New Hope Arts’ 20th Anniversary Gala

by Lori Goldstein

New Hope Arts celebrates its 20th anniversary with a gala the evening of May 24 at Hotel Du Village. The event kicks off its *Elevate the Arts* Capital Campaign to fund a renovation by Doylestown/New Hope architect Ralph C. Fey. A new exterior and interior will be built, as well as an ADA-compliant ramp leading to a three-story elevator funded through a $116,000 state grant secured by Sen. Santarsiero. Mayor and Chairman of the Board, Laurence Keller, will act as auctioneer for the live auction, during which eight major works will be donated by New Hope artists.

One of the Board members instrumental in the gala plans is sculptor Mark Pettegrow, a member artist since 2004. As he reflects on the organization’s mission, he explains how the late Robin Larsen founded New Hope Arts as a non-profit partly to eliminate the pressure that a gallery might exert. “Instead of hearing, ‘I’ll show your work, but if it doesn’t sell, I’m not going to show it anymore,’ New Hope Arts can say to a young or mid-career artist, ‘We see value in your work…we think it’s an interesting piece, let’s show it.’ Who knows where that work is going to go in five years? But if you don’t have the nurturing at the beginning, you cut off the growth.”

Mark remembers fondly Robin’s positive reaction to his work when he was a young artist--her willingness to put his sculpture in the Outdoor Sculpture Project and to place two of his pieces prominently in Union Square. New Hope Arts “provides a vital link between the private studio where the artist creates the work and the public that wants to see it.”

He credits current executive director Carol Cruickshanks with sustaining New Hope Arts through the pandemic with online art shows. The Outdoor Sculpture Project was also a lifesaver since it allowed people to appreciate art safely in the outdoors.

It was Doreen Wright, a Board member at the time, who told him, “’There needs to be artists’ voices on the Board’…there were a lot of wonderful people that truly support the art, but I think it important that other than Robin, there be someone there who was an artist.” Mark joined the Board a decade ago; now he is joined by two other artists: fellow sculptor Elizabeth Miller McCue and Kathy Schroeher, a painter and former pharmaceutical executive. “I think that we bring an important vision to the table…We’re trained to look at something and think, is this a pleasing arrangement or does this work?”

Mark’s first assignment on the gala committee was to create a beautiful “Save the Date” card with the help of designer Rosemary Tottorotto. He was influential in suggesting that the eight artists also bring a larger piece to be seen, to show the scope of their work. One may also approach the artist to see if she or he’d be willing to sell the larger piece.

What Mark’s especially excited about is that his friend and fellow artist, painter Bob Beck, “is going to reprise one of his roles…from decades ago, he’s going to live-paint the event.  ‘We used to do it at the FACT (Fighting Aids Continuously Together) parties at the time, but what do you think?’ And he said, ‘Since you’re asking me, I’m going to do it.’”  That painting will be the last piece to be auctioned. The seven other artists donating their works are Malcolm Bray, Rita Gekht, Kevin Kopil, Michelle Lester, Justin Long, Sean Mount, and Rye Tippett.

A silent auction will also occur during the cocktail hour. Local businesses have donated some of their wares; restaurants--evenings and dinners out. Local jeweler Diana Vincent has donated one of her pieces. There will be a variety of experiences to bid on, including an evening on the Jersey Shore, where a hotel will be providing dinner for a large party at their restaurant.

Pianist Bob Egan will provide entertainment. Jon Kontz, the new owner of Hortulus Farms, is donating all the table floral arrangements. He’ll also decorate the space as you walk in and provide stunning container plantings for the patio.

At the beginning of the cocktail hour, there will be charcuterie and cheese plates, a table of cold and raw bar, plus two generous farm tables full of snacks along with hors d’oeuvres. When the doors open for the main auction room, there will be three food stations with a selection of hot small plates.

It’s not a traditional sit-down dinner.  “It’s so much more fun…because you’re not stuck at your table. You’re carrying your small plate and going back for a variety of different tastes and foods.”  The high-top cocktail tables will encourage people to mingle from table to table. Who knows? You just might strike up a conversation with one of the featured artists.

Your attendance at the 20th anniversary gala will help launch New Hope Arts into its next decade. Tickets to the May 24 event are available through Eventbrite.