

1989 - 2022 MICHIGAN'S OLDEST ART CENTER

BY OAB STAFF

In 1989, the Old Art Building (OAB) was added to the State Register of Historic Places, just as the Michigan State University (MSU) summer program came to a halt. MSU stopped using the property, and the building remained dormant for the next few years. What would become of the OAB became a topic of conversation at social gatherings.

A Rebirth

At the time, there was speculation that MSU might sell the property. The Leland Township Board considered buying the property and tearing down the building to build a new fire station. There were also inquiries from developers looking to buy the property to build riverfront condos. Ed and Bobbie Collins, who founded the Leelanau Conservancy in 1988, in response to the threat of over-development in Leelanau County, initiated community action to save the Old Art Building. In early 1992, the Collins and Amy Chatfield drove to Lansing to speak with state representatives and MSU trustees about the idea to preserve the OAB for community use.



Amy Chatfield



Bob and Sally Biggs

Derby Day party



Artists' Market



By September 1992, a group of community supporters led by Ed & Bobbie Collins, Amy Chatfield, and Sally Biggs convinced the Leland Township Board to enter a 20-year lease with Michigan State University with the idea they would start a community center inspired by the early years of the Old Art Building and in keeping with Allie Mae's vision. At a price of one dollar for the initial 20 years and just one dollar to cover each additional 10 years, the stalwart volunteers secured the fate of the building and grounds. The Leland Township Board agreed to manage the lease with MSU with the stipulation that the community would put a board in place to oversee operations and financial responsibility of the Old Art Building.

The first Board was formed in 1992 and included eight members who developed and began to implement their initial objectives: to continue in perpetuity the facility and grounds as a community center dedicated to a multiple-use approach and participation by a broad base of individuals and institutions; to establish means necessary to maintain and operate facilities and programs through private donations, user fees, and endowments; and to ensure the inherent historical and scenic character of the building and grounds.

The first operation costs to consider were taxes and utilities in addition to all building and grounds maintenance. MSU required that its tenants pay for and arrange all maintenance but was receptive to the overall vision for the building. The university would later agree to two building expansions funded by the community.

A Nonprofit Recognized

In 1994, the Leelanau Community Cultural Center (LCCC) was established as a nonprofit. Andy McFarlane was the first paid employee of the LCCC and oversaw summer programming. At that time, the only in-house program was a Coffeehouse on the first and third Thursdays of the month. The group gathered around the fireplace in the main room while sharing music and poetry. Volunteers were plentiful. Ellen Pisor started the gardens we still enjoy today. Bob Biggs was on poison ivy duty for several years. Sally Biggs and her Master Gardener class cleaned up the riverside, while Nancy Telgard helped her clean out the OAB attic by throwing piles of unsalvageable items out of a second story window onto the lawn below.

Early fundraising efforts included dinners at The Lodge and Bluebird. The first large benefit took place the summer of 1993 and remains the strongest annual fundraiser supporting the OAB to date. What was once called the Leelanau Peninsula Wine & Art Auction later became Art Leelanau.

In 1995, a benefit bash called "Raising the Roof" secured enough money for a new roof, exterior painting, floor renovation, and insulation. All of this work, the fundraising and the manual labor, was accomplished by passionate volunteers. Bob Biggs led a group who removed every fourth board from the building's interior walls to add insulation and then return them exactly as they were so as not to disturb the colorful marks that generations of MSU art students had left behind.



Art Leelanau



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Art Leelanau



Art Leelanau volunteers



Art Leelanau



Becky Ross on left, Judy Livingston at right, 2014

Open Year Round

In 1996, Judy Livingston was hired as the LCCC's first year-round Director and served for 18 years (1996 – 2014). Judy fondly recalls starting with five hours per week during wintertime, when she worked with a space heater to keep warm in the OAB office located on the back corner of the stage. During the summer months programing increased to include exercise classes, art workshops and exhibits. In 1998, LCCC launched its first campaign with a goal to fund an addition to the building. Biggs Construction stepped up to help with the work. Bathrooms were added to the breezeway area, and an office was built to get the staff off the stage and into a more functional space.

In 2006, the Ann Hall Artist in Residence program (now known as the Ann Hall Visiting Artist Program) was established with a gift from the Hall family. The Halls wanted to honor their late family member, Ann Hall, a talented artist, and long-time summer resident of Leland. As part of their residency, the Ann Hall Artists in Residence were asked to teach classes, give lectures, and present their work in an exhibit. David Grath, a local painter, who first came to the area the late 40's to visit the MSU

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In 2009, due to increasing program demands, the OAB needed a second employee to assist Judy. Linda Sprout joined the organization; she helped create the first database and increased marketing efforts. In response



Renovating the Old Art Building in 1996



Judy Livingston, OAB Executive Director, 1996 – 2014

Inspirational comments, from MSU years, are still visible on the Old Art Building wall.



Reunion of Ann Hall Visiting Artists, 2017



In two decades of national and international touring, the Old Art Building remains one of my favorite venues to perform in. And on top of being a world-class listening room, it's a hub of creativity and community where folks from all walks and generations come together to create and experience art, music, and lasting connections.

Seth Bernard, Musician, Title Track Founder and Executive Director

to increasing facility usage, LCCC initiated their second capital campaign in 2011. Again, with support from the community, funds were raised to expand storage, office, meeting, and kitchen space. Interactive digital audio-visual equipment was also installed for the first time. Biggs Construction oversaw the renovation process once again.

Increased Community Involvement

In 2014, current LCCC Executive Director, Becky Ross, was hired upon Judy's retirement. At the time Becky was serving on the LCCC Board and her significant experience in fundraising and development made her a natural fit. The board and staff continued to focus on increasing activities to reach more facets of the community by building up programs, activities, and classes. It was during this time that the Membership Program was created, with the goal of engaging new people in Old Art Building programs. What began as a small number of our most ardent supporters has turned into a robust program of more than 280 members.

Love for the OAB grew and continued to bring joy to the community. By 2018, the board observed a shift taking place. Outreach efforts over the years had paid off. Artists and musicians were now contacting the OAB with performance requests without any initiation from OAB staff. A testimonial by singer-songwriter, and 2019 Visiting Artist, Seth Bernard, sums up why: "In two decades of national and international touring, the Old Art Building remains

one of my favorite venues to perform in. And on top of being a world-class listening room, it's a hub of creativity and community where folks from all walks and generations come together to create and experience art, music, and lasting connections."

During this time there was a noted increase in programming, everything from Derby Day, HollyPOP, and Winter Picnic to Leland Musical Arts Celebration and Art of the Garden Exhibit. More and more often the OAB was seen as an ideal location for community events, ranging from school dances to graduation parties, and weddings to birthday parties. What was once a space primarily used during the summer was now providing year-round programming and benefits to the community.

In 2019, as the board looked for ways to manage costs while simultaneously being aware of the organizations environmental impact, a subcommittee began to explore the possibilities of solar power. Significant time and attention were dedicated to the idea given the buildings designation as a historic landmark. Later that year a grant was awarded by All Points North Foundation that would fully fund installation of 60 solar panels on the roof of the Old Art Building. Throughout the installation process there were numerous opportunities for community involvement, including connecting with students at Leland Public School as part of their science curriculum. This project culminated in a Summer Solstice celebration with an outdoor concert on the front lawn.



Construction of the annex



Farewell party for Judy Livingston

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Today, true to the vision it was founded upon, LCCC offers a vibrant canvas of 680 programs, classes and workshops focused on education, arts, and culture. Inside the Old Art Building, the landmark venue is a gathering place for the community, sometimes serving as a concert hall, art gallery, and/or exercise facility. Visitors can engage in various activities including folding origami, calligraphy writing, ballet and ballroom dance, making monotypes by hand, learning about the art of botanical watercolor, and special exercise classes for seniors.

Mark Dudzinski,
former Chief Marketing Officer
for GE Energy Business
Solar Today, Fall 2019 Issue

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Celebration of the MSU agreement to sell the Old Art Building back to Leelanau Community Cultural Center, February 14, 2020



Visiting Artist Seth Bernard plays at the 2019 Summer Solstice celebration

Fourth of July parade float



Leland Public School eighth grade students learn about solar energy.



Community Ownership

After years of exploring the possibility of purchasing the building from MSU, the door opened in 2019 and LCCC Board members began the negotiation process with the University. The fear of losing the OAB altogether drove the Board to this decision. A purchase agreement was finally signed in February 2020, with the stipulation that the sale would be finalized by the end of the year, thus initiating

website, the staff got to work developing the OAB virtual experience. In the summer of 2020, the OAB presented three annual exhibits, virtually, for the first time. The annual Leland Air (“plein air”) event expanded to include more artists, allowing them to paint where they were located. The Art Leelanau Benefit included a Picnic-to-go and virtual wine tasting before the on-line gallery opened. While nothing could replace being in the Old Art Building,

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the *Owning Our Future* campaign. With the help of over 450 donors, ownership returned to the community on December 31, 2020, when the LCCC Finance Committee signed the purchase agreement. During the campaign, money was also raised for the existing Endowment Fund to help maintain the 100-year-old building and support its programs.

When COVID hit in early 2020 the OAB was deep in campaign planning and preparations for another busy summer. With yearly event attendance in the thousands and engaging programming taking place year-round, the staff didn’t waste time determining how they could continue to serve the community with the doors physically closed. Thanks to recent marketing efforts and a newly launched

the virtual exhibits delivered a much-needed connection during a difficult time. In the fall OAB presented members with a virtual concert featuring singer/songwriter Joshua Davis. This was followed in the winter by the new Festival of Lights, bringing JOY to countless visitors. In the summer of 2021 the OAB staff launched Music in the Air, a free summer concert series on the lawn, having the goal of bringing community together in a celebration of the arts.

In 2022, the Old Art Building celebrates its Centennial birthday. The OAB is honoring the different chapters of its history with special events throughout the year, and a new strategic plan is in place to propel it into the next chapter of its history. It is with great appreciation for the countless volunteers and visitors that we enter the next century of this historic building.



Sally Biggs, Becky Ross, Amy Chatfield



OAB Executive Director Becky Ross and OAB President Dan Lizuk

