

Alumni Councilors Issue Forum
Notes on Meeting at Strathmore
July 10, 2008
4:00 session
Facilitator: Morrie Warshawski
Scribe: Cliff Murphy

MEETING SUMMARY

MAJOR THEMES:

About Maryland people appreciate:

- Diversity, geographic and ethnic
- Proximity to culture
- Futuristic attitude

People are concerned about:

- Funding
- Arts in the schools
- New media/technology

About MSAC, people appreciate:

- Its accessibility
- Its grants to arts councils, organizations and artists
- Its national reputation
- Its art exhibits

Recommendations include:

More frequent newsletter

More involvement with legislators

Increased networking and communication

SOME SAMPLE QUOTES:

“I like it [MD] because it’s like a Little America. Mountain areas, plateaus, shore. ... It’s at the forefront of a lot of things like industry. It’s a futuristic state. They’re trying to improve it at all times.”

“I like it because we have the kind of collective leaders, including the Senator and people like the last couple governors who’ve made things possible like Strathmore, BMA, museums out in Washington County. The fact that they haven’t decimated the MSAC budget when they could have. They don’t line

item grants in advance of the arts council budget, or out of the arts council budget. We have an enlightened democracy. There are so many opportunities here. It's good. You can get to things, and it has things."

"... in MD there is diversity, an international community, people who enjoy different things other than homogeneous things you get in other places. I like that MD respects that and cultivates that. In the Arts Program there are reflections of that. It doesn't matter what part of the state you go to, there is an arts culture. Each region has different music: you go to the Eastern Shore, you hear one thing; you go to Montgomery County you hear another."

"If in school you don't have band, orchestra, or art class, kids won't want to do it because they can't see it. The reason people go out to see baseball is that everybody's played it. You can live vicariously. If you go see a choir and you've never done it, there's a degeneration of sophistication. It's very important that public schools increase their opportunities for kids."

"... it's consumer driven entertainment. The user generated content tends to be, I see it as a poor example. It's the media, a bombardment of entertainment without the experience, the investment in the entertainment. I have my personal prejudices, but it's a fact of life and we have to react to it. And if we don't, there are dire consequences."

"Well, a lot of new technology is user generated. Games hire lots of artists that make very cool art that at the end of the day you play in a game. It's a different experience from going to a concert hall, but it's not without its own merits too. It's a challenge. Those forms of entertainment are very appealing, not hard to be involved in, there's no gas, no tickets. It is a challenge for traditional theaters and symphonies who are all worried anyway about losing audiences. So now you have competing entertainment forms that are not without some value."

"I went to a previous dedication of a Rodney Carroll work, and it was a wonderful experience to see this 50 foot tall piece in Annapolis Junction, and to see these people realize it would make their office more interesting to look at. These people have invested in something that will be a point of discussion. I like the fact that they have IAA's, there's always an art exhibit at the main office with pictures on the website. And just the fact that we have such a high standing among our peers in the whole nation should speak for itself."

"It's especially notable that the way MD does all its grants for Individuals and Organizations and Education Programs are always held up as a model at national conventions. I know. I've been to 7 of them. And there's always real careful consideration of change, and no rush to do something new just because it's a great idea. Change is done carefully."

"The MSAC's integrity has never been questioned, and its connections to the governor's office and general assembly are good. I would have those people study the arts council and see what its needs are

– it’d show that things are good, but would show them your needs. The only people who will really convince the assembly are the insiders.”

“Legislators [on MD Arts Day] were impressed that so many of us showed up. I would like to see more community networking. For example, historical societies and garden clubs, and the Historical Trust. I was assigned to the millennium committee and the arts council to design a time capsule. And that’s what we as citizens can do.”

RAW TRANSCRIPT NOTES

Theresa – opening welcome

Morrie – addresses group, talks about planning concept

Participants introduce themselves.

Morrie starts with questions.

What is it about Maryland that makes you want to be here? What is special?

- I love living in MD. I’ve lived in Northern Virginia, but I felt comfortable in MD. There are opportunities in Eastern MD that wouldn’t be affordable in urban areas. Great place to raise my children.
- I like it because it’s like a Little America. Mountain areas, plateaus, shore. It’s like a Little America; you could do in a one day trip from Cumberland to Ocean City. It’s at the forefront of a lot of things like industry. It’s a futuristic state. They’re trying to improve it at all times. Chesapeake Bay, trying to protect and improve at same time – trying to do something good for the environment and the economy.
- What I like the most is there are so many more trees than most states. Vegetation. I like it because we have the kind of collective leaders, including the Senator and people like the last couple governors who’ve made things possible like Strathmore, BOMA, and Museums out in Washington County. The fact that they haven’t decimated the MSAC budget when they could have. They don’t line item grants in advance of the arts council budget, or out of the arts council budget. We have an enlightened democracy. There are so many opportunities here. It’s good. You can get to things, and it has things.
- I lived overseas for a lot of my life, so coming back here, there are some states where I’d feel very uncomfortable. But in MD there is diversity, an international community, people who enjoy different things other than homogeneous things you get in other places. I like that MD respects that and cultivates that. In the Arts Program there are reflections of that. It doesn’t matter what part of the state you go to, there is an arts culture. Each region has different music: you go to the Eastern Shore, you hear one thing; you go to Montgomery County you hear another.

- I don't think I'd like to live in some rural areas, even though they're pretty. I really like Baltimore, even though it's a city not everyone would instantly fall in love with. I live in Canton on the water, and if you come in the back way from BWI, it looks like you're coming into an Eastern European City. Wow, of all the places in the world, why do we live here? But the truth is, I love living there because of the people, the neighborhoods, the culture, the blending of the old and the new, and particularly the way in the last decade with the arts; it's a place where artists come and live, can afford to live and work there, there's good support there. There's Peabody, there's history and tradition in the arts. You have conductors, Germanic strains of conductors. During the last 10-12 years, the way that artists have taken over certain neighborhoods. Rolling Stone just did something on the best music cities, and Baltimore was in there. People feel like "wow, there's a lot of creative things going on here."

Where did you see arts flourishing in the state? What are you really proud of?

- Washington County Museum
- Walters
- BMA
- Ward Museum
- Garrett County's thriving arts community
- Garrett County arts festival

Who are the artists?

- Liz Lerman, Dance Exchange
- Marin Alsop, Music Director, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra
- The Walters Art Museum
- Montgomery County Youth Orchestra(s)
- Jazz Performers
- Doreen Bolger, BMA
- Gary Vikan, Walters

Where do you see the issues looming in the arts?

- Funding, in this economy. A lot of the big givers are not giving as much as they used to. I was at a focus group this morning and funding came up there. It's military. Companies there and they give a lot of money, and they're looking hard at cutting back on a lot of grants they give because the economy isn't as good.
- We're finding that so many organizations want to tie grants to the kind of business they own. Certain things are determined, interest areas, and it used to be that the arts would benefit from a number of eclectic organizations. Now it's more focused, and fewer organizations are tying into arts.
- I see exposure to the arts. Since I teach the youth, being exposed to artists, they're not seeing it anymore. They're not seeing it on television. So a lot of it is "cant' afford the ticket," can't cross

the bridge. I don't think you get inspired if you can't see it. I became an artist because I saw an artist. That's what happens. Besides the economy, the first to go is the dance classes.

- If in school you don't have band, orchestra, or art class, kids won't want to do it because they can't see it. The reason people go out to see baseball is that everybody's played it. You can live vicariously. If you go see a choir and you've never done it, there's a degeneration of sophistication. It's very important that public schools increase their opportunities for kids.
- There's a lot of lip synch stuff. We're going from program generated entertainment industry, where you're getting variety and cross-section and different kinds of things, a curated series. As opposed to now when it's consumer driven entertainment. The user generated content tends to be, I see it as a poor example. It's the media, a bombardment of entertainment without the experience, the investment in the entertainment. I have my personal prejudices, but it's a fact of life and we have to react to it. And if we don't, there are dire consequences.
- When you go see music, you can feel the vibrations. Where if you see it on TV, you're not in the music.
- Kids don't seem to want to see one another. They like the screen.
- Well, a lot of new technology is user generated. Games hire lots of artists that make very cool art that at the end of the day you play in a game. It's a different experience from going to a concert hall, but it's not without its own merits too. It's a challenge. Those forms of entertainment are very appealing, not hard to be involved in, there's no gas, no tickets. It is a challenge for traditional theaters and symphonies who are all worried anyway about losing audiences. So now you have competing entertainment forms that are not without some value.

How many had training in the arts? How many of you participate?

- I'm writing fiction
- I play French horn. Last semester I conducted band.
- I still teach dance class, and I'm still a choreographer.

What do you frequent?

- I love drama, I love theater. I do community theater. I like music, I go to clubs. We had bands come from Baltimore to Easton and it's amazing how many bands were there playing music.
- I just went to see Big River. And there were so many young people in the audience. It was very well attended by young people.

Can you think of an art experience recently that really moved you?

- I saw a dance piece that probably moved me more than anything I'd ever seen. By Christopher Bruce. It was 20 minutes long. Somehow from the beginning to the end, you just got moved along. By the end, he ends up dying, but it's almost a relief. If you can tell something like that through movement, it's just incredible.
- Last night or the night before, there was a documentary film on TV about the making of the firefighter sculpture in Baltimore by Rodney Carroll. And I met the filmmaker, and part of the sculpture was dedicated to firefighters and EMT's, and they have 300 some odd names on it. So when Rodney got the money to do the piece, part of the deal was a film about the making of the

sculpture. And they used firefighters and EMTs as models for the sculptures. Real firefighters posed for these, and they took their job really seriously. All these families and firefighters from around the state came. I think everyone should see this. It's about how art and public art touches all these people. People touching the monument. The sculpture is beautiful, but the seriousness of the art is taken very deeply to heart. Not just to sit in a museum, but to be meaningful to the families and to the people. And it made me angry at the Baltimore art commission for refusing the project because they wanted something abstract. I called Rodney the next day and told him I was proud of him. It told the purpose and meaning of art to the community.

- There are interactive fountains in Germany, using the symbols and legends of the town, and are made into bronze pieces. And some of them are suggestive, and you can tell because the brass is very shiny there.
- I went to a previous dedication of a Rodney Carroll work, and it was a wonderful experience to see this 50 foot tall piece in Annapolis Junction, and to see these people realize it would make their office more interesting to look at. These people have invested in something that will be a point of discussion.
- I was impressed by a bank that had a ceramic tree that enclosed an ATM machine.
- I've been to Wolftrap many times, but never did the lawn. I had an experience recently at Wolftrap. We'd ordered a meal with a bottle of wine, and sat down on the lawn for a picnic. It was a little brisk, but there weren't mosquitoes. It was quite delightful, and different from what I'm used to of walking into an establishment.

Let's Talk About the Arts Council. How aware are you of the arts council's programs now?

- Pretty aware.

How do you get information about the arts council?

- Email. I think it should be more frequent.

Are there MSAC things you are particularly proud of?

- Well, how long do we have?
- I like the fact that they have IAA's, there's always an art exhibit at the main office with pictures on the website. And just the fact that we have such a high standing among our peers in the whole nation should speak for itself.
- Like someone else said, we're not clawing for line items; everybody feels invested and everybody benefits.
- It's especially notable that the way MD does all its grants for Individuals and Organizations and Education Programs are always held up as a model at national conventions. I know. I've been to 7 of them. And there's always real careful consideration of change, and no rush to do something new just because it's a great idea. Change is done carefully.

- I think it's accessible to artists. Whether they get money or not, I think they have a good experience.
- They're extremely supportive of individual arts councils. Just the fact the arts councils were established and are vibrant in every county is just great.
- Most states just can't say that.

Having served on the council and now having perspective of being an alum, is there a way that your knowledge gained having been on the council and your interest and experience could be tapped? How could we, as a council, stay in touch with and utilize the experience and knowledge of our alums?

- I feel honored being asked to alumni meetings or a reunion, because I love the people who are doing it. And I like picking up ideas. I was able to pass on good things from our county, and I picked up good things for our county. It's networking and brainstorming.
- Yes. I would like the newsletter, a monthly newsletter with worthwhile info; it would be more useful than a newsletter that comes infrequently and tells us what happened.
- If the Arts Council was in more regular touch with people – not just grant recipients – it would make advocacy easier. I would use it. It's useful information. Communications was a challenge when I was on the Council and not sure what DBED allows.

We had a conversation where we couldn't get a councilor to go to an event. We talked about having alums involved in an ambassador role. Is there some role that might be appropriate as a resource?

- Sure, public speaking was the most fun of being on the arts council.
- If you had a roster, with a biography with what they would like to bring, like a speakers bureau of council alums.
- Some people move on when they leave the Council. But an opportunity to go speak to a group on behalf of Council would be good. It wouldn't have the same cache. It's higher with you than it would be with the organizations.
- Some councilors feel that when their time is done, they should step aside and make a conscious effort to allow the new council its own time.
- If you can pick the ones who were really into it, it would be good.

Last question: When you think about the next five years, do you have any suggestions? Anything you'd like to see changed? Specific programs you'd like to see? Refocusing?

- About this strategic planning process. When I worked at the BSO, we needed a ¼ million dollar computer system. What we did was we got people from the companies of board members to study our computers who showed it to their bosses. The MSAC's integrity has never been questioned, and its connections to the governor's office and general assembly are good. I would have those people study the arts council and see what its needs are – it'd show that things are good, but would show them your needs. The only people who will really convince the assembly are the insiders. We are seen as self-serving. A committee of 5 or 10 who would serve for 3-6 months to see what the shortfalls are.

- I think the selection of those people should be very carefully selected. Names presented to the governor, then those members are approved by house and senate. That's most effective in Maryland. It'd be the most apt way of securing future funding.
- What is your objective for this? That they'd come up with more needs for funding?
- They'd see that given the increase in requests from organizations and artists, they will see that the arts council is underfunded. And they will go to their bosses who will come back and say "you guys should have more money!"
- But it works better if there's some kind of benefits coming out of it. The governor's arts and tourism – the arts attract people, which generates more money and makes things more viable. The Southern Maryland Trails originally came about from the tobacco buyout. So we now have several farms that grow corn mazes, family fun days, tractor pulls, and what have you. And they have this beautiful booklet. They linked it together with artists and artist studios and organized trails. It's separated into different areas. They can go to a potter for an hour and make pots, that sort of thing.
- We are reaching out with Imagine Maryland. Strategic support coming up from the ground, where we go to the governor where we say "this is what we've found." Internal review where we show how effective we are. Compelling data points where we say "that's why we need XXX appropriation."
- As XXXX was saying, if you get the right people to conclude and find that data, your job will already be done.
- Isn't that what the Cultural Data Project is supposed to do?

Around the room – one last comment to Arts Council:

- I'd like a copy of the minutes, and I'd like to put it on the website.
- Notes from meeting will be up 7-10 days on the website.
- It's nice to have contact again. I hope in anything you're doing that you listen very carefully to the staff. So much is known here with the staff.
- Nice to meet you, see you again, thanks for coming.
- What XXXX said, I see this from several angles. One observation is that we have to have a delegate on our board of trustees. They're constantly bombarded with information. Everyone presents a good case for why their special interest is more important than the other. I'm not sure without our input and enthusiasm about what we do that it can be as compelling an argument. If they just see a piece of paper with facts on them, they'll come to conclusions, and financially savvy people will notice those things. But to get the other component – our passion for what we're doing in making people's lives better – it's a foregone conclusion with them, but we need to remind them.
- That was very evident on MD Arts Day. Legislators were impressed that so many of us showed up. I would like to see more community networking. For example, historical societies and garden clubs, and the historical trust. I was assigned to the millennium committee and the arts council to design a time capsule. And that's what we as citizens can do.

Closing Comments from Theresa Colvin:

Welcome back. It's nice to see you, and thank you for sharing your experiences. I look forward to updating you more frequently and including you in future events.