

Cuvilly celebrates 25 years of loving the earth

By Barbara R. Bodengraven
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What: The Cuvilly Arts & Earth Center 25th Anniversary Gala Celebration, including art auction, diner and dancing to the Orville Giddings Band

When: Friday, Oct. 16 at 6:30 p.m. at the Hellenic Center

Tickets: \$50 per person and may be purchased by contacting the Cuvilly Arts & Earth Center at 978-356-4288 or cuvilly@verizon.net.

It's no accident that Ipswich artist Julia Purinton has been invited to paint the pastoral beauty of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur Cuvilly Arts & Earth Center on Jeffrey's Neck Road.

Purinton's landscapes tell stories of meetings – sea to sky, marsh to meadow, sunlight to seedlings. Under her hand, what appears to be ordinary is suddenly tethered to the sacred. And in the eyes of Cuvilly Arts & Earth Center founder and director, Sister Pat Rolinger, calling attention to the sacred beauty of the earth is as important as promoting concrete, sustainable practices.

"All creation is sacred," said Rolinger. "What better way to promote stewardship of the earth than by inviting artists to come be inspired by our land?"

Purinton's resulting oil on canvas — along with the work of fellow area artists Nicole Hupin-Otis, Andy Borsari and photographer Terri Unger — will be unveiled at an auction to benefit the center.

Established in 1983 by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur in what was originally an old dairy barn, Cuvilly Arts & Earth Center is, arguably, one of the religious order's unique and most varied ministries.

A nationally-accredited pre-school and kindergarten, an environmental arts education center, a home to a variety of farm animals — including Nubian goats being raised for donation to Heifer International and a space for acres of vegetable gardens and farm fields, Cuvilly is many things to many people.

Above all, however, it is a model of sustainability based on the premise that the diversity of life is essential for the well being and sustenance of the planet.

According to Purinton, whose children graduated from the Cuvilly pre-school program several years ago, she and her husband, Ipswich Planning Board member Tim Purinton, have continued to support and remained actively connected to Cuvilly because they fully embrace its larger mission.

"Like the Sisters of Notre Dame, our family believes that accountability begins in your own backyard," Purinton said. "But accountability also extends beyond your own backyard. It's up to us to preserve and protect the earth."

Or, as Sister Pat Rolinger puts it on the home page of Cuvilly Arts & Earth Center's web site:

"The purpose of Cuvilly is to have children fall in love with creation so when they grow up they will preserve what they love."

Twenty-five years ago, Cuvilly Arts & Earth Center opened solely as a pre-school, gradually evolved to include a kindergarten program with its emphasis always on using the natural world as a platform for learning.

Over the past five years, the Center has expanded its reach even further by establishing an environmental arts program for adults. Vegetable canning workshops, bicycle rallies to promote the use of cycling as a means of transportation, soap making, weaving and wool spinning classes – all have been on Cuvilly's recent roster of community course offerings.

For the past two summers, Cuvilly has also offered a special summer session for 4th through 7th graders and, according to Rolinger, has plans to expand its programs for older children.

Cuvilly's most ambitious project to date may be its investment in alternative energy production. Three years ago, a wind turbine and series of photovoltaic panels were erected on one of the hills of Cuvilly's 15 acres, making Cuvilly Arts & Earth Center almost completely energy self-sustaining. This natural, environmentally friendly system generates most of the center's electricity. More importantly, its benefits extend far beyond the confines of Ipswich.

"Our natural energy system serves as the prototype for the hospitals and schools the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur operate in Africa," said Rolinger. "We work out the kinks of the system here, so that when we erect them there we know things will run smoothly."

An international religious order, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur was founded in France in the early 1800s. Cuvilly Arts & Earth Center takes its name from the rural village in France where the order's founder was born.

For more information, visit www.cuvilly.org.



Courtesy photo

At Cuvilly Arts & Earth Center's pre-school and kindergarten, students interact with the center's farm environment on a regular basis as part of the curriculum. Here, student Alex DeStefano is grooming Chique as part of the Center's Farm Chore Challenge.

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