 2 p.m. until 11 p.m. The river festivities, including a Native American blessing and live music on shore and on boats, begin at dusk.

All are welcomed to enjoy the beauty of WaterFire Sharon free of charge on September 22. For more information, visit: waterfiresharonpa.org.

Mifflin County Groups Work Together with At-Risk Youth

By Sam Price, Community Partnerships RC&D

A new summer program developed by Community Partnerships RC&D in partnership with the Tuscarora Intermediate Unit 11 and Mifflin Juniata Arts Council provides high-quality, interactive arts education for at-risk youth in Lewistown. Local youth learned about the work of Dale Chihuly and in his trademark style and worked to fashion their own chandelier designs from repurposed plastic water bottles. The week culminated in a trip to the Palmer Art Museum and the Penn State Arboretum where students checked another piece of recycled plastic art: "Gravity Schmavity: Repurposed Plastic Sculpture by Aurora Robson." By refashioning discarded materials into delicate organic sculptures,

Robson invites views to consider the long-lasting impacts of plastic.



Photo by Angela Dysinger Niman

Arts and Health: A Powerful Combination

By Anne Marie Rhoades, Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance



When it comes to arts advocacy, the mantra of the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance is "Data + Stories = Proof."

Tasked with making the case for arts and culture to civic influencers and elected officials at every level, the Cultural Alliance turned that equation into the *Agenda* series, the latest issue of which, *Agenda: Wellness*, premiered on April 27, 2018, at Jefferson University's "Fusion: Innovation Across Disciplines" symposium. The

Philadelphia County Medical Society is proud to partner with the Cultural Alliance on *Agenda: Wellness*.

The Cultural Alliance developed the *Agenda* series in 2016 to expand the case for supporting the arts from focusing just on economic impact to highlighting the positive social and community impacts as well. The data around economic impact is important, but it's the stories about arts programs improving people's lives that really engage and inspire people. Empowering individuals to advocate for the arts means equipping them with the tools to tell those stories.

The confluence of Southeast Pennsylvania's nationally-recognized arts sector with the region's powerhouse "Eds & Meds" industry made *Agenda: Wellness* an obvious choice for

the series. Research coming out of the University of Pennsylvania, in conjunction with the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, as well as newly integrated arts and culture curricula and arts partnerships at Temple University and Jefferson University, are creating new conversations around how art can improve outcomes, not only in patients, but in the medical profession itself.

While the impact of art on patient outcomes is well-documented—in fact, art therapy for patients at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center was highlighted by the House Appropriations Committee in its FY2018 budget recommendation for maintaining funding for the National Endowment for the Arts—research on the impact of arts in the education of medical professionals is newer and just as encouraging. Narrative medicine, like the programming at Temple University, or integrating humanities into medical school curriculum, as at Jefferson University, are vivid examples that the healthcare profession values the positive impacts of arts and culture more than ever before.

In highlighting the region's existing combination of arts and medicine, Cultural Alliance staff often retell a story from Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, which put out a request for volunteer piano players through the Cultural Alliance's online presence—only to ask that the request be taken down in less than 48 hours after the hospital received hundreds of volunteer offers from musicians to play for CHOP patients.

The *Agenda* series is written by Anne Marie Rhoades, Vice President of Advocacy & Strategic Partnerships; overseen by Michael Norris, Chief Strategy Officer, and Kristen Vinh, Strategic Communications Manager; and designed and produced by SWELL. Future editions will focus on the intersection of the arts with other important civic issues (e.g., criminal justice reform). For more information on *Agenda: Wellness* go to www.philaculture.org/wellness.

PA Museums 2019 Conference Set for Philadelphia

By Rusty Baker, PA Museums

PA Museums, Pennsylvania's statewide museum association, is convening in Philadelphia for its annual conference, **Trust, Transparency, and Transformation**, April 7 – 9, 2019.

Museums and historical organizations have retained the trust of patrons through thick and thin, and even as public trust in institutions declines across the board, museums are holding their own. Increasing transparency has helped museums tell better stories about themselves and their collections and change is on the near horizon as a new generation entering the field demands it. Are museums neutral? Can museums, already struggling with a host of development issues, face accessibility, equity, and employment challenges?

The PA Museums Annual Conference offers museum professionals an interactive forum for the exchange of ideas, professional networking and discussion of trends in the museum field. The event is an excellent opportunity for professionals to reconnect and recharge as well as learn from colleagues. With our conference in Philadelphia, and the City of Brotherly Love will have a lot to offer –

historical touchstones as well as glimpses at the cutting edge of technology and museum practice. Our museum community will connect and learn as we enjoy special events showcasing our member museums, educational sessions and excellent speakers, honoring the winners of our annual Special Achievement Awards, and opportunities to connect with our colleagues.

PA Museums is seeking proposals for sessions for our 2019 conference. We opened nominations for our annual awards in August 2018. Please visit or share this link, <https://pamuseums.org/programs-services/>, with your networks. We will once again offer free conference registration to university students interested in careers in museums and history.



Racial Equity and Arts Funding in Greater Pittsburgh

By Mitch Swain, CEO, and David Pankratz, Research & Policy Director, Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council

A 2015 presentation by one of GPAC's board members, a leader in the Black arts community, cited instances of inequitable funding in Greater Pittsburgh. She illuminated the need for an in-depth, data-informed study of arts funding by race in Greater Pittsburgh.

In 2017, after many local and national conversations, GPAC committed itself to analyzing data underlying these issues. **Racial Equity and Arts Funding in Greater Pittsburgh**, a report released in May 2018, is the result. It is an *empirical analysis*—an effort to uncover the facts of how arts funding has been and is distributed by race.

For this research GPAC formed a Learning & Leadership Committee, a person of color-majority committee with extensive and varied experience in our area's arts funding system.

One issue the Committee faced was **coding, by race, the raw funding data** provided by two public funders and 16 private funders. The Committee devised this set of codes:

Racial identifiers (ALAANA): Arab/Middle Eastern; Asian; Black or African-American; Hispanic/Latino (a) (x); Indigenous, More than one race; White (non-Hispanic), and

Additional identifiers: Founder identity; Organizational mission; Staff and Board make-up; Roots in historically underserved communities and specific cultural traditions; and Employment of artists of color.

After coding raw data using these definitions, GPAC analyzed the coded data by two measures:

Numbers and percentages of grants by race
Total dollar amounts and average grant amounts by race

What were our key findings?

The Pittsburgh population is 23% ALAANA, but ALAANA arts organizations have received 16% of arts grants and 14% of funds granted in the past five years

During that period, percentages of grants to ALAANA organizations have increased, but percentages of dollars distributed to ALAANA recipients have not

Grant funds to ALAANA organizations vary considerably by year, making financial planning difficult

The grant funds to ALAANA organizations are clustered around a few recipients rather than spread widely

The final report also documents funder innovations, including the *Advancing Black Arts* initiative of the Pittsburgh Foundation and the Heinz Endowments and the PA Council on the Arts' *Preserving Diverse Cultures* program.

What's Next? GPAC hopes that racial data can be consistently collected, thus enabling data-informed comparisons of equitable funding patterns over time.

GPAC is working with Grantmakers of Western PA to see if and how the report's recommendations for Board and staff diversity training, diversification of grant panels, expansion of grants review criteria, and increased access of ALAANA organizations to multi-year grants, can be implemented.

Looking to the middle of the 21st century, when ALAANA individuals will become the majority of the U.S. population, GPAC seeks an arts community that is fair and just and that brings unprecedented cultural and social benefits to all in Greater Pittsburgh.

Access **Racial Equity and Arts Funding in Greater Pittsburgh** here

<https://www.pittsburghartscouncil.org/programs/research>

BTE Celebrates 41 Years of Theatre in Bloomsburg (PA's only town)

By Laura Haden, Bloomsburg Theatre Ensemble



For 41 years (and counting), Bloomsburg Theatre Ensemble has been embedded in the heart and soul of Downtown Bloomsburg and surrounding region. It began in the summer of 1976 when a group of young actors, mostly graduates from the Northwestern University Theatre Program, came to Bloomsburg to study with the legendary Alvina Krause, whom the theatre is now named after.

This determined and passionate group of actors had a dream of bringing professional, live theatre to Columbia County. With incredible community support over the years, Bloomsburg Theatre Ensemble went on to purchase an old movie

theatre and turn it into the home for their art. The Alvina Krause Theatre, located at 226 Center Street in Bloomsburg, PA, has gone through many renovations

and has been witness to thousands of performance over 41 years.

The Ensemble performs six mainstage shows a year, as well as hosting presented events, fundraisers, and sharing their space with Bloomsburg University, who present two shows a year at the Theatre.

This season will feature plays full of enchantment and exploration. The season opener is *The Explorers Club*, a new comedy where an old Victorian boys club attempts their most difficult quest yet: admitting their first female club member! Then, be whisked over the rainbow as BTE brings you the beloved musical, *The Wizard of Oz!* The magic continues in January when the Theatre will host a magician and mentalist, *John Graham*. This interactive, one-weekend presentation will be followed by *Industrious Angels*, a beautiful one-woman show performed by one of BTE's founding members, Laurie McCants. In spring, BTE will bring you an electrifying adventure as you experience the story through the eyes of a unique young man as he investigates *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. The theme continues with *Every Brilliant Thing* in a heart-felt examination of all the good things that make life worth living. For more information visit www.bte.org.

Humanities Inspire Academic and Personal Growth in Philadelphia-Area Veterans



By Jared Valdez, PA Humanities Council

[University of Pennsylvania's Veteran's Upward Bound \(VUB\) program](#) is an important service for veterans in the counties of Bucks, Montgomery, Chester, Delaware, Philadelphia and Camden. For no cost, it provides them with the academic skills and experiences necessary to excel in college. With support from the NEH, initially through its Standing Together initiative, Pennsylvania Humanities Council has been funding cultural and arts experiences for participants, leading to meaningful conversations about culture, history and justice.

Penn VUB has been highly successful -- 90% of a recently graduated class went on to enroll in postsecondary courses. Veterans in the program are often first generation college students and most are facing economic hardship. The curriculum resembles a traditional college preparatory program, including instruction in mathematics, science, foreign language and humanities. What makes Penn VUB special is the cultural experiences, mentorship and counseling services, along with the camaraderie and support of fellow veterans in the program.

Since 2015, Pennsylvania Humanities Council has worked with Penn VUB to expand the humanities curriculum and activities offered. A recent PHC-sponsored trip included a visit to [Wharton Escherick Museum](#) and tickets to *The Diary of Anne Frank* at the [People's Light Theater](#). This critically acclaimed production tells Anne Frank's harrowing story in a way that illuminates modern problems of polarization. The veterans reported that the performance was captivating and spoke with clarity to

their own concerns about discrimination.

Coupled with the play was a lively panel discussion on Jewish history and social justice. The veterans asked pointed questions to the panelists about issues many of them struggle with every day: racism, equity and justice. They went on to further immerse themselves in Jewish culture by participating in the [Annual Freedom Seder](#) at the [National Museum of American Jewish History](#). This event has its roots in the 1969 Freedom Seder that took place during the Civil Rights Movement and it is an opportunity to share an evening of food and stories of liberation at the community Passover table.

Penn VUB students benefit from exposure to the region's cultural assets which can open up worlds of exploration, uncovering learning opportunities and revealing new interests. Within the supportive community of Penn VUB, veterans are able to heal past wounds, build confidence inside and outside the classroom and make meaningful changes in their lives and their communities.

Pennsylvania Humanities Council is proud to partner with Penn VUB to enhance a humanities curriculum that successfully fosters both personal and academic growth for the region's veterans.

Learn more about Pennsylvania Humanities Council's partnership with Penn VUB: <https://pahumanities.org/initiatives/veterans-upward-bound>

