

Rochester

an Arts and Cultural Community

By Wendy Smith

If you've never given much thought to Rochester's image as an arts and cultural community, think for a moment what your life would be like without the museums, music venues, theatres, galleries, dance ensembles, festivals, and movie offerings, to name but a few of the area's offerings.

For Pearl Rubin, community activist and advisor to non-profits, Rochester is not only rich in the classic organizations such as the RPO, Geva Theatre, and the large museums and galleries, but

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also has a rich alternative arts scene such as the Shipping Dock Theatre, Pyramid Arts Center, and the Little Theatre. The area also offers theater at the local colleges and outstanding music at Hochstein and the Eastman School where faculty and student performances are free. Not only is there the opportunity to enjoy excellent, diverse music for free, but also there is no cost for parking. Compare this to other cities where parking alone can cost you the price of a ticket, and the advantage of Rochester's downtown art scene is immediately apparent. The irony is that we are not even aware of all of the events going on in this city where there is something for everyone.

It is the job of Sarah Lentini, executive director of the Arts & Cultural Council for Greater Rochester and her organization to promote, market, and strengthen the cultural industry for the benefit of the community in the our region. As a regional arts council, their role is to serve as an umbrella organization for all the arts organizations within their 10-county jurisdiction. When Lentini began in June 2000, she met with a broad range of members and key leaders to assess how the Arts Council could be most useful. Overall, marketing and promotion was the most important focus for both small and large organizations, individual artists, and the community leadership.

If, as was alluded to by Rubin, Rochester's diverse art scene is its best-kept secret, how do we get the word out? Lentini says we need to start by building a strong image first among our residents so they can serve as our "ambassadors" when they travel and do business. In order to market small organizations and individual artists, the Arts & Cultural Council for Greater Rochester has partnered with existing economic and tourism efforts such as the Greater Rochester Visitors Association, the Finger Lakes Association, and with the arts councils in their 10 county area, to promote the arts to businesses and tourists coming to this area. To that end, "Cold Rush" was produced in partnership with the Greater Rochester Visitors

Association to promote Rochester in the winter. If you are smiling at the thought of promoting winter in Rochester, take note that the target market are people within a three to four hour drive who may be experiencing more snow than we do! A successful venture from January 2001-March 2001, it is promoted on the Website visitrochester.com where you find not only an events calendar and map, but can make online plane and hotel reservations. Marketing and promotion include reaching not

only outside our borders via the web and other media, but also reaching within to ferret out such gems as performing artist Steve Gadd and then promote him as well as other individual artists. This was the function of the 18th Annual Awards ceremony on October 25 where artists and organizations representing different aspects of the arts community were recognized.

For Sarah Lentini, "Steve Gadd is one of the most widely recorded drummers in the world and yet he is better known in Hollywood, than in Rochester, where he's from and where he lives."

This is the case for Stephen Merritt, world-class ceramist, the Rochester City Ballet, and the Garth Fagan Dance Company among others. According to Lentini, "we have more world class artists than other cities this size," which means we have huge potential to set an image as an arts community.

Her vision for the future of the Arts & Cultural Council is to "step up and scale up our efforts so that we're not just promoting Rochester in the winter, but all year 'round, to all market segments. We need to reach out to students, employees, employers, and the people who live here. Promoting Rochester is not about a once a year event."

By expanding these efforts, she hopes that first its residents, and then the rest of the world will see what a truly rich and varied arts and cultural scene we have. **BSM**