

An Artful Survey

Written by Lisa Annelouise Rentz

In November, the Arts Council of Beaufort County asked the community to respond to ten questions about the arts in Beaufort County, each one with an unlimited field for comments. 29% of the people who took the survey consider themselves to be working artists; the second largest category, at 25%, was the 'other, please specify' option. 25% wouldn't categorize themselves from the menu of eleven options, even though "artist" is stalwartly used in the broadest sense, just like the "arts" in the Arts Council of Beaufort County encompasses every form and concept.

index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1451:an-artful-survey&catid=21&Itemid=108 <p>This unwillingness to be menu-optioned to oblivion is admirable, and displays how artists are focused on the details of their calling: studio owner, artist spouse (a singular role) doodler, participant (maybe someone's doing performance art!) quilter, hobbyist, independent publisher. Then there was the other side of the coin: supporter, consumer, appreciator, spectator, a member of the art-enjoying community, and even "Just like the art," one person explained. Another said, "Every artist needs an audience. Very important!"

Much of this survey was about communication itself: do you feel well informed? Appreciated? a part of the arts community? A few responses were along the lines of "wish the slant weren't quite so much to the visual arts." There is much more dimension to the arts in Beaufort County happening right now: black box theater (Painted Alice will premier at ARTworks soon!) basket-making with Kim Keats (google her, you'll be glad,) literary workshops, quilted triptychs on display at ARTworks, and the arts council staff & board show in April is going to be decidedly multi-media. Note also how the community is speaking out and writing letters to the editor in favor of keeping the SC Repertory Company in Hilton Head going that's what it takes, speaking up, spending a few dollars (the arts council has a very necessary operating fund that requires supporters), creating something not on canvas, and then sharing it well and loud. Artists and art supporters in the current economy of change-and-adapt are true catalysts for progress, and no, "artist" could not in a thousand years mean only the visual arts.

But how to share well and loud once you've found a creative path? That question was another chunk of the survey, as well as the purpose of ARTworks as a 12,000 square foot community arts center. Survey-takers were asked: do you know that the arts council is not a function of Beaufort County government? Do you find ARTworks to be organized and accessible, a place for artists to find career resources, a place for all to connect to the arts? While most people were not aware that the Arts Council is not supported by the county, the responses about resources and connections were upbeat:

"As I do not live in Beaufort full time, I am not always available to participate," commented one survey-taker, "but I certainly recognize and appreciate all of your efforts to provide our community with a first rate art center. You are doing a great job!"

"This aspect," noted one survey taker, about arts career resources, "has grown and progressed immensely in the new space and under the guidance of the Ronces."

"I think you've done a bang up job since you've moved to the new facility. Keep on trucking, so to speak. The outer reaches of the county are still learning that ARTworks even exists - they'll catch on with your steadfast promotion efforts."

The question that provoked the biggest and most varied response asked people to agree or disagree with "I feel I am a part of the arts community."

"And, thank you for helping me feel that way!" wrote one accomplished artist who included her name (and is offering sketching and watercolor classes at the SoBA gallery in Bluffton this month and February.)

"Came to Beaufort 10+ years

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ago, thinking it a great arts community, only to find out that it's all about \$\$\$. I was living in a place where artists shared ideas, processes, even equipment--getting together for suppers, discussions, joint projects. Each artist in Beaufort seemingly exists in his own monetary vacuum."

◆ "I think you all do a nice job of making people feel that they ARE a part of arts community, even those of us who are not artists.◆Keep it up, and THANK YOU."

◆ "The presence of a strong arts community is one of the main reasons that I moved to Beaufort in the first place (17 yrs. ago). It has been a pleasure to see the art community grow and prosper. ARTworks is a great addition, and I feel that the people that run it are doing a great job. The fact that you are even conducting a survey just goes to show that you are completely on the right track in trying to provide the very best facility possible. I thank you."

◆ And finally, one person simply mentioned one of the arts council's most unique and welcoming efforts:◆"I enjoy the President's Circle Program." Watch for updates ◆◆ twenty tickets only to each Circle!

◆ This survey supplied vital food-for-thought for the arts council staff and board, who in turn have a renewed & pencil-sharpened set of answers for their county-wide mission. These answers (and those that will surely arise) are continuously worked out, on canvas, on stage,◆in the monthly e-newsletter, facebook account, and arts council website, and in person at ARTworks in◆Beaufort Town Center, the home of Arts Council of Beaufort County, which promotes and nurtures the arts 365 a year, and works as an independent, non-profit service organization that is not a function of the Beaufort County government.◆www.beaufortcountyarts.com, 843-379-2787.</p> <p>◆</p> <p>◆</p>