Huge Success Labor Day Weekend

Volunteers Shine at Academy Events

Spencertown Academy presents the Festival of Books, a huge success Labor Day Weekend.

FESTIVAL OF BOOKS

A young shopper peruses a potential purchase in the Kid's Book Room at the 2013 Festival of Books.

Volunteers have always been the backbone of the Academy. Today, with the organization once again operating on an all-volunteer basis, their role has never been more crucial.

Every program and event at the Academy must be broken out into a multitude of jobs, functions, and services that begin long in advance of the event itself. Organizing committees meet for months, brainstorming ideas, handling publicity and marketing, selling advertising, and producing our signature annual fundraisers: Revels, Hidden Gardens and the Festival of Books—as well as dozens of other events, shows and programs throughout the year.

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers shine at Academy events.

Judy Spencer: Portraits of Veterans of War

Photographs by William Wright
Open Hours: 1:00-4:00pm
November 9, 10, 16, 17, 23
December 7, 8, 14, 15
Admission free
SEE PAGE 7 FOR MORE INFO

Zak Pelaccio In Conversation with Ruth Reichl

December 14—4:00-6:00pm
Reception following
Admission $20
SEE PAGE 6 FOR MORE INFO

Good Globe Singing School Community Sing

Join Sheri Bauer Mayorga and students in a program of fall and winter songs
December 7—1:00-2:30pm
Admission free
SEE PAGE 4 FOR MORE INFO

Revels

Annual Winter Revels Party and Dinners
Support the Academy while enjoying a festive evening of great food and friends
February 22, 2014
Cocktail party—5:30pm Dinners—8:00pm
SEE PAGE 3 FOR MORE INFO

Handmade Holiday

Handmade Holiday is taking a "Christmas vacation" for 2013
Look for a big comeback in the 2014 season
spencertownacademy.org/events
Welcome!
It’s my pleasure to present the first edition of the Spencertown Academy Newsletter.

Between programs, gallery shows and other events, as well as building upgrades and our transition to an all-volunteer organization, this has been a busy and productive year. At a series of community conversations, we talked about the Academy’s future directions and, more importantly, listened to what you had to say. Our newsletter, which we hope to publish on a regular basis, provides an effective way to keep the conversation going.

One question that comes up time and again is “How is the Academy doing?” Our first year on an all-volunteer footing has been challenging but rewarding. To borrow a phrase from an old friend, “We’re in good shape – for the shape we’re in.

In 2013, all three of our signature fundraising events – the Revels, Hidden Gardens Tour and Festival of Books – have been successful, bringing in more money than in previous years.

Membership has grown and building rentals are up, with classes in singing, ballet and yoga as well as a rich schedule of readings and concerts. We held our two most successful gallery shows ever this year; our latest, “VETS: A Portrait of Veterans of War,” will be up through December 15. The Academy’s popular Conversations with Neighbors series has featured two great programs so far this season; the third, with Ruth Reichl and Zak Pelaccio, is set for December 14.

We’ve been busy making physical improvements as well. A building committee has been re-established to oversee the care and upkeep of our treasured historic structure. The boiler has been rebuilt, the elevator and A/C system cleaned and serviced, and the fire alarms, smoke detectors and emergency monitoring system tested and upgraded. (Our apologies if you were startled one Tuesday evening in October when we conducted a fire drill with five local fire companies.)

Our ability to achieve as much as we did this year on our own is due in large part to the remarkable job Mary Anne Lee has done as executive director over the past seven years. Her creativity and resourcefulness in developing the templates for each of these events and generously providing guidance and assistance throughout the transition have made all the difference. We owe Mary Anne a major debt of gratitude for her tireless efforts on the Academy’s behalf.

Much has been accomplished this year, but we’re still working through a long to-do list. We will be launching our year-end appeal soon and we need your financial support. But we also need you. Please consider volunteering on one of our committees or lending a hand at one of our events. We couldn’t have achieved a fraction of our success this year without the talent and hard work of our volunteers.

Thank you for your support. And my warmest wishes to you and those you love for a happy Thanksgiving and holiday season.

Mick Lee

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Preservation Architect Studying Academy Building

Built in 1847, the Spencertown Academy is showing its age. The good news is that the Academy’s Building Committee has been re-established, with responsibility for overseeing the preservation and maintenance of this treasured resource.

The committee’s members bring a variety of talents and expertise to the job. We are lucky to have Cherie Schwartz, a preservation planner and project management consultant who specializes in historical preservation projects and local architect Ben Puccio, who has a history with the Academy and was involved in previous work done on the building. Also on board is local contractor Chuck Weinlein, who has performed much of the repair work on the building in recent years, as well as several other members of the community who care about the building.

At its first meeting, held last December, the re-established committee outlined a master plan with these priorities:

1. Identifying and addressing the most urgent needs, notably roof repairs
2. Performing all necessary work, including exterior painting
3. Making additional improvements as needed
4. Maintaining the building on an ongoing basis.

As a first step, the committee agreed to engage an experienced preservation architect to perform an existing conditions study, covering the projected scope of work and time frame. Following an intensive search, the committee retained Marilyn Kaplan, one of the area’s most accomplished and highly-regarded preservation architects.

Marilyn has an extensive resume, locally and across the country. She has worked with the Academy in the past and was involved in the recent restoration of St. Peter’s Church across the green in Spencertown. She has begun working on her report and the committee continues to meet as we get her feedback. Her full report is scheduled for completion by year-end.

Not surprisingly, our first priority is the repair of the roof, which is leaking. We will share the findings of the full report with you when it is received.

The Building Committee needs additional members: If you would like to play a role in the physical preservation of the Academy, consider joining the Committee.

We would also appreciate hearing from anyone who can fill in details about past repair and restoration work on the Academy. Please contact us at info@spencertownacademy.org or 518 392 3693.
Get Ready for Winter Gala

Premiering more than 25 years ago, Revels is among the most eagerly anticipated fixtures of the Columbia County winter calendar. Held annually, this moveable feast is an opportunity to escape the winter doldrums and catch up with neighbors and friends. The festive evening begins at the Academy with cocktails and hors d’oeuvres prepared by our very own Let’s Eat culinary stars. Then it’s off to one of the many elegant dinner parties hosted by friends of the Academy.

“For newcomers to Columbia County, the Revels is a wonderful way to meet new friends, sample delicious food, and support the Academy, while enjoying the beauty of our 1847 Greek Revival building,” says Barbara Deisroth, board member and chairperson.

The Revels is set for Saturday, February 22, 2014. Mark your calendar—and come in from the cold!

Huge Success

The reviews are in: This year’s Festival of Books Garners Raves!

The planning and execution of the annual Festival, which takes place over the Labor Day weekend, is the coordinated work of many volunteers putting in long hours starting months earlier. It’s a massive effort that involves sorting, moving and pricing books, recruiting speakers, preparing gallons of home-cooked chili and working at the various events, beginning with the Friday evening wine-and-cheese reception.

At this year’s well-attended Saturday morning children’s programs, parents and grandparents came with little ones to meet and take a souvenir picture with a super-sized “Llama Llama”. They also gathered round to hear volunteer Nellie Rustick read aloud about said llama from books written for preschoolers through kindergarteners. Young volunteers supervised even younger readers in making and decorating handmade books and bookmarks to take home. Visitors could enjoy the charming and creative winning designs of a bookmark competition, which were on display throughout the Academy. The competition took place last spring at Chatham’s Mary E. Dardess Middle School.

Large, enthusiastic crowds turned out for appearances by New York Times columnist Verlyn Klinkenborg, poet-teacher Taylor Mali, historian Hugh Howard and a dramatic reading from Peter Biskind’s book about Henry Jaglom’s lunches with Orson Welles, performed by Robert Zukerman and Bernie Kukoff.

The Cookbook Café was busy serving delicious homemade chili and cornbread made by members of the Board. Academy bakers donated a variety of sweet treats to enjoy with coffee or cider.

The Festival was also a financial success. More than 6,500 books were sold, grossing about $20,000—comparable to last year’s total. And our net income (after expenses) represented an improvement over 2012.

Many people have asked what happens to the books and other media that don’t sell by the end of the festival. The thousands of donations the Academy receives each year don’t all stay in our neighborhood; the ripple effect can be felt for hundreds of miles. This year, unsold items were donated to two non-profit organizations: Chances for Children in the South Bronx, which accepted most of the children’s books for their program; and Big-Hearted Books in Foxboro, Massachusetts, which collected the remaining books, CDs, and DVDs, to be distributed to boys and girls clubs, senior centers, libraries, prisons and other worthy organizations.

Meanwhile, preliminary planning has begun for Festival of the Books 2014. We are already in discussions with some exciting authors who may be available to join us. Watch for updates in the new year.

And if you’d like to pitch in on next year’s efforts, please let us know. The more hands on deck, the more fun we will have.
Garden Tour Breaks Records
Ninth annual Hidden Gardens Tour, celebrating the art of the garden...

posted a whopping 50% increase in profit over last year’s record-breaker, with 250 tour tickets sold. The annual June fundraiser has become the most successful event on the Academy calendar.

In addition to the proceeds from the tour itself, the sale of tickets to the Friday night cocktail party, together with commissions from the garden market and garden-themed Gallery show, as well as a sharp focus on cost control, contributed to this year’s record profits.

Academy board members Lydia Kukoff and Madaline Sparks, again served as co-chairs. “The year-after-year success of the Hidden Gardens is due to the work of our wonderful committee and the dozens of volunteers, as well as the gracious hosts who opened their gardens to visitors,” Lydia says. “It’s very generous to invite the public into your garden—much like opening your home. Gardens are often sanctuaries—extensions, really, of their owners. Thankfully, gardeners keep sharing them with us! But we’re always looking for new gardens—if not for next year, then for future tours.”

As in the past, the tour itself highlighted a full weekend of events, “offering the garden enthusiast a variety of ways to enjoy,” says Madaline. These include a gallery exhibit, a Friday night cocktail party, an informative lecture by a garden expert on Saturday morning and an all-day Garden Market on the Green on tour day. For the third year in a row, the tour featured four urban gardens in Hudson and three spectacular gardens in and around hamlets in Columbia County.

This year’s Twilight in the Garden Cocktail Party took place at the Ghent home of Renee Iacone and Steve Clearman adjacent to their bucolic Kinderhook Farm. More than 100 partygoers enjoyed a sumptuous buffet prepared and served by Let’s Eat, the Academy’s volunteer catering team.

At the Saturday morning lecture, Duncan Brine, designer and co-owner of Garden Large in Dutchess County, shared his views on garden design, which he calls “structured naturalism,” with a focus on the use of native plants. Past guest speakers have included well-known local author-blogger Margaret Roach and master horticulturist Dan Benarick of Chanticleer Garden in Pennsylvania.

For those who love to shop, the Saturday Garden Market on the Green offered a wide array of unique and unexpected treasures at affordable prices. More than 20 invited vendors displayed their home and garden-themed wares, including plants, vintage furniture and ornaments, garden tools and books. Gardeners also visited the booth of the Master Gardeners of the Columbia County Cooperative Extension for free gardening advice and answers to questions. A percentage of all sales at the Market benefit the Academy.

This year’s gallery show—our most successful Hidden Gardens exhibit to date—featured the distinctive photographic work of artist Ellen Hoverkamp, who creates intricate arrangements from plants, vegetables, and natural objects placed directly on a digital flatbed scanner. The day following the opening, 20 lucky people attended a lecture demonstration of her fascinating technique at the Academy. Planning has already begun for next year’s Hidden Gardens to take place June 20-21, 2014. Stay tuned for details and mark your calendars now so you don’t miss this exciting event.

Steve Clearman and Renee Iacone, hosts of the Twilight in the Garden Party

Magic Carpet by Ellen Hoverkamp

On Saturday, December 7, 1-2:30 pm the members of the Good Globe Singing School will lead an “all welcome” audience in a Community Sing. The Good Globe Singing School is comprised of children, ages 8-16, who learn about the voice, sight singing, part singing, and improvisation from Director Sheri Bauer Mayorga. The singers will teach and lead the audience in this semester’s songs including rounds, sea shanties, cowboy songs, traditional ballads, and solstice songs. A musical interlude will be generously provided by our guests, “Fiddlers, Too”, the fiddling duo of Memrie Kelly and Erika Ludwig.

Other events in Spencertown that weekend will include the Tree Lighting and Caroling on the Spencertown Green on the evening of December 6. St. Peter’s Church Holiday Craft Bazaar and a visit with Santa at the Spencertown Fire House will take place on December 7. And on Sunday December 8, the Austerlitz Historical Society will host their annual Holiday Sing.

Please visit spencertownausterlitz.org for more information
The Academy’s Home-Grown Arts Education Program artsVOYAGE, Spencertown Academy Art Center’s Arts-In-Education program... is in its eighth year partnering with Chatham Public Schools and other schools in the region. The program serves more than 300 young people of our community bringing in-depth encounters with high quality artworks and performances into their learning day.

At Mary E. Dardess Elementary School in Chatham, 85 third grade students have already completed a study of plants and seeds, using ancient and contemporary depictions of plants and flowers as an inspiration. Students studied images by three “mentor artists,” George Gruel, a photographer from Troy, NY, Basilius Besler (1561-1629), and Ellsworth Kelly, Spencertown resident and longtime supporter of the Academy. Students focused on observation and description, and considered the similarities and differences between artistic and scientific depictions of plants. In a final project, students went “en plein air” to make botanical studies of plants on the school grounds.

Our long-standing unit of Venice is constantly evolving. In past years we have danced to the music of Vivaldi, built a (sort of) scale model of the Grand Canal, made pasta from scratch, and sipped hot chocolate in a mock Café Florian (magically recreated in The Academy’s gallery). This year’s project will focus on the life and work of Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1696 –1770) and consider the role of the artist in this wonderfully unique community. Ulrich Birkmeier, the chief conservator of the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, CT, will visit us and discuss art in Venice, past and present.

The Fifth Graders have adjusted to their transition from the Middle School to M.E.D. and are looking forward to resuming their exploration of Mayan Art and Culture. Building on the work of Dr. Mike Wallace, we will continue to explore the ways art and architecture help one culture gain insight into another.

In the spring, we return to Zen and the Art of Poetry, looking at Chinese art and music from the Tang Dynasty. Our cultural partners Susan Cheng and Wang Guowei of “Music from China” will once again be visiting us. (Our good friend Da Chen, New York Times bestselling author and longtime partner with artsVOYAGE, has recently moved to Hollywood to write screenplays, but has promised to visit us via Skype to discuss Chinese poetic structure.)

Beyond the classroom, we look forward to resuming artsVOYAGE Family Days at the Academy this spring. In addition, we are planning a forum on issues in Arts-in-Education for artists, teachers and parents. Stay tuned for the announcement of dates and artists after the holidays.

The Academy’s Director of Education, Tom Lee, continues to work for The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Yale Center for British Art. His newest partnership is with the education department at The Metropolitan Opera, where he conducts workshops for teachers from around the country who bring their students to the HD broadcasts in their communities on Saturday afternoons.
Natured Loved

In July, the Academy presented the work of four local artists and friends, Pamela Dalton, Page Curry Ginns, Patricia Munson Gravett and Barbara ML Willner. The theme illustrated their shared interest in the beauty of the natural world, both in still life and landscape painting, with most of the landscapes located in Columbia County. It was one of the most successful gallery shows the Academy has mounted to date. Not only did numerous canvases sell, but these artists also attracted an impressive number of visitors throughout the five-week run.

THE GALLERY

July 13-August 4

Zak Pelaccio In Conversation with Ruth Reichl

One of the Academy’s missions is to create and strengthen community. With that core goal in mind, the Academy board has decided to revive a popular series of past years, Conversations with Neighbors. Based on the idea that our “neighborhood” has many resources, chief among them the people who live here, this is an occasional series designed to spark neighbor-to-neighbor conversations and celebrate the richness and diversity of the Columbia County community.

CwN uses an interview format, followed by a question and answer period. Everyone then has an opportunity to socialize at a reception in the Gallery. This year, the Academy has sponsored three CwN programs, all on Saturday afternoons from 4-6. In April, a sold-out crowd heard local author Peter Biskind interview Victor Navasky, Hillsdale resident and former editor/publisher of The Nation on his new book, “The Art of Controversy: Political Cartoons and Their Enduring Power”.

In October, Spencertown resident and journalist Michael Singer shared the stage with community activist Sam Pratt of Hudson on “The State of the County: Land Use Politics and Patronage”.

Coming up on December 14, author and former Gourmet Magazine editor-in-chief Ruth Reichl will chat with restaurateur Zak Pelaccio, a pioneer in NYC’s nose-to-tail culinary movement, expert on urban foraging and author of “Eat with your Hands: The topic: “Beyond Local: Taking Local Food to a New Level”. Most “farm to table” restaurants rely on local meat and seasonal produce. According to Ms. Reichl, Zak Pelaccio, who has recently opened Fish and Game in Hudson, takes it another step. He buys whole animals and uses every part. He creates his own condiments; a year before the restaurant opened he began making fish sauce from local shad. All summer, he put up produce to feed his winter guests. Even the plates, bowls and tables were locally made. This program is sure to be popular; advance reservations can be made at spencertownacademy.org.

“For next season, we’d like to present at least one conversation that deals with local issues and, of course, we intend to continue meeting our neighbors and hearing about what they’re doing,” says chairperson Lydia Kukoff. As this first season of CwN draws to a close, the committee: Lydia, Betsy Hess, Liz Diggs, Emily McCully, and Jan Moseman would like to thank all the guests who graced the Academy stage in 2013 and are busily planning for a slate of fascinating speakers for 2014.

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Please visit spencertownacademy.org for information on programs, artsVOYAGE, membership, volunteer opportunities or to subscribe to our e-blast list.
Volunteers Shine at Academy Events

Volunteers do it all, from initial planning to hosting and everything in between. They work as garden tour docents and gallery attendants, receive and sort book donations, host dinners, sell tickets and perform many other tasks.

VOLUNTEERS

“Serving on a committee is enormously rewarding—and a lot of fun,” says board member Madaline Sparks, who co-chairs the Hidden Gardens Committee. “It’s an opportunity you might not otherwise have to get to know your neighbors while joining in work that benefits the Academy and our community. I have made dear friends whom I met when I served on my first committee 10 years ago.”

The Academy is currently seeking volunteers to join the Membership Committee, Programming Committee, Arts Voyage Committee and Gallery Committee. Plus, there’s always room on the fundraising event committees for Let’s Eat, Revels, Hidden Gardens and the Festival of Books. Whatever your interests, there’s a chair at the table for you!

Board members and chairpersons Nick Van Alstine (Building), Barbara Deisroth (Revels), Madaline Sparks and Lydia Kukoff (Hidden Gardens) and David Highfill (Festival of Books) wish to express their gratitude to the more than 100 folks who have volunteered to serve on committees and work at special events over the past year, generously donating their time and talents and often giving up their weekends. “They make these events happen,” says Nick. “It simply would not be possible without them.”

Academy volunteers will be honored at a Volunteer Appreciation Party hosted by the Board of Directors November 23.

A lot on their plate

If you’ve been to an Academy event in the past several years, it’s likely that you’ve sampled the delicious creations of Let’s Eat, the Academy’s in-house catering committee, currently headed by Cindy Atkins and Cris Morales. Founded by Academy member and super-volunteer Jerry Berger, Let’s Eat brings together food mavens, professional chefs, and talented gour- met cooks. “Jerry’s inspired idea for a volunteer catering crew is what every nonprofit needs to keep costs low and standards high,” says Academy member Charlotte Fennell. They create the menus and cater the cocktail parties for Revels and Hidden Gardens, and supply refreshments and delicious fare for various openings and receptions throughout the year.

A unique crew of volunteer caterers served a special-ly prepared assortment of delicious hors d’oeuvres at the recent opening reception of the current gallery show, VETS: Portraits of Veterans of War. All were soon-to-be-graduating students in the current session of Culinary Command, an elite and intensive nonprofit culinary training program for veterans, led by Chatham-based Chef David Robinson of Bezalel Gables.

The mission of Culinary Command, Chef David says, “is to help returning U.S. veterans and active military personnel transition into restaurant, hotel, food service, and hospitality careers.” Tuition for this program is free to the participants. The fall class hails from New York, Arkansas, Texas, California, Massachusetts and Maine. The Spencertown Academy is proud to serve as the nonprofit fiscal agent for Culinary Command.

Volunteers do it all, from initial planning to hosting and everything in between. They work as garden tour docents and gallery attendants, receive and sort book donations, host dinners, sell tickets and perform many other tasks.

THE GALLERY October 19-December 15

VETS: Portraits of Veterans of War

Photographer Bill Wright is a husband, father, veteran of Desert Storm/Shield, and resident of Pittsfield, MA. After working in the commercial photography industry for a decade, he embarked on a monumental artistic project that became “VETS.” The exhibition has traveled throughout the country, most notably exhibited at the State House in Boston. This powerful exhibit is on display on the following dates: November 9, 10, 16, 17, 23 and December 7, 8, 14, 15 from 1:00 to 4:00pm.