

Jaffrey Civic Center: The Heart of Jaffrey

In discussing the nature and identity of the Jaffrey Civic Center, it's difficult to avoid circling frequently back to visual art and local artists. This is no accident or coincidence. Jaffrey's Civic Center has a long and remarkably consistent history of combining art and education in various ways.

By Michael Ferreira / Photography by Michael Moore

Jaffrey's Civic Center is a refreshing foil to the big town civic centers of urban New England.

Stereotypes around the concept of a civic center surely vary widely, probably conjuring images of college basketball games, corporate conventions, arena band concerts and the occasional monster truck rally.

You won't catch a Metallica concert at the Jaffrey Civic Center.

Nevertheless, despite any incongruities with conventional stereotypes, Jaffrey's Civic Center is undoubtedly a very pure instance of a civic center.

The question arises: If hosting population-intensive, budget-heavy events and grandiose spectacles does not make a civic center, then what does?

The answer: Civic centers are functionally defined. As such, their identity is captured by what they do — by the role that they play — not by the specifics of how or where they do it. Civic centers, big and small, play a community role that involves focusing the collective attention of the local citizenry on culturally significant people, events and artifacts. In short, they bring the people that comprise a community together, in space, time and mind.

The Jaffrey Civic Center, though it may not conform to the vernacular definition, ostensibly belongs to this functional class.

As Executive Director Regina Vorce points out: "Historically [we've] functioned as both a community and

cultural center. We work closely with the community and the school district on shared community events ... in addition to providing space to over 30 local organizations."

Vorce might add that this institution is also a member of a special sub-class of a civic center, a group for which the building, inner spaces and grounds actually do comprise a crucial part of the organization's identity.

ART & EDUCATION

The enormous spaces of the nation's late 20th century mega civic centers seem only contingently related to the events they host: They need only to be big, it would seem. By contrast, Jaffrey's Civic Center offers a more intimate and personal window into the history, culture and people of the towns from which it draws people together.

Vorce elaborates: "Visually, the Civic Center is a beautiful and elegant historical building ... I have heard it described as 'the heart of Jaffrey'... The spacious lawn and grounds can be used for outside events, seasonal markets, etc. Inside the building, we have three galleries, an art studio for classes and conference space, as well as a small kitchen."

How do Vorce and the Civic Center's Board leverage the unique space to play the Jaffrey Civic Center's eponymously named role as the community's center of civic life?

"Art and education are the basis of the organization," explains Vorce, without hesitation.

Indeed, in discussing the nature and identity of the Civic Center, it's difficult to avoid frequently circling back to visual art and local artists. This is no accident or coincidence. Jaffrey's Civic Center has a long and remarkably consistent history of combining art and education in various ways.

The story of the evolution of that admixture of art and education starts with the vision of a school teacher who grew up in Jaffrey: Marion Mack Johnson, who decided upon her retirement that Jaffrey ought to have an "open center for activities of a cultural and historical nature."

To create the desired effect, Johnson organized the Jaffrey-Gilmore Foundation and saw that the dignified building that houses the Civic Center at 40 Main Street opened in 1966.

Today, three art galleries beautify and enrich the main building's inner spaces, adding texture and color to the naturally charismatic interior. The curated exhibits offer a diversity of showings, including acrylics from John Driscoll, an oil exhibit from Dick Fisher, and a button exhibit produced by the Jaffrey Historical Society, which also happens to be headquartered within the building.

In addition to hosting high-quality art exhibits and the Jaffrey Historical Society, the Civic Center houses a large



auditorium and office spaces. The unique inner expanses are utilized for hosting a pair of major art shows, which are held annually every fall and spring. In truly civic-minded fashion, the annual shows feature an open call for submissions to the public. As a result, the fall and spring shows provide an uncommon public display of organically communal visual art.

CLEAR VISION OF ITS FOUNDER
 With a level of care and consistency that speaks to the aesthetic identity of the organization, Vorce steers the Civic Center's support of community education with a steady eye on Marion Johnson's founding commitments and vision. Some of the moves that flow out of that steering seem natural. For instance, one way

Continued on page 30.

COLL'S Coll's Garden Center & Florist of Jaffrey, LLC

- Easter Plants
- Taking Chick Orders for Broilers and Egg Layers
- **Husqvarna** battery series Trimmers, Chainsaws & Blowers. Stop in and see our Husqvarna Auto Mower in Action!



 Husqvarna

View our wedding designs on www.collsgardencenter.com
 And facebook page COLL'S GARDEN CENTER & FLORIST
Mon-Sat 8-5 • 63 North St., Jaffrey • 603-532-7516

Invite Light Into Your Life
 This Can Change Everything



You know how good it feels to bask in the sunshine. There's no reason you can't have that level of pure delight in any season right inside your home. Allow your windows and doors to create a seamless connection to the light and natural beauty beyond your walls.

Explore ways to change your home with light at MarvinWindows.com





JAFFREY 51 Peterborough St. 603-532-7716
PETERBOROUGH 188 Concord St. 603-924-9436
www.belletetes.com

to blend education and art is to continuously provide the community with a range of art classes, which Jaffrey's Civic Center does.

But the organization has also found ways to innovate while expanding access to its evolving brand of aesthetic education.

One stand-out project involves local students in an annual event in January, over the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday. Entitled "Celebrating Martin Luther King, Jr.," the affair is advertised as a "contest ... in creative art, including any media, open to all Jaffrey and Rindge residents of middle school age and non-resident students enrolled in Jaffrey and Rindge schools."

It's a motivating way to kick off the calendar year for area students and families. But the event is more than just an art contest that pays tribute to Dr. King. The event strikes a much deeper pedagogical chord, involving students in probing issues around social justice and the legacy of an iconic civil rights leader.

This year's theme — "We Are All One Humanity" — challenged students to creatively engage a foundational tenet of



While waiting for visitors to arrive on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Jaffrey Civic Center president Tom Doane views artwork honoring MLK and produced by Jaffrey school children.

the American civil rights movement while grappling with the decidedly divisive political and social climate of the moment. The event is thus a celebration of American education and community, demonstrating the Civic Center's commitment to weaving multiple, nuanced layers into its admixture of art and education.

The Civic Center makes versatile cultural contributions to the community that stretch a bit beyond the art and pedagogy, too.

December saw the organization hosting what might be described as an immersive, Christmas dinner theater experience entitled "A Dickens Christmas," proceeds from which raised money for both the Civic Center and Project Shakespeare.

Every summer, the Civic Center's green grounds provide the setting for live music. Annually in July "Night of 1000 Cupcakes" takes place, an enticing title for an event which probably doesn't require much further elaboration to draw interest. Indeed, Vorce observes that 1000

"A Trusted Partner for ALL Your Renewable Energy Options."

Home Heating and Solar



Green Energy Options

Sales • Service • Installation



37 Roxbury St., Keene, NH 03431
603.358.3444
www.GreenEnergyOptions.com



MORE THAN A GOLF COURSE!

- Beautiful Outdoor Pool/Sun Deck
- Tennis/Racquet Court – Resurfaced in 2017
- 18-Hole Golf Course
- Men's & Women's Twilight Leagues
- Pro Shop
- Private Men's & Women's Locker Rooms
- Dining
- Full Bar
- Function/Meeting Rooms
- Event Venues (seating up to 250)

2019 Membership Specials Now Available

- Initiation Fees Waived for 2019 (\$1500)
- Junior Golf Membership (ages 12-18), Just \$100
- Pool & Tennis Memberships \$838
- Varying Memberships Available... Family, Individual, Senior, Young Adult, and Corporate

Join Today & Save!! **603-352-0135**  



Playing bridge at the Jaffrey Civic Center from left, Nancy Sterling, Linda Harris, Ruthanne Bailey and Betty Shea.

Cupcakes is a beloved event, free and open to the public, drawing hundreds of people to the heart of Jaffrey at the height of New England's balmy summer.

Facilitating so many thematically diverse possibilities in such a comparatively small, quintessential New England town testifies to the Civic Center's flexibility, adaptability and creativity.

So long as the community is on board, future programming is not necessarily tethered to, or rigidly bound by, the organization's inceptive roots in the arts and education. The rich, historical interiors and expansive grounds furnish enough elasticity to allow for the exploration of a variety of programming options.

One possible direction Vorce mentions

would be to experiment with programming that would fall into a (broadly construed) "movement and wellness" category. Think introductory yoga classes, for instance.

But even at this apparent point of departure from the Civic Center's links to art and artists, Vorce's instincts tend to re-shade the brainstorming in a more aesthetic color. She broaches the idea of a "mindful drawing" class, for example, as a potential exemplar for bringing together art, education and wellness for community consumption. She also considers growing a more robust music education program, catering to aspiring musicians in the region.

And so, for now, and for the foreseeable future, Marion Mack Johnson's vision for a "community center for educational and artistic purposes" continues to be spectacularly realized at Jaffrey's Civic Center at 40 Main Street, at the very heart of Jaffrey's colorful civic life. 🍷

Michael is a freelance writer and a philosophy instructor. Please feel free to reach out with your questions and comments: m.j.ferreira.vt@gmail.com

We love what we do, and we do it for you!
 Find us in your local retailer today!

The Bread Shed
 80 Krif Road, Unit 8 - Keene, NH
 (603) 355-3912
www.facebook.com/TheBreadShed

THE FARMERS' MARKET OF KEENE Winter Market

Monadnock Waldorf School
 98 S. Lincoln St., 10a.m. to 1p.m.
 Every Saturday, November through December 22
 All Local, All the Time, Guaranteed!

keenefarmersmarket.com • Facebook: The Farmers' Market of Keene

"Put a Lion to Work for You!"

Serving the Greater Monadnock Area

Charlene Stephens Realtor / Partner
 Direct: 978-798-2998
 Email: cstephens@laerrealty.com
 Licensed in NH & MA
 265 S. River Road Suite C • Bedford, NH
www.laerrealty.com

Katsura Landscaping LLC

Aaron Abitz
 Katsura Landscaping LLC
 603-831-1322
Katsuralandscapes@gmail.com

- Ecological landscapes
- Edible and pollinator gardens
- Ornamental, shade and native gardens with seasonal interest
- Certified in permaculture design

Serving the Monadnock Region for 15 years