“THIS IS WHAT WE WERE MISSING ALL ALONG, UNTIL TONIGHT”

Art draws 270!

A portion of a crowd of 275 is shown July 28 at The Ellwood City Public Library’s first “Art on the Avenue.”

Attendance at library fundraiser speaks volumes, organizers say

By William V. Foley
For The Chamber

ELLWOOD CITY—More than 270 visitors ambled through 26 exhibits showcasing the artistry of those from or with connections to Ellwood City, a first-of-its-kind eye-opening recognition of works that lays the groundwork for further expansion of the “art scene in Ellwood City,” abstractionist Alexis McClymonds said. “Art on the Avenue” is itself a creation of the Ellwood City Public Library, a July 23 fundraiser whose theme drew raves from a crowd that exceeded by 25 those attending the organization’s April 2016 “Write-On” celebration of local authors.

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Library’s first art show draws 270!

"We did have a crowd like this last year, but they were authors, and this is a library. Bringing art into a library was not risky, but we weren't sure."

"This is incredible. It's incredible!"

Comments from those who approached her during the three-hour event ranged from, "What a wonderful thing the library has done," Pacella said, to "what talent we are seeing in this community," and that "I never knew so many people were so talented."

Wow is the word that immediately comes to mind to describe the artists' work and the public's reaction, said McElwain. "Art on the Avenue" chairwoman and a member of the Ellwood City Library 100th Anniversary Committee.

Exhibitors, according to McElwain, said, "No one has ever treated us like this in this kind of a venue," and the guests, that "This is incredible. It's incredible."

"Being able to assemble this kind of talent, and people willing to donate their time and talent to something like the Ellwood City Public Library, speaks to the fiber of this community."

"Art on the Avenue" also served as a venue to promote the 7-year-old, $2.1 million Ellwood City Public Library, which through May had 15,645 registered library cardholders in an area that includes Ellport, Wampum and Wayne and Perry townships; and residents of the Riverside School District in Beaver County.

"The ultimate goal is to bring people into this fantastic library."
NEXT PHASE OF CONNOQUENESSING PROJECT RUNS PAST ELLWOOD CITY

Cleanup banks on volunteers

By William V. Foley
For The Chamber

ELLWOOD CITY — Among kayaker Christina Handley's best memories of the Connoquenessing Creek is watching a doe and two fawns cross a portion of the 50-mile waterway in front of her. Among the worst, knowing the amount of pollution that still exists in a creek rated in 2003 as the second most toxic waterway in the United States.

"We have seen first-hand the incredible amount of physical pollution consuming our once natural, healthy waters," Handley said. "This drastic change was horribly shocking but opened our eyes to the real conditions of our local waters. We were inspired and spent the past few years educating ourselves to the current threats facing our water. Knowing what we knew, we realize that we can no longer live with our eyes shut."

Handley is president and her husband, Mike, vice president and treasurer of the nonprofit Allegheny Aquatic Alliance, which has a possible 300 volunteers on Aug. 18 and Sept. 9 will scour a 10-mile stretch of the Connoquenessing Creek from Harmony to Ellwood City, bringing to 45 the number of miles of the waterway cleaned by the alliance that formed in February 2012.

A cleanup of the final five miles of the Connoquenessing Creek, from Ellwood City to the waterway's discharge into the Beaver River at Rock Point, may follow in 2018. Up to 150 volunteers have participated in six semi-annual cleanups in five years, Handley said, adding that the groups have collected 270,000 pounds of garbage, 2,615 tires, political signs, car batteries and an unoccupied coffin vault.

"It is our responsibility to protect it"

"There is less garbage consuming the waterway overall in the sections that we have already cleaned," Handley said. "However, there is still new garbage entering the creek through flooding and illegal dumping."

Among the reasons the health of the Connoquenessing Creek is important to Ellwood City residents are its natural uses for recreation such as kayaking, canoeing, rafting, fishing and swimming.

"It is also a potential source of water and habitat for wildlife and aquatic species," she said. "This creek provides relaxation and serenity. The Conno is a local natural resource and as stewards of this area, it is our responsibility to protect it."

The Allegheny Aquatic Alliance this spring became a member of the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce, and its efforts are being praised by Raymond Santillo, chamber executive director and a former educator in a Riverside School District whose campus is adjacent to the Connoquenessing Creek.

"We had assemblies where students would be asked to take the pledge to reduce, reuse and recycle," Santillo said. "We want to keep the Connoquenessing as clean as we can. We appreciate the efforts of the alliance and of the volunteers who are doing that."

The alliance welcomes additional volunteers, Handley said. Those wishing to participate should meet at the Live Out Baptist Church, 1710 Route 586 in Fombell, at 8 a.m. on Aug. 19 or Sept. 9.

What to wear, bring?

Comfortable clothing and footwear can get dirty and wet are suggested. Handley said, adding that hip waders or water-resistant clothing is ideal. Participants are also encouraged to bring any supplies such as shovels, pry bars, pickup trucks, canoes or rope.

"Action needs to be taken," Handley said. "We formed this nonprofit organization so we may educate others to what we know and work to restore our water to its beautiful, healthy state. Otherwise life on our planet, our home, will be in jeopardy."

For more information, contact the alliance at (724) 371-0416 or visit alleghenyaquaticalliance.com.
USO DANCE REMINDS PARTICIPANTS OF SIMPLER TIME

Memories old, memories new

By William V. Foley
For The Chamber

ELLOWD CITY—Rose Thorpe, Karla Burgess and Joe Hemlick made the trip from Ohio; Jack Murtha, from Enon Valley; and Karen Koszela and Don Vaughn, from New Castle; to take a trip back in time July 22 at a Sons of Italy Lodge 608 aptly decorated for the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce’s third Stars and Stripes USO Dance. Thorpe and Murtha, and Koszela and Vaughn were among those who swayed on the wooden dance floor to “Tuxedo Junction,” “On the Sunny Side of the Street” and other trumpet- and trombone-driven tunes from Dante DiThomas Swing Band. They then retired to one of 18 white-clothed tables, each festooned with centerpieces of red, white and blue balloons and miniature American flags.

Filling out his wife Jackie’s dance card was Bob Rivers, wearing a World War II Army uniform and penciling in his name and that of the couple’s 3-year-old son, Robert, alternating on all 26 lines.

“This is fun and exciting,” Jackie said. “Different. Very different from what they have today. It’s nostalgic, and reminds me of my grandparents.”

“It is good to look back at a part of history”

The Riverses, of Ellwood City, also attended the 2016 Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce Stars and Stripes USO Dance.

“It is good to look back at a part of history,” Rivers said. “And how a USO Dance was a huge gathering for people, both military and nonmilitary. It was a big celebration and a lot of fun. It is a huge thing to get the community involved, to see what their grandparents did, what their parents did.”

Seated nearby was Rachel McGreal.

“We don’t know the moves,” she said, adding that the USO Dance was her first and that she liked the music — dropping a few hints to husband Conor.

Ellwood City resident Mike Kumanhik said he has never swing-danced “a day in my life” but thought it would be interesting for him and his wife, Lisa, to learn.

“We love this type of music,” he said. “It’s different. It’s old. It’s classic. And it’s clean.”

“I’ve never done it”

After watching others on the floor, Mike said he and Lisa would “give it a shot.”

The visit to the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce Stars and Stripes USO Dance was a first for Thorpe, of Niles, who said she came at the request of Murtha, a World War II veteran.

“In fact, that is where we met,” at a USO Dance in Canfield, Ohio, she said. “Swing dancing

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USO DANCE REMINDS PARTICIPANTS OF SIMPLER TIME

Paul and Pat Dici, of Ellwood City, left; Sophia Burnell and Mary Veres, of Ellport; and Mike and Lisa Kumanchik, of Ellwood City are shown July 22 during the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce's third Stars and Stripes USO Dance.

Memories old, memories new

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is just very rhythmic."
Burgess, who likened Hemlick
lives in Brimfield, says she
loves to only watch swing
dancing.
"I've never done it," she
said. "And I'm probably going
to watch tonight."
No attempt whatsoever?
"Maybe."
Her boyfriend, Hemlick,
had to be the one to be con-
vinced, she said.
While Hemlick said he was
enjoying big-band era music
that he was hearing for the
first time, he was "probably
not" going to be persuaded to
join the likes of Thorne and
Murtha, Koszela and Vaughn
and Jackie Rivers and her
son on the dance floor.
"It's fun," Koszela said.
"We like this era of music and
dancing."

"You actually
have a partner"

Jeve and West Coast
swinging are different from
contemporary dances
in that "You actually have
a partner and dance steps,"
Koszela said. "You don't just
raise your hands in the air."
Forget yoga and spinning,
Vaughn said.
"You are never going to find
an activity that is more ex-
hausting and more gratifying
than swing dancing," he said.

The Dante DiThomas Swing Band performs July 22 during the Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce's third Stars and Stripes USO Dance.

Raymond Santillo
Chamber executive
director

Dan Franus
Chamber 2nd vice
president

"Our events have been
very, very blessed"
The Ellwood City Area
Chamber of Commerce was proud to
honor veterans "with music
and dancing," executive di-
rector Raymond Santillo said,
adding that the USO Dance
joins other events that have
drawn attention, including
the Summer Concert Series
in the Community Plaza and
outdoor movies in Ewing
Park.
"Our events have been
very, very blessed," he said.
"Good weather. Good spon-
sors. And a lot of people who
volunteer. We had volunteers
here this morning setting up.
It's really touching. They are
not only generous with their
time, they are generous with
their money. It's just blessings
from both directions."
The USO Dance reflects
the Ellwood City Area Cham-
ber of Commerce's attempt
to try different ideas, second
vice president Dan Franus
said.
"We think this is something
unique for the community," he
said. "The 1940s was a
unique era in our country."
The number of decisions
facing those in that decade
may have been fewer but
more difficult, Franus said.
"It was a time when 16-, 17-
and 18-year-olds were decid-
ing whether they were going
to countries and yet they
did not know where those
countries were," he said of
teens enlisting in the military
during World War II. "But they
were going to go ahead and
defend our country."
The era was marked with a
"kind of the naive," Franus
said, "that we are trying
to bring back, to reminisce
about."
ATTENDANCE SPEAKS VOLUMES, ORGANIZERS SAY

Library’s first art show draws 270!

I am meeting all kinds of people who I didn’t even know did these kind of things.

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who have never been here before, and maybe will be repeat offenders,” McElwain said.

“The library has such a vision to do this!”

A rt on the Avenue drew Wexford teenager Josh Gerthoffer to the Ellwood City Public Library, and specifically to a spot where he could view larger-than-life caricatures of famed personalities created by Manhattanite Robert Riske, a former Ellport resident whose works appear in the New Yorker and Vanity Fair magazines.

“They are really funny and very abstract,” said Gerthoffer, adding that his favorite – from among those depicting Elizabeth Taylor, Keith Richards, Liza Minnelli, Whoopie Goldberg, Bette Midler, Conan O’Brien, Carl Reiner and Sylvester Stallone – is of Jack Nicholson.

“It is just Jack Nicholson,” said Gerthoffer, a North Allegheny High School student who studies graphic design.

Even Lynda Lambert, a long-time Wurtemburg resident who served as director of the former Hoyt Institute of Fine Arts in New Castle and as a Geneva College professor of fine arts and humanities, was surprised by the number of artists the Ellwood City area has produced.

“I am meeting all kinds of people who I didn’t even know did these kind of things,” she said while displaying her talisman pouches made of stones such as ammonite, opals and crystals, surrounded by stitched and layered glass Japanese seed beads.

“I think the library has such a vision to do this.”

Agreed, said Raymond Santillo, executive director of an Ellwood City Area Chamber of Commerce whose membership includes the Ellwood City Public Library.

“We have much more of a culturally mind community than people give us credit for,” Santillo said.

Alexis McClymonds, of Ellwood City, is shown with one of her abstractions at “Art on the Avenue.”

David Buano, left, of Ellwood City, and Mike Sofe-kanich, of Wayne Township, view metal art created by Larry Shaffner, of Portersville.

“This will expand a lot of influence”

Antillio need look no further than the chamber’s second vice president, Dan Franus, architect and water color artist who created for “Art on the Avenue” index-card-sized paintings depicting details of business signs on Lawrence Avenue.

“Just because we are a small community doesn’t mean we can’t be an art center,” he said.

“And sometimes when you are a smaller community it allows you to get a grasp of that and build it better than if you were some huge metropolis. It allows us to build on something and really make it something fantastic.”

Which is exactly what Alexis McClymonds was saying. The 24-year-old Ellwood City resident who creates abstract Tiki and African-infused neon illustrations adds that “Art on the Avenue” gives long overdue recognition to those with connections to Ellwood City.

“Usually,” she said, “this isn’t appreciated, the art scene in Ellwood City. So this will expand a lot of influence around Ellwood City.”

"Small Town, Big Living"