

Creating Community with the Arts

Allegany Arts Council • Cumberland, MD

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From the heart of Downtown Cumberland, the Allegany Arts Council has served as a hub for the arts in Western Maryland for more than 40 years. Its mission: “To cultivate the arts to enrich the quality of life in our community.”

“We’re working to make Cumberland a more ‘artful’ place,” says Chris Sloan, executive director of the Arts Council. “This involves creative place-making and working with the community. We support artists and arts organizations with grants, an artist registry and access to e-commerce. We want to provide them with the tools to be successful.” The goal is to transform Cumberland into an arts destination that will attract visitors and enhance the area’s quality of life.



Above: “The Buc” by Darrin Isom (digital photography).

Left: “Plastic Girl” by Penny Knobel-Besa.

Below: “A Boy and His Dog” by Anthony Cornwell (mixed media).



The Arts Council’s headquarters at 9 N. Centre Street, just off the Baltimore Street Pedestrian Mall, serves as a key destination within Cumberland’s Arts & Entertainment District. Its expansive glass windows and doors entice visitors inside to explore an ever-changing selection of professional artwork within two galleries that bear the names of area families known for their generous patronage of the arts. The Saville Gallery serves as the Arts Council’s primary art space, featuring exhibitions of local, regional, and national artists within a spacious, contemporary gallery setting. The Schwab Gallery, equipped with a stage, lights, and professional sound system, serves as a venue for exhibitions, workshops, small performances, meetings, and similar events.



There's always something new to see at the Arts Council. Exhibits change every three to four weeks, with most artworks available for purchase. And then there are hallmark annual events: Allegany National Photography Competition and Exhibition, Mountain Maryland Plein Air Exhibition, Wills Creek Exhibition of contemporary American art, the Studio Tour and the Members' Exhibition. A new, month-long event called "Start to Finish" allows artists to claim gallery space where they can create artwork to be showcased at a closing reception at month's end. Visitors are welcome to watch the artists at work throughout the month.

Arts education is a vital part of the Arts Council's mission. Classes are taught by volunteer artists and art teachers. Adult courses range from photography, digital arts and drawing to business-related issues for artists. For kids, the Arts Council offers classes every other weekend, along with arts camps held in summer and winter. "The kids' classes include all aspects of art," Chris says. "You never know what they'll be doing. We're helping kids see that the arts are a viable option for a creative and fun career."

Chris points to the recent completion of a 200-foot mural at downtown's Canal Place State Park as evidence that Cumberland is an arts-friendly community. "The mural was a community effort, highlighting an iconic scene visible to tourists riding or walking by on the bike trail. Other mural projects and artistic signage are popping up all around town."



Lord Montigue
by Michalina Eisenberg.

"Sunflowers in Blue Glass Jar," "Great Blue Heron," and "Copper Pitcher" by Patricia Wilt and "Quietude" by Donna Godlove (right).

While the Arts Council's headquarters are in Cumberland, Chris emphasizes that this is a county Arts Council. "Frostburg is a very active Arts & Entertainment District," Chris says. "They're using the arts to drive tourism there as well."

The Arts Council also has a mobile arts education bus called the Arts Bus that travels the county. We're very interested in bringing the arts to people who don't get into Cumberland or Frostburg, says Chris. "In 2017 we'll have a STEAM bus as well," says Chris. STEAM stands for science, technology, engineering, arts

and mathematics. The STEAM Bus will provide programs that blend STEM learning with the arts.

The Arts are good for the spirit and also for the economy. "Every \$1.00 spent on the arts in Maryland yields \$3.37," Chris says, noting strong support for the arts from state, county and city governments. "Everyone benefits."

The Allegany Arts Council galleries are open year-round, Tuesday – Saturday from 11 a.m. – 5 p.m., and on Sundays, June through December from 11 a.m. – 5 p.m. Exhibits are free and open to the public, with handicap access available. For more information, call 301-777-ARTS (2787) or visit www.alleganyartscouncil.org.