HARWICH: A NEW CULTURAL CENTER TAKES CENTER STAGE

A CONVERSATION WITH ERICA STRZEPEK,
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HOW HAS HARWICH LEVERAGED ARTWEEK TO HELP MAKE ARTS AND CULTURE A CREATIVE ECONOMY DRIVER, INCLUDING THE DESIGNATION OF THE NEW CULTURAL CENTER AND HARBOR SHANTIES?

The direction of the new Harwich Cultural Center was still forming in the spring of 2018, so participating in ArtWeek gave us a goal and advertising support to reach a wider audience. We believe that sharing programs illustrating varied use including visual art, healing arts, woodcrafts, printing, music, and the performing arts, demonstrates the importance of cultural organizations like ours and their benefit to the community at large. ArtWeek has been a valuable platform for the Cultural Center to shine in many different ways.

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HOW DID THE CENTER USE ARTWEEK TO ADVANCE ITS GOALS IN YEAR 1 AND YEAR 2?

ArtWeek launching throughout the Commonwealth in 2018 was incredibly timely for our new municipal endeavor which was repurposing a 78,000 sq. ft. former middle school as the Harwich Cultural Center. Our initial goal was one to two days of programming, and much to our surprise, quickly evolved into 10-days of various activities. ArtWeek demonstrated the expanse of our local creative economy and the alignment of a municipal, multi-use building. The week not only brought visitors to the center, it facilitated conversation about the Town’s participation in the Massachusetts Cultural Council’s “Cultural Compact Pilot Program” -- Harwich being one of six communities participating, the only town selected, and the only community located on Cape Cod.

Building on the prior year’s success, for ArtWeek 2019 the Harwich Cultural Center sought to spearhead programs throughout the Town, especially within the two newly forming Cultural Districts, Harwich Center and Harwich Port. Year two included programming in the Brooks Free Library, Monomoy Regional High School, and Harwich Community Center; all of the events were free and open to the public. Again, ArtWeek brought new visitors and awareness to the Harwich Cultural Center and the public was introduced to another new municipal endeavor, the Seaside Marketplace at Saquatucket Marina which included new art spaces.
CAN YOU GIVE EXAMPLES OF SOME OF YOUR MORE SUCCESSFUL EVENTS?

Our ArtWeek 2018 success stories included an audience conversation with Cape Cod Chamber Orchestra founder and conductor, Matt Scinto along with a performance by a string quartet from the orchestra. This unique event drew visitors from Truro to Boston. An Indoor Walking Labyrinth accompanied by Crystal Singing Bowls was such a success, it lead the way for Labyrinth Quest to develop free monthly labyrinth walks at the center. Turning Your Hobby into a Business lead by Erika Nickerson of Beach Cottage Living, a motivated cultural center renter, gave practical business strategies to those looking to take their creative business ideas to the next level.

Year two highlighted programming that spoke to the burgeoning creative economy in Harwich. The Creative Economy: Seaside Marketplace at Saquatucket Marina ribbon cutting and local economy discussion was well attended by the public, municipal government officials, local cultural council, and state lawmakers. Coverage of the marketplace in local newspapers bolstered awareness of our “Call for Vendors,” as a preview to the first spring/summer season. Also supporting creative entrepreneurs in our community, the center hosted Marketing for Artists, Designers, & Small Businesses presented by Community Development Partnership and Tips & Ideas for Booth Displays with Jennifer Clifford of Vintage Picks by Jen. The Guild of Harwich Artists held a tremendously successful Mystery Puzzle Art Project which saw young children through senior citizens participating, utilizing grant funding from the Harwich Cultural Council to offset the costs to produce this free public event.

Both years, we participated in the Light Up the Night special program. Year one, we created large ArtWeek letters on the building facade and lit them; our local media channel produced a stunning nighttime drone segment for us. The second year, a local resident created a giant interactive piano keys light display that were synchronized to different music (ranging from Star Wars to World War II songs) each night. It was a creative way for us to literally shine a light on how creative Harwich is!


Information sessions at the Harwich Cultural Center, the Harwich public access channel and website, the Harwich Cultural Council, and good-old-fashioned word of mouth and face-to-face outreach served us well in expanding awareness and participation. Comprised of seven villages, Harwich is fortunate to have a strong public library, active community center, and a brand-new state-of-the-art high school. These entities were obvious locations to hold community events during the week.

The Center’s pre-ArtWeek community drone photo also engaged and reached new audiences in Town such as the Harwich Fire and Harwich Police departments, school-age families, and retired community members. The use of this community photo promotionally in newsprint and online gave a natural, “Where am I in the photo?” effect and increased its sharing online.
WHAT STEPS WOULD YOU ADVISE OTHERS IN TAKING TO JUMP START OR EXPAND ARTWEEK IN THEIR COMMUNITY?

The Harwich Cultural Center started by looking at what our community was doing well and what programs and organizations could make great partners, presenters, and volunteers. ArtWeek’s professional advertising strategy and materials are an enormous help for a municipal organization with little to no budget. Using ArtWeek as a launch pad really helped to facilitate town-wide brainstorming and collaboration and put the Harwich Cultural Center in the spotlight.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

• Town partners like the Library, Chamber, and Community Center are naturals
• Involve the local community media center
• Don’t overlook nontraditional art forms
• Special Programs like Light Up the Night uniquely highlight cultural facilities
• Link to creative economy benefits