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Arts Advocacy Day comes to Legislative Hall

Apr 30th, 2017 · by Ian Gronau · Comments: 0



House Speaker Pete Schwartzkopf looks at a painting by Barbara Patterson in his office at Legislative Hall. The painting is on loan from the Rehoboth Art League. (Delaware State News/Marc Clery)

DOVER — If you ask Speaker of the House Rep. Pete Schwartzkopf, D-Rehoboth Beach, why he hangs art from his home district up on his office walls, he'd say it's because it soothes him.

"It's relaxing, it lowers my blood pressure," he said with a grin.

In the run up to the second annual Delaware Arts Advocacy Day, Rep. Schwartzkopf decided to have the Rehoboth Art League stock his office with eight different historical and contemporary oil paintings and prints from their collection. Looking forward to the event on Thursday, Rep. Schwartzkopf likes the idea of the state wrapping its arms around the artistic community.

According to the Delaware Arts Alliance, the upcoming advocacy day event comes at a politically "uncertain" time for "the arts" nationally — referencing the elimination of the National Endowment for the Arts in a recently proposed budget by President Trump's administration. The Arts Alliance also noted that Delaware has ranked third in the nation in state arts funding by the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies in the past, due to a supportive administration.

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“The Delaware Arts Advocacy Day brings a unique opportunity to show legislators the importance of arts education in Delaware’s curriculum and how it positively impacts our future workforce,” said Dr. Guillermina Gonzalez, executive director of the the Delaware Arts Alliance. “We hope this program will make evident how an education in the arts shapes our students’ creativity and has a lasting impact.”



House Speaker Pete Schwartzkopf chats with Rehoboth Art League Chief Operating Officer Sara Ganter in his office at Legislative Hall. (Delaware State News/Marc Clery)

The Delaware Arts Alliance will host the event in the House Hearing Room at Legislative Hall in Dover on Thursday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. The event, sponsored by Rep. Debra Heffernan, D-Edgemoor, will feature a panel of arts education guests including Dr. Susan Bunting, Delaware Secretary of Education and Jeff Poulin, the Arts Education Program manager from Americans for the Arts. The event is free.

“The emphasis this year is on arts-education since the inclusion of the arts

in education helps Delaware kids gain a competitive edge. The event is open to the public and the activities designed for the day are fun, interesting and rewarding,” said Rep. Heffernan.

Rep. Schwartzkopf originally got the idea to stock his office with local art after a visit to Sen. Chris Coons’ office in Washington D.C.

“I was over there and Sen. Coons was showing my all the art hanging in his office and he said, ‘yeah, these are from the Rehoboth Art League,’ said Rep. Schwartzkopf. “When I got back here, we made some calls and worked it out to have some of the art brought here.”



The Rehoboth Art League was happy to oblige.

“We had our first group of paintings up for about two years, and we recently rotated to the current ones in January,” said Rep. Schwartzkopf.

Five of the eight art pieces on display in the office are from Rehoboth Art League’s permanent collection, noted Sara Ganter, the organization’s chief operating officer.

“They’re great because they offer talking points to visitors to the office, but they also help us get art out into the community,” she said. “The artists are honored to have their work appear here — it’s a big deal for them.”

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Rehoboth Art League's full permanent collection consists of more than 700 pieces collected over the last three-quarters of a century. The organization offers over 100 art classes per year in pottery, painting, drawing, mosaic and photography and showcases their collection at various shows, venues and fairs throughout the state.

Also dedicated to bringing art to Legislative Hall, Dick Carter, the director of special projects for the Senate Majority Caucus and Chair of the Delaware Heritage Commission, is responsible for hanging many unique pieces in the building.

"I've endeavored over the years to find interesting works of art and historic objects in the Delaware State Museum collection and the Delaware Public Archives with which to adorn the walls of Senate office and public areas," he said. "Some are paintings and drawings, including several by such prominent Delaware artists as Jack Lewis, Howard Schroeder and Orville Peets."

Mr. Carter also noted that the office's conference room is decorated with examples of the Delaware state seal from its earliest days on up through the years, including one version painted on glass, which used to appear on the ceiling of the old U.S. House of Representatives chamber in Washington D.C. through the second half of the 19th and early 20th century.

For Mr. Carter, the upcoming Delaware Arts Advocacy Day is just another excuse to appreciate the role art plays in Delawarean life.

"I believe that the arts and the history of Delaware are an essential part of our lives as Delawareans," he said. "Art and historic images greatly enrich our lives in many ways and it is important for our citizens to be able to see such works when they visit Legislative Hall. This is especially important for the many hundreds of school children who visit here every year. I believe that artistic expression and the study of history are crucial elements of American citizenship."

For more information on Thursday's event, visit delawareartsalliance.org.

If you go

Delaware Arts Advocacy Day will be held in the House Hearing Room at Legislative Hall in Dover in Dover on Thursday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. The event is free and open to the public.

- 11 a.m. to noon: Introductions by Rep. Heffernan and Sen. Brian Bushweller, followed by performances and artwork from Delaware elementary school students and local artists.
- Noon to 1 p.m.: "Art-Education: The Key to Delaware's Workforce of the Future" panel moderated by Jeff M. Poulin, the arts education program manager at Americans for the Arts and Delaware Secretary of Education, Dr. Susan Bunting. The panel will



One of Legislative Hall's conference rooms is decorated with several Delaware state seals from the past. This one, painted on glass, dates back to 1855 and was made by Johannes A. Oertel. It was part of the iron-framed milk glass ceiling of the U.S. House Chamber, along with similar seals of all the other states then part of the Union. It was removed in 1949 and given to the State of Delaware in 1951. (Submitted/Dick Carter)

include six speakers from the arts and business sectors, two from each sector and county in Delaware.

- 1 to 2 p.m.: Delaware Arts Alliance's institutional supporters will share videos on arts education. Delaware Arts Advocacy Day will conclude with readings from Poetry Out Loud state champion Cecilia Ergueta of Wilmington Friends School and first runner up Shalyn Littlejohn of Hodgson Vo-Tech.

Reach staff writer Ian Gronau at igronau@newszap.com

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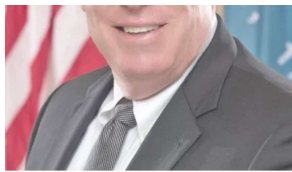
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