

# new haven Advocate

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## City Spirit Goes Its Own Way

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*Laura Belle McCoy sharpens drawing skills in a class for seniors given by City Spirit, a three year-old arts program that has just broken off from the New Haven Arts Council. (Virginia Blaisdell photo)*

**E**thel Holley creates in an art class at the Dwight Senior Center sponsored by City Spirit. The three-year-old agency, which is directed by poet Louise Calio, is trying to make it on its own after a three year affiliation with the New Haven Arts Council. (Virginia Blaisdell photo)



## City Spirit

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start to trust you." City Spirit artists generally succeed in getting creative participation in their projects where other arts-related programs have failed because art is their top priority.

If not for the Arts Council, City Spirit artists may not have been able to get into the centers and institutions where they are now working. But, appreciative as they are, the artists feel that it's time to cut the cord and try walking the city streets on their own.

"I think it's terrific," says Baker Salisbury, Director of the Arts Council, "Under the wing of the Arts Council, City Spirit was always in competition with other programs. Anything imbued with such a special set of goals and such enormous talent deserves an energy thrust all its own."

On their own, City Spirit artists will have less administrative bureaucracy between themselves and the community groups which they serve. When City Spirit approached funders as a part of the Arts Council, it had to be dealt with along with other Arts Council requests. Now that it will be considered an independent organization, it stands a better chance of getting funds.

Calio feels that City Spirit's community identity will be improved with a strong Board of Directors, committed to keeping the service alive and growing, encouraging local artists to stay and develop their talents in New Haven.

"We want artists to help each other, to fundraise for the group instead of competing for small amounts of money," says Calio. Muralists Ruth Resnick and Terry Lennox have found that fundraising for their work through City Spirit opens doors that would normally be closed to them as individuals.

"City Spirit gets us contacts in the business community," says Resnick. "As you meet people in the community, you become real to them. You see ideas in people's minds, you get to know what they want. And if one project falls through,

you've made your contacts for the next one."

When they were on CETA, Resnick and Lennox got a feeling for working as professional artists in the community. Now that they realize their employability as artists, they and other ex-CETA artists are not about to "go back to waiting on tables."

City Spirit is able to fill some of the arts service holes that CETA left gaping. The problem is that some of the agencies are CETA-spoiled. For the past couple of years, they've enjoyed federally funded arts services with little concern for the cost involved. Now that the federal money has virtually dried up, the agencies still want art. They just don't understand that somebody has to pay for it.

"Believe it or not, I get tons of phone calls from people who want me to work for free," says Melandez. "They figure that if you love the work you do, you don't want to get paid. They forget that artists too like to eat and pay bills."

For their own survival, City Spirit has to raise "arts cost consciousness" in its agencies. "It's a challenge to all the agencies who have been getting something for nothing to come aboard and pull an oar," suggests Salisbury.

Right now, City Spirit is not quite fiscally frozen, but a little more cash flow would certainly work the stiffness out of some of its joints. It just received a grant from the New Haven Foundation for the interim period from now until December, and they are up for grant consideration by the State Commission on the Arts and the NEA.

"We need a larger space to work in and store materials," says Calio. "We need supplies for all kinds of arts activities. We also welcome any volunteers who want to do research, office work or help with workshops."

City Spirit artists would like to get involved in additional service programs. They want to put out a booklet advertising their work as artists. "The artists are so busy they don't have time to toot their own horn," says Calio. Perhaps now that City Spirit is on its own, the horns will sound all over town. □



# ARTS

## Artists on Their Own City Spirit breaks loose

By Susan Block

Remember those vocational preference tests you took in high school? You just circled what you'd rather do, whether it was plant tomatoes, sell tomatoes, or throw them at lousy actors. Then you tallied up the results, and found out whether your deepest professional calling was to be a doctor, a lawyer or a tomato picker.

Well, if your vocational preference test told you that what you most wanted to be was an "artist," it also probably revealed that what you least wanted to be was a "businessman" (and vice versa). Artist and businessman are simply opposite colors in the vocational spectrum, and when you mix them you get an intolerable shade of grime.

On the contrary, City Spirit would say, art and business can mix. They must mix. And the results of this initially awkward marriage are artists who know enough about business to fund themselves, and businesspeople who know enough about the value of art to want to fund artists' service to the community.

City Spirit is a program designed to enable New Haven visual and performing artists to share their creative skills with the community, especially with those people who have less opportunities to reach the

traditional arts centers. "I always had an interest in art, but when I was working I didn't have time," says Bertha Allinson, a student in Bohdanna Melandez's art class at the Dwight Senior Center. "Now that I'm retired, I have time. But I can't take advantage of the cultural things happening in the city because I'm afraid to go out at night, and there's no means of safe transportation for seniors. So it helps to have something right here at the center."

Besides the Dwight Senior Center, City Spirit artists are currently working in 30 locations, including other senior centers, hospitals, jails, half-way houses, nursing homes and libraries.

The artists not only teach and perform through City Spirit; they run the program itself. They fundraise. They plan and organize projects. They bring their ideas to the service agencies and the New Haven business community.

Lousie Calio, a poet, is also director of City Spirit. "We want artists to be on their own and learning the business of art through experience," she says, "artists should know where arts dollars come from and where they go."

The artists in City Spirit are now going to learn a lot more about the business of art, because City Spirit has just broken off from its subproject relationship with the New Haven Arts Council and is incorporating itself. "Splitting from the Arts Council will strengthen our identity and fundraising capabilities as an artist-run program," explains Calio.

Why was a program like City Spirit part of a membership-service organization like the Arts Council, one which really isn't program-oriented in the first place? In 1976, a Bicentennial Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts was awarded to the New Haven Arts Council to develop greater interaction between the arts and the com-



munity. With this money, City Spirit was born. Technically the program should have ended after a year. But the steering committee, composed of members of the community, the Arts Council, the Board of Education, and artists, decided that City Spirit was worth continuing.

Continuity is important to arts services, especially for the agencies involved. Bohdanna Melandez has been teaching creative crafts through City Spirit at the Dwight Senior Center for a year and a half. "The seniors like that kind of relationship," says Melandez, "they lose interest if they think the thing is going to go down the drain, like

**E**arl Gordon gives tips on sketching to Ethel Holley (l.) and Rose Brown in a class for seniors sponsored by City Spirit, the three year-old arts agency that recently broke off from the New Haven Arts Council to make it on its own. (Virginia Blaisdell photo)

what's happened to some of the city programs. But if they see you coming every week, they get involved and gradually they

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# Art from the Grassroots

## City Spirit opens its own doors

By George DeStefano

"There is an assumption in the United States that you don't subsidize artists," says Louise Calio, director of New Haven's City Spirit program. "You either become a star or you starve."

Calio, a poet, and the nearly 30 artists who make up City Spirit feel, however, that between the extremes of starvation and superstardom lies a more feasible and attractive option: viability as community-based and involved artists.

The participants in City Spirit—visual artists, musicians, dancers, actors and dramatists—are an anomaly in today's arts scene. While "support for the arts" has increasingly come to mean centralized arts management and high-priced administrators, resulting in artists tailoring their needs to those of the agencies ostensibly set up to serve them, City Spirit is geared towards

artist self-management and the garnering of support from the communities in which they live.

The artists themselves conceive and execute their projects and raise the funds for them. They bring their ideas to the service agencies that employ them and to the businesses and other funding sources from whom they seek support, thereby establishing the personal contact with sponsors they feel arts bureaucracies are incapable of effecting.

When asked whether such agencies as the New Haven Arts Council might have the advantage of being able to open doors on behalf of artists seeking recognition and support, Louise Calio asserts, "I don't want anyone to open doors for us; we'll open our own doors."

Calio tempers that remark a bit, however, explaining that while an arts manager might be able to open a door to a potential benefactor, she wants to be the one to slip through the door and do the talking. "I don't mind being introduced to a bank president by an arts administrator," she says, "but when it comes to communicating the situation of an artist to that bank president, it takes an artist to do it."

Such independence of spirit is admirable, but in these economically straitened times, it's getting harder for artists across the nation to budge the doors to businesses and



City Spirit artists need money! So they're holding a benefit concert-dance November 1 at the Educational Center for the Arts. Some of the scheduled performers are: renowned jazz bassist and French horn player Willie Ruff; Spiritual Source, with Michael Mills, Larry Ferrel and Walter Gibson, and Cheri Miller of the Tapestry Oriental Dance Company.



# Correctional facility given artistic uplift

By BILL LAZARUS  
Staff Reporter

When Terry Lennox and Ruth Resnick first saw the visiting room in the basement of the New Haven Community Correctional Center on Whalley Avenue, they were struck by how dreary it was.

So the two New Haven artists decided to bring a little sunshine the next time they came by.

They are now midway through a 39-foot long, 9-foot high mural on the southern wall which should be completed in time for Thanksgiving. In the center is a bright sun which surveys the entire area with a golden gaze.

The mural is elongated, the way the earth would look from far away, and is divided into five distinct areas representing the seasons. The sea washes against a brown cliff on the left as an unfinished Pan waits to play his spring song.

Next to them, a couple picnics in the summer. Canadian geese fly across the eye in the central fall portion followed by purple swirls that represent winter. Green curls and lilies mark the second spring.

The entire picture, which is untitled, is surrounded by the blue of the cosmos and is united with water that flows in various forms through each interlocking segment.

"We wanted to show that life goes on," explained Lennox, a brown-eyed blonde who also does portraits, fabric designs and prints. "The second spring shows continuity."

They work from five to seven hours a week, usually on weekends, fitting the mural into their busy schedules. Lennox teaches art at Conte School while Resnick, a blue-eyed brunette who also creates greeting cards, is director of fundraising and programming for City Spirits Artists Inc, a community art group.

The fund-raising skill is almost as important as artistic talent. Lennox and Resnick raised nearly \$2,000 to buy supplies for the mural, receiving donations from area businesses and cultural groups. In addition, they had about \$1,400 left over from a project they had done for the New Haven Welfare Department.

They are dedicating this mural to former Mayor Frank Logue who encouraged them and helped find funds to support them.

Still, both women volunteer their time, as do about a dozen other people who come by to help with the project.

Joining them on this afternoon were Betty Kubler, 58, president of City

Spirits, and Karen Rossi, 24, a free-lance artist who was looking to get more involved with art that includes people.

Kubler was adding orange leaves to a fall tree, following a grid pattern on the wall set down by the two directors. Like all of the volunteers, she was there because she loves art.

This is actually the second mural Lennox and Resnick have collaborated on. In 1977, the women received a grant from the Connecticut Commission on the Arts to paint murals in offices. "We want to put art in public buildings to humanize them a bit," Lennox said.

It took almost 18 months to complete the Welfare Department mural. In the interim, the Comprehensive Training and Employment Administration (CETA) ended their jobs as mural directors. However, they had agreed to do a second mural.

After some searching around, they found the blank wall in the Whalley facility. "We want to make something very beautiful," Resnick explained, "because visitors are very important to the inmates. It's a celebration of love and friendship, a link to the outside."

The basement is going to get some permanent visitors before they're done. A small party has yet to be painted. Also, they plan to add kids skating in the winter, youngsters playing around a pool in the summer and someone gardening in the spring.

They primed the wall last summer and developed miniature sketches of the mural. "We couldn't use artist oil paint," Lennox noted. "The fire inspector said it was illegal." As a result, they work with latex house paints.

It's a good thing those paints are washable. Lennox, 29, was slowly turning her purple jeans into a walking palette while Resnick, 30, had developed green hands.

They laugh as they study their creation, teasing each other. The mood is picked up in the art. "We wanted to be playful," Lennox admitted.

So they borrowed artistic ideas from various cultures and snuck them into the mural. The waves are Chinese; some decorations African. The swirls were picked up in India, the hills from Turkey, the geese from Canada. There's an overall "feeling" from Persia, Resnick insisted.

Even the sun is alien. The design is Egyptian: the rays from Guatemala.

The inmates and visitors don't mind. They are not just the mural's only critics ("They can be tough," Lennox said with a smile), but the ones who can bask in its glow.



staff photos by LORENZO EVANS

Above, with the mural and their materials all around them, the artists pose for the camera: front to back, Ruth Resnick, Karen Rossi, Terry Lennox and Betty Kubler.



At left, Resnick carefully mixes paints together to create the color she is looking for. The artists use only regular latex wall paint for the mural.



At right, Kubler, one of the volunteers working on the mural, studies the next dab of her paintbrush.