

OCEAN COUNTY ARTISTS' GUILD: SPECIAL FUNDING INITIATIVE

By Pat Johnson

The Ocean County Artists' Guild recently produced a booklet about the origins of the Guild and a mural celebrating inclusivity. This unique project interconnecting art and history was supported by two Special Funding Initiative awards from the Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission.

Thanks to an unprecedented increase in funding from the state of New Jersey, the Ocean County Cultural & Heritage Commission offered the Special Funding Initiative for the first time in 2022. The Initiative supports both Art and History projects by new and emerging organizations or organizations requiring a small amount of funding. The Initiative offers a rolling deadline throughout the year, simplified request process, and short time frame from request to award.

Funds are made available by a grant from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts and New Jersey Historical Commission and administered through the Ocean County Cultural & Heritage Commission. For more information on how to apply, please visit the Ocean County Cultural & Heritage Commission website:

<https://co.ocean.nj.us/oc/ch/fmSpecialFunding.aspx>
or email sstokes@co.ocean.nj.us.

"The mural really is beautiful—the most beautiful thing about it is our membership and community worked on it together," said Guild President Kim Cesaretti. "It shows the diversity of our community. Art is inherently inclusive. Art is for everyone. We all come together to learn to live and grow. We grow art, artists and art lovers in Ocean County."

All the members of the Guild were asked to submit

line drawings of local flora and fauna. The result is, "We have a flower garden with some birds and bugs, dragonflies," said Cesaretti. "It was a collaborative effort and then we took the drawings and composed the image digitally and colorized it and then projected it on mural fabric," she explained.

Members were then invited back to paint the design and it was mounted on board and weatherproofed with varnish.

To make the mural accessible to people with limited eyesight the text was raised in Braille.



Mural in progress.
Photo courtesy: Ocean County Artists Guild.

"We also hyped the [drawings'] outlines with black textured paint—a paste that you squeeze through a [pastry] piping bag. This allows visually impaired people to 'see' it," she said.

The mural will be installed in the front of the Guild's restored 1880 Queen Anne Victorian located

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at 22 Chestnut Street in historic Island Heights. The Guild is hoping for an installation and celebration sometime in the early fall.

The second part of the funding resulted in a 12-page, bi-fold booklet introducing the public to the Guild's history.

Katie Miskolcy, office manager for the guild, put it together and also narrated a YouTube video about it. "The Guild was founded in the 1950s' by a group of six women, unusual for the time, and we wanted to highlight that," said Miskolcy. "I was able to access photos from albums on the second floor that hadn't been archived yet. It was a lot of fun-- I could pick favorite photos and do some investigative work--I interviewed some relatives of the founding members."

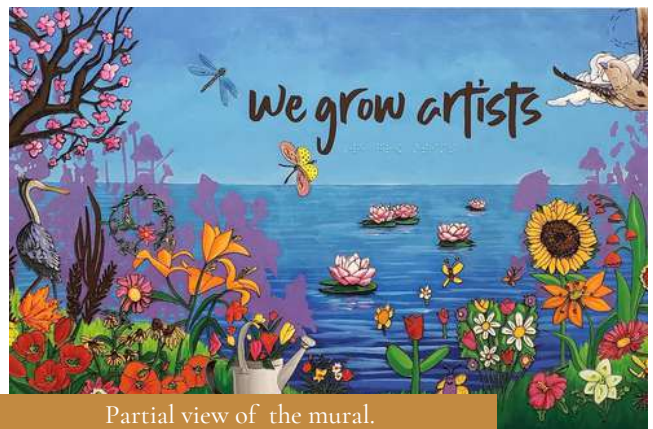
The genesis of the Guild began when founder and artist Edna Thompson Feerick saw that the community was lacking in a place where artists could gather and support each other. Feerick with six other women started the Ocean Arts and Crafts Club in 1957. They met once a week in the Methodist Church, the First Aide building or at each others' homes. Exhibits were held in hotels, banks and clotheslines. By 1960 there were 30 members and in 1973 Edith Grace donated the imposing and beautiful Victorian home. The group was renamed the Ocean County Artists Guild and now has over 300 members.

"The Guild has historical significance in Ocean County and in art history," said Cesaretti. "And in women's history as a group of women got together to bring art and culture to Ocean County. Honestly, the Guild is the county's best-kept secret and we want to raise awareness of who we were and who we are. I want those founders to be noticed and I want New Jersey women artists to know that and take pride in that."

When thinking of the mural's significance, Cesaretti again made the analogy of a garden. "We have the perennial [members] who always come back and the annuals who come for a season. We consider ourselves the good soil and the soft place to land for our seeds of creativity to take root, be nurtured and grow and bloom."

Like other cultural institutions, the Guild is working to get back to pre-Covid activity but even during the worse of the pandemic they were open. "Besides being the new Guild President I'm also a teacher," said Cesaretti. "We were one of the few organizations that were open and we did a great service during that time. We had kids here and seniors, particularly the seniors needed a safe social outlet and the kids couldn't have art classes in school.

That's another part of our garden—we serve people of all ages, we're intergenerational. And we are here no matter your age, creed, race or political affiliation—art is the great equalizer. We all come together at the Guild. Together we are better and part of something great. We're just happy to be here for the community."



Partial view of the mural.
Photo courtesy: Ocean County Artists Guild.