

Art is Strong Medicine

Lexington initiatives lead the way in model programs

By Kim Thomas

Parkinson's patients dance with the Mark Morris Dance Group

"I found I could say things with color and shapes that I couldn't say any other way — things I had no words for."

—Georgia O'Keeffe

As a volunteer grief counselor (called a Stephen Minister) I have attended to people with terminal illness and journeyed with them through the final months of their lives on this plane. In all of that suffering, I discovered there are a number of ways to help people focus on the good, the hope, the light, if you will.

The need for artistic expression during times of mental, emotional, or physical distress is apparent, and it's heartening to know that the best medical facilities today have adopted that school of thought and are introducing art to augment and complement the conventional methods of medical treatment. Even better news is that some of those organizations are right here in the Bluegrass, with plans for all of Kentucky to enjoy the benefits of the healing amalgam of art meets healthcare.

You can see evidence of the Arts Community's work with Lexington's health communities at the Side by Side exhibit this Friday at Gallery Hop; at the University of Kentucky; and through Kentucky's model arts initiatives.

UK Healthcare

UK's Dr. Michael Karpf says, "Health care is a complex process for many people who are often times under emotional stress. The arts offer comfort to people and provide a distraction from those stressful situations. We hope

people will want to come to our facilities to see the art so they know us and feel comfortable with us before they ever have to visit in their time of need."

He explains, "Research studies into the ways in which arts can improve quality outcomes and reduce costs are ongoing. There is preliminary data that it improves attitude and decreases the patient's length of stay ... We expect that our patients, staff and students will experience all the benefits the arts can offer in a health care environment."

Dr. Karpf, Executive Vice President for Health Affairs, states, "the leadership of UK HealthCare is committed to supporting the vision for the University of Kentucky to become a top 20 public research university. UK HealthCare, the clinical enterprise of the University of Kentucky, supports that vision by aspiring to become a top 20 academic medical center." Dr. Karpf confirms that The UK Arts in HealthCare program has been actively developing for several years in anticipation of the opening of the new UK Albert B. Chandler Hospital.

He adds, "An important factor in the success of our developing program has been the partnerships we have built with those throughout Kentucky that share our vision of the role of art in improving lives. The most significant example of that for us is our partnership with the Kentucky Folk Art Center in Morehead, Kentucky. They have been instrumental in guiding us in developing our collection of the works of some of Kentucky's most talented craft artists. Another critical success factor for our program is the financial support we have received through private donations."

Artist Bill Santen says, "When I was a student at UK,

I had the opportunity to make art with the patients in the Kentucky Children's Hospital through a student organization called Kreative Catz. Our immediate impact was providing a much needed distraction for parents, brothers and sisters, as well as patients. In addition to providing creative and educational entertainment, making art is a way for kids to regain some of the control that they lose when trapped in a hospital bed. As a volunteer, I always had a captive audience, which meant 15-20 minutes to convince the children that art will save the world."

He adds, "Recently, I received a generous commission from the Kentucky Children's Hospital for a 25' relief sculpture. The project has been very exciting and impossible without the help and support of Erin Mcanallen, Judy Martin, Loralyn Cecil, Rachel and Brad Riley, and of course the KCH Art Committee." Erin Mcanallen started Kreative Catz when she was a student in UK's College of Fine Arts. She's now a full time employee at the Kentucky Children's Hospital and welcomes volunteers.

Santen is proud to be affiliated with Kreative Catz, a division of Child Life in the Kentucky Children's Hospital, saying, "I worked on the in-patient floor and in the oncology clinic. Working in the clinic is great because you are able to see many of the same patients on a regular basis.

Dr. Karpf says, "There are many wonderful arts programs in health care settings throughout the country. We believe our program, through the support of the community will bring something uniquely Kentucky to the world class hospital we are building for the

Commonwealth.”

Plans for UK Healthcare’s ventures in arts in healing revolve around the opening of the new facility. “Currently, there are three significant pieces under commission for the new UK Albert B. Chandler Hospital set to open in 2011. There is a 38-foot-tall stainless steel and fabric mesh sculpture that will hang in the atrium within a two-and-a-half-story skylight. A 90-foot wall along the upper level of the atrium will Celebrate Kentucky through a multimedia installation of photography presenting the places, people and landscapes of Kentucky. And finally, the Myra Leigh Tobin Chapel will be composed of art glass designed by British artist John Reyntiens depicting springtime in Kentucky.”

“In addition to these three commissions, the new hospital will also house an unparalleled education and performing arts auditorium. The W. Paul and Lucille Caudill Little Foundation is an early partner in establishing a performing arts in health care program and bringing music therapy to patients — a collaboration between the UK School of Music and UK HealthCare.”

And nearby in the new hospital, a unique collection of Kentucky folk art will be on display in the Health Education Center. This collection will be on display at the UK Art Museum this summer from July 11 through September 20. Lexington Art League to display a number of selections from their Paint Present show in the new UK HealthCare Kentucky Neurosciences Institute opening in June 2009.

Aging Through a Physician’s Lens, the photographic art of Dr. Jeffrey M. Levine, will be on display in July and August 2009 in the North Lobby of the UK Albert B. Chandler Hospital. Dr. Levine will hold a grand rounds lecture “Humanism, Geriatrics, and Art” on August 25, 2009 at 6pm in the President’s Room of the Singletary Center for the Arts. (*Exhibit Info, www.ukhealthcare.uky.edu.*)

Karpf identifies a number of individuals within the Lexington community instrumental to the initiation and development of UK’s program, including Donna Hall and Carol Farmer, co-chairs of the UK HealthCare Art Committee, along with “the guidance of the Society for Arts in HealthCare (www.thesah.org), Ms. Elaine Sims of the University of Michigan and Ms. Donna Glassford of Vanderbilt University. Additionally, Ms. Jackie Hamilton has led the team of UK HealthCare staff who have helped make the vision of the Art Committee a reality.”

Arts in Health Care Committee members are: Mira Ball, Antony R. Beck, Hilary J. Boone, Jim Clark, Murray Clark, Arlene Cohen, Carol Farmer, Jim Gray, Donna Hall, Jacqueline Hamilton, Courtney Higdon, John G. Irvin, Ellen Karpf, Michael Karpf, Michael Kennedy, Sheila David, Donna Glassford, Susan Goldstein, Everett McCorvey, Dan Miesle, Victoria Myers, Katie O’Brien, Arturo Alonzo Sandoval, Robert Shay, Myra Leigh Tobin, Kathy Walsh-Piper, Barbara Smith Young.

Side By Side

Lexington physician Nick Kouns and speech pathologist Diane Mason put their heads together a few years ago and decided it was time to stop talking about the need for art and healing and do something about it. The result was the award-winning Side by Side module, a collaborative effort between Cardinal Hill Hospital and the Lexington Art League (where Kouns is a past president). The third exhibit showcasing the work from the program will be open during Gallery Hop, June 19.

The exhibit will feature 30 pieces of art, including one piece created by each child during the six-week course, the collaborative pieces, and one work by each participating professional artist. Last year, all 30 works were exhibited together — “Side by Side” — as evidence of the shared joy of discovery and inclusion, not to mention fun, generated by the program’s curriculum.

Irish Roberts Hatler is the Development Coordinator for Cardinal Hill and says therapists suggest which children they believe would benefit from the introduction of art into their healthcare efforts. “We currently keep an ongoing list of pediatric patients that might be interested in being part of the Side by Side program, which is a supplemental opportunity to their therapy.”

Hatler says, “During Side X Side classes, Cardinal Hill therapists work with the children to ensure the learning environment meets their individualized needs. Adaptations for tasks are incorporated into the curriculum. Under the guidance of art instructors and clinicians, they are encouraged to unleash the artist within.”

She adds, “Based on their experiences in the program, the children gain newfound or expanded artistic talent, an increased ability to function in social or group situations (socialization), and increased self esteem and boosted confidence.

Kouns says that with this program, which was funded by VSA arts of Kentucky, “the goal is not only to impact the lives of ten children, but also to inspire local artists to become involved with the organization. As more programs like those at Cardinal Hill begin to explore art as a means of therapy, self-awareness and growth, the need for local artists who are trained to work in these types of environments will grow.”

Side by Side serves as a model for similar programs throughout the state, and for that matter can do likewise throughout the nation, or even globally. “The model we adopted at the Art League is actually a variation of the statewide program, ‘Side x Side’ that VSA Kentucky advocates and funds. We took their model and added an on-site healthcare provider facilitator. In other words, we took it one step further in placing the program squarely within the context of



Luella Pavey with Austin

a healthcare setting. The children have physical therapists, occupational therapists, counselors, and providers on-site. These healthcare providers facilitate the process by adapting the space, tools, and equipment. If you have a healthcare center and an arts community, you can reproduce this model. I look at this program like ‘Special Olympics for the arts.’”

Kouns says, “our state allots 2.3 million dollars a year

for intellectually gifted children to pursue an exemplary program for the arts here in Kentucky. We are trying to provide that same level of opportunity for a broader and more



“Color” by Kristina Lange and Georgia Henke

representative population of Kentucky’s children. I want us to let them and their families know that we respect and value them equally.”

Hatler says, “The Side by Side program is important to our patients, our staff and as a model of art in healthcare, the citizens of the Commonwealth.”

Art in Healing at the Kentucky Center for the Performing Arts

Debbie Pennell, Vice President for Customer Services at the Kentucky Center for the Performing Arts explains how the Center became active in arts and healing. “The Center began researching Arts in Healthcare issues approximately two years ago, and I was involved in that small task group of staff.” She believes there is a positive impact from the concept of combining art therapy with conventional medical treatment. “We anticipate positive impact in a variety of areas, including improved quality of patient care and outcomes; increased staff satisfaction and retention, savings in healthcare dollars (shortened hospital stays, reduced pain medications) and strengthened public perception of the healthcare facilities. However, we want to carefully distinguish a difference between “arts in healing” and art therapy. While art therapists’ work with patients using established modalities designed to move the patient toward anticipated outcomes, artists working in an art in healing program will provide the opportunity for a diversion from the medical environment, designed to allow the patient a creative experience to help promote a positive thought process. The activities can work in concert to achieve the common goal of healing.”

She says, “In many communities, successful programs already exist. We believe that the Center’s Arts in Healing program which is being developed in Louisville will provide a model that can be replicated in other communities across Kentucky.”

Pennell explains, “We are currently moving into the pilot phase of this new program. Louisville is home to some of the most progressive hospitals in the nation and they have shown an interest in embracing Arts in Healing in several innovative and forward thinking ways.”

This is an area where everybody wins in any Red vs. Blue “competition.” ■