

A Brief History of the Louisville Cultural Council

SCFD inspired the creation of the Louisville Cultural Council (LCC). In response to the 1988 voter approval of the Science and Cultural Facilities District (SCFD), Louisville's City Council created the new 1989 Louisville Arts and Humanities Council, the forerunner of today's Louisville Cultural Council (LCC). By resolution, its primary purpose was to advance and preserve the disciplines targeted by SCFD: art, music, theater, dance, zoology, botany, and natural history. Its public benefit was to enliven Louisville public life and provide opportunities for Louisville artists. Louisville, long the resourceful coal mining town and perpetually looking to help its hard-working residents, hoped its new five member cultural council would enliven town life and provide employment for its artists.

In 1990 the LCC staged its first SCFD-funded performance and employed Louisville artists in a Labor Day concert featuring the Louisville-based band Wind Machine. The initial concert was such a successful community-building event that it started an annual tradition, first of Wind Machine concerts, which for several years were the most popular LCC events of the year, and later of outdoor summer concerts. Over the years SCFD-funded concerts have played in Memory Square Park, Cottonwood Park, Louisville Middle School, and since its creation in 2006, in Community Park. Concerts in the Park have been and continue to be highly anticipated events as well as an effective means of community outreach and name recognition for the LCC.

In 1990 the new LCC collaborated with the then 10-year-old Louisville Arts Association (LAA) to offer an SCFD-funded Youth Art Show. Designed to inspire young artists and educate them about art shows from the participant side, the event generated so much enthusiasm from students, teachers, parents, and the community that it has become an annual event that still draws hundreds of participants.

One of the founding members of the cultural council was a force of nature named Carolyn Markham. In 1980 she had cut her teeth on the creation of another local arts group, the Louisville Art Association (LAA). In 1990 while leading the newly created LCC she encountered an old problem: a dearth of indoor space for arts programming. Certainly the LCC's outdoor concert met community need, but to offer a diverse year-round program and for the Art Association to stage art shows both of Markham's arts organizations needed an indoor venue suitable for arts programming.

"The Old Brick Schoolhouse" provided the solution. Built in 1894, the two-room schoolhouse had served the Louisville community in a variety of ways over the years. When the LCC was originally created the Senior Center occupied the schoolhouse, but in 1990 they moved to a new space created for them by the city. The two Markham-led arts organizations banded together and approached city council. If the arts organizations provided future arts and cultural programming for Louisville, would the city dedicate it to the arts and keep the building operating into the future? The answer was, "Yes".

The repurposed school became the Louisville Center for the Arts and has served as the home for both the Louisville Cultural Council and the Louisville Art Association (LAA) ever since. The City of Louisville, true to its word, has kept the building in good order. In 1997 a major renovation provided enhanced art gallery space and in 2004 the city added a cupola to restore the building's original design. The building is charming, warm, and historic. As a performance space it provides a bright sound and comfortable ambiance that can seat about 100 people or, interestingly, display about 100 pieces of framed art.

The LCC, also true to its word, stages lively and diverse cultural programs in the Center for the Arts. World Music, Jazz, Chamber Music, Silent Films, discussion forums, and lectures have engaged community participation. The LCC was instrumental in supporting the launch of Coal Creek Players and making sure

that they shared the Center for the Arts. Center Stage Theater later received the same access and both groups are currently resident arts groups at the Center for the Arts, along with the LCC and the LCC.

Collaborating with and advocating for Louisville arts organizations was from the start and continues to be a primary objective. The LAA, Arts Underground, Louisville Arts District, local business, the Library, and the Historical Museum are all programming partners. The LCC has partnered with the Louisville Library since the beginning of Louisville-Superior's "One Book" program, to host a live reading of the "one book" by the performing artists from Stories On Stage. The LCC partners with Louisville Art Galleries and businesses partners for in-kind support and co-promotion of arts related events and arts-friendly businesses. The Louisville Art Association (LAA) is a key partner who traditionally serves as a member on the LCC and invites an LCC member to sit on its board. In 2013 the LCC partnered with the Louisville Museum to co-host a history-oriented lecture, which proved to be one of the best-attended indoor events of the year. On the strength of this event the LCC added a lecture series for 2014. Also in 2013, for the first time in 20 years, the LCC coordinated a series of meetings with the four other SCFD-funded Louisville arts groups and the city to review, strengthen, and clarify the purpose, use, and administration of the Center for the Arts. The result was a city resolution specifying the agreement.

The LCC provides leadership in the area of public sculpture and public art. They served as the focus for the evaluation, siting, and gift of a 2009 sculpture commemorating a fallen community member. In 2010 the LCC sponsored a community decision-making forum that chose a whimsical metal-forged fish for the first installation in its public sculpture garden. Founding, funding, and finishing the city of Louisville's first sculpture garden is a long term project. More recently in 2013, the LCC engaged a consultant to advise both itself and the city on best practices in public art policy development. As a result, the city is in agreement about the need and the basic elements of a public arts policy and has identified 2014 as the year for creating it. City Council committed to setting aside money in a future budget for another sculpture installation to follow the arts policy. The LCC will be involved in both of these next steps.

The LCC always has been and continues to be an all-volunteer board who does a lot with a little. The original complement of five members has grown to ten. The current members are appointed by the Louisville City Council and business is conducted under City of Louisville's Open Government policies. Operating funds come from SCFD, a contribution from the city, in-kind support from local business, passing the hat, and ticket sales. Thousands of Louisville residents participate in LCC programs each year. The individual events do what good arts programming does – engages, stimulates, interests, and connects participants.

2014 may be the LCC's best year yet. In response to advocacy presented by the LCC over several years, the City of Louisville in 2014 created a new position and hired a Public Arts Coordinator. Louisville is in a perfect position to take a leap forward in creating a more dynamic and exciting arts and culture experience. In 2014 the LCC looks forward to streamlining and improving event marketing and outreach, facilitating events programming by non-LCC community members, strengthening and expanding community collaborations, and working with the city on a public arts policy.

(Sources used for this article include city ordinances, minutes of the Louisville Arts and Humanities Council, 1898 – 1893, newspaper articles, the City of Louisville website, the Louisville Arts Association website, and City of Louisville-produced documents including The Louisville Historian and the Jefferson Place Historical Survey report.)