

# Gallery relies on community support for funding

BY MARSHA HERNDON  
MHERNDON@FRANKLINFAVORITE.COM

With the May opening of the annual Guild Show, a new season began at the Gallery on the Square as it celebrates 22 years of showcasing member-artists to the community of Franklin.

As the Gallery enters another year, gallery director Barbara Markell-Thomas faces a new year of challenges as she plans the shows, schedules the artists and begins a new fundraising effort in order to secure the future of the Gallery in Franklin.

This is a new challenge because of some behind-the-scenes changes with the Gallery and the funding that has kept it running for the past few years.

Markell-Thomas says that, especially when asking for money, she runs into many misconceptions about the Gallery, her position there, and the need for funding the arts in Simpson County.

## So, what exactly is the Gallery on the Square?

"What we really are," says Markell-Thomas "is the Simpson County Guild of Artists and Craftsmen, a lot of people don't know that. We are a 501c3 not-for-profit organization."

She explains that while the roots of the Gallery stem from support from the Franklin-Simpson Community Arts Council, and there is a history between the two organizations, the Gallery is now independently funded and operated.

"We have gotten support from them for many, many years. And for that we are so grateful," says Markell-Thomas. "They own this building where we are housed. At the same time, we (the Guild) do all the upkeep and maintenance in the building in exchange for being here."

Markell-Thomas says that many people don't realize that while they receive some continuing support, the Gallery is no longer supported by donations made to the Arts Council. For the past year, the Gallery—a/k/a The Simpson County Guild of Artists and Craftsmen has been fundraising all on its own.

## How is the Gallery funded?

It is important for the community to know this, Markell-Thomas says, because when funding falls short the Guild must write grants, ask for community support and seek local businesses to assist with funding.

"Although the revenue at the Gallery grows year after year, it just isn't enough to support continuing annual operational costs," she says.



Reporter Marsha Herndon and gallery director Barbara Markell-Thomas pose for a "selfie" with artist Vickie Warner (center) after a painting class at Gallery on the Square.

A large part of her job is grant writing, and Markell-Thomas has been diligent in attempting to obtain funding from state and national levels to keep the Gallery running. The Gallery on the Square has been the recipient of the Kentucky Arts Partnership Grant for the past five years, and funding has been obtained through the Kentucky Arts Council (KAC) in the past. However, KAC funding comes from National Endowment for the Arts, federal funding which has been reduced over the past few years.

"We have a reputation in Frankfort. We meet with the Kentucky Arts Council, we participate in the day on the hill, we are active and because of that relationship with KAC, Franklin is on maps and on websites where it might not otherwise be," says Markell-Thomas.

She says that the Arts Council maps allow the Gallery exposure to residents and tourists all over the state of Kentucky. There are visitors to the Gallery who make day trips and travel to Frankfort especially to see the works of a specific artist. On the day she sat down to talk, she had visitors from Alaska and Virginia who stopped through on their travels.

## How does the Gallery help the artists?

Artists in the Guild, as well as the art and crafts in the Gallery, are strictly Kentucky and Tennessee artists and craftsmen. Which means one of the services the Gallery

provides is supporting local and regional artists, giving them a place to display and sell their work and get support and advice from their peers.

## How does this help the city?

What this does for the town of Franklin, she says, is bring access to culture and the arts that some residents might not otherwise have. Many of the artists who grace the Gallery walls are are regionally and nationally known artists.

"We have artists here who are from Louisville, Lexington and Nashville. Some who have hung in the rotunda in Frankfort. We have artists who are highly respected and very well known," says Markell-Thomas.

She feels that having these artists in addition to local artists helps to elevate the community to a higher level in the arts, giving it an action for visitors and potential residents. She's had visitors come from Alaska, Virginia, Maine, Oregon and many other states in between.

## "To provide arts and arts education to our community"

—Simpson County Guild of Artists and Craftsmen mission statement.

Additionally, the Gallery is an active member of the Chamber of Commerce and the Downtown Merchants Association. They participate in the Cherry Blossom Art Festival and the Earth Day festival. They assist the F-S Community Arts Council by providing space to sell tickets and hosting opening night receptions. They collaborate with the Goodnight Library to manage art exhibits there, and recently partnered with the Brickyard Café to create a gallery of Guild work inside the restaurant.

The partnership with Simpson County Schools includes young artist shows, scholarships, workshops and a collaboration with Habitat for Humanity that allows children of Habitat families to work with a Guild artist to create artwork for their new room.

As a community space, the Gallery is a space that is available to rent for special



Winners of the African American Heritage Center's student art contest hangs in the Gallery each year.

events such as weddings, showers, anniversaries, music or other special events. The Fine Print book club, a Pinterest club and the dulcimer ladies are clubs that have all sprung up as a result of the Gallery, and continue to meet there on a regular basis.

They also provide a pretty unique place to shop for gift items that are unique, local and Kentucky Crafted.

## What does the director do?

As the Gallery's director, Markell-Thomas names a laundry list of things that fall on her shoulders. Grant writing, communicating with 80 or more artists, inventory, sales tax reports, monthly board meetings, attending Kentucky Crafted and other shows to purchase items for the gallery and recruiting new artists are just the beginning of her duties. Add to that marketing and

PR for the Gallery, which includes email, maintaining active Facebook and Twitter accounts, keeping up with email list of 600 addresses and a physical list of more than 500 names, well, that sounds like more than a full-time job for a part-time director. She commends her very active board members for their willingness to assist her when asked.

Markell-Thomas says that most of her six annual shows are planned a year out and with big shows, such as the Fiber Art event that was held in January, the planning can be pretty time consuming. She admits that while some think her job is "manning the store," the retail side of the operation actually accounts for only about 20% of her time.

## What's coming up?

Shows at the Gallery are generally planned a year out and Markell-Thomas is excited about July's Wild Summer Art Show, which

stems from an idea that began last summer. As the director, she is always looking to expand the reach of the Gallery and be inclusive of all types of art.

The exhibit features comic book art by Loyd Gant, skateboard art by Derek Williamson and silk screen and airbrush art by Thomas Kennedy and Coty DiMichele. The opening for the new exhibit will be held Saturday, July 12 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and gives the community the chance to be a street artist for a day.

"You have to move forward in this field. It's either go forward or backward, there's just no standing around. You can't do that."

For more information on upcoming shows, Guild artists, classes or to make a tax-deductible donation to the Gallery on the Square, call Barbara Markell-Thomas at 270-586-8055 or visit their website at [www.galleryonthesquare.org](http://www.galleryonthesquare.org).



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