Mackinac Arts Weekend celebrates its 20th year

By Becky Harris, Professional Writing 2016

Special Weekend for a Special Anniversary
In June 2014, the MSU College of Arts and Letters celebrated the 20th anniversary of Arts Weekend. An annual collaboration between CAL and Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island, Arts Weekend hosts patrons of the arts—MSU affiliated and not—for a weekend of education, fine art appreciation, and fun!

Each year, Arts Weekend features performances and exhibits hosted by the College. This year’s entertainment lineup included two MSU Department of Theatre performances in partnership with the Williamston Theatre; a staged reading of Love Letters, and The Big Bang, directed by MSU Theatre’s Rob Roznowski; an informational session on Department of Art, Art History, and Design Professor Kelly MacArthur’s graphic design research; an informative tour of the Manoogian Art Collection given by Art, Art History, and Design Professor Phylis Floyd; and an interactive exhibit hosted by the Creativity Exploratory that related Michigan’s agriculture industry to Grand Hotel’s menus and culinary traditions.

Unforgettable Island Experiences
While Arts Weekend has been an MSU tradition for 20 years, that doesn’t mean others can’t join in on the fun, too. “Non-MSU affiliates regularly flock to this event,” says Linda Conradi, College of Arts and Letters assistant director of alumni relations. “People come from all over the country to enjoy a weekend of art and cultural appreciation in the beautiful scenery of Mackinac Island.” Jim and Judy Williamson can firmly attest to this. This year, the Pennsylvania residents decided to spend their 45th wedding anniversary at Arts Weekend.

“We wanted to spend our anniversary somewhere up north, and when we heard about this Arts Weekend on Mackinac Island, we decided to give it a try,” explains Judy Williamson. “I can’t think of a better way we could have spent our anniversary. We’ve made so many new friends at this event, and learned so much about the state of Michigan’s rich arts culture. We’re looking forward to coming back again next year!”

Celebrating State on Mackinac Island
While you don’t have to be an MSU graduate to attend, plenty of green and white can be seen at the event each year. “I’ve been helping to organize MSU’s Arts Weekend for years, and every year, I’m impressed with the Spartan spirit that guests bring to the weekend,” says Holly Nitzschke, director of convention services at Grand Hotel. “For the past two years, the event has been sold out. If that doesn’t tell you something about MSU alumni and their love for their school, then I don’t know what will.”

(Left to right) CAL Senior Associate Dean David Prestel, Director of Academic Technology Scott Schopieray, Dean Karin Wurst, Theatre Chair Kirk Domer and Head of Acting and Directing Rob Roznowski, Director of Development and Alumni Relations Bridget Paff, and Marketing Director Ryan Kilcoyne.
Dearest Alumni and Friends of the College of Arts and Letters,

It is my great pleasure to be writing to you as the newly elected president of the College’s alumni board. For the last six years I have enjoyed working in several roles on the board. With each year, I feel that our board has strengthened and brought forth more innovative ideas, collaborating with Dean Wurst’s vision for the College. I am excited to be taking on the role at this time in the board’s history. Our forward momentum continues to gain speed, and we are aligning ourselves to better support our alumni and current Arts and Letters students in meaningful ways.

I would like to thank Mr. Brad Deacon, our outgoing president, for his outstanding commitment to the College of Arts and Letters. Under his leadership, we have developed into a stronger board with many new initiatives in place and a refreshed outlook on the future. I hope to continue his strong leadership as we move forward. A close-knit group, it is always bittersweet to experience transition of exiting board members who have given so generously of their time and talents. I would like to thank our eight exiting members for their service: Liz Ahrens, Brad Deacon, Judy Green, Letitia Fowler, Terrence Gipson, Neal Lao, Keith Phillips, and Zack Pohl. We are excited to welcome a new class of board members who will continue their efforts: Kristin Clark Taylor, John Donohoe, Thomas Howard, Whitney Miller, Stefanie Pohl, Rich Sternberg, Emily Sutton-Smith, Emmalena Verellen, and Christine Wilder Hays. The range of talent, experience and excitement for the College that is represented by our board is truly inspiring.

A few of our newest efforts as a board have included introducing small grants for Registered Student Groups. These grants have allowed students to participate in activities that may have otherwise been cost prohibitive. This year we will also be introducing a new award to recognize students and faculty who have been engaged with the community in extraordinary ways. Our members are also engaging regularly with their regional alumni clubs, in hopes of staying connected with fellow Spartans and sharing news from Arts and Letters. It is our goal to strengthen our network and message, ensuring that everyone understands the innovative work being done in our College and sharing that a liberal arts education is the best way to “Claim a Better Future.”

As a French major, I have experienced first-hand how others judge our choice to major in an arts-related field. I have always loved being a Spartan, but somehow that love has grown tenfold through my involvement with the alumni board. The opportunities that the College and board have awarded me are endless. It has meant so much to know that we are supported and that there are others sharing in and understanding the value of our work and passions. I truly hope that we can continue to share with current students that an arts education is invaluable. I feel that the impact of this message is the true focus for our board.

As we look toward the future, my vision is that the College of Arts and Letters alumni board will continue its support of current students and our valued alumni. It is also my hope to reach out to even more alumni and raise awareness that there is no time greater than the present to both emotionally and financially support the arts education of future Spartans. We will continue to work to provide a strong foundation for our current students, as well as forge an increasingly meaningful connection for our alumni. Please consider giving your time and talents to further our cause, as we welcome support in all of its forms.

In Spartan Spirit,
April L. Anderson
Alumni Board President
French, 2000