

Macoupin Art Collective: Rural group keeping art appreciation alive

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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STAUNTON - Many school districts are pushing arts and culture out of curriculum due to funding woes, and society is no longer appreciating arts as it once did, Macoupin Art Collective (MAC) Social Media Manager Paul Cloud said.

MAC is a group funded by class fees and donations, based at 214 E. Main Street in Staunton, inside the former Bishop Motors building. Cloud said his wife, Brandace Cloud, executive director of the MAC, had dreamed of opening a community studio to provide quality art education to folks in small rural communities near Staunton.

"Brandace taught art classes and workshops in a number of different settings for years, and while teaching one of those classes, she met a student who enthusiastically stepped up to help make that dream come true," Paul Cloud said. "This very special student invested the money needed to purchase our building in Oct. 2016. This generous investor also helped us renovate that building and fill it with all the equipment we would need to teach a wide variety of classes on crafts and fine arts."

The building opened its doors in March 2017, and Paul Cloud said it has been striving daily to improve its mission.

To illustrate its mission of bringing arts and culture to Macoupin County, MAC offers a wide variety of classes for students of all ages and skill levels, working on projects as various as simple crafts, ceramics, drawing and painting. Classes are offered both as "one shot" and multi-session.

Art gallery space is also available in the building, with the most recent show, "Small Town Able," featuring work from nine different professional ceramic artists.

Funding for MAC comes from class fees and donations from many patrons. The organization is a nonprofit, so all the money goes toward improving the overall experience and operating costs.

"The inclusion of the word 'collective' in our name was very intentional," Paul Cloud said. "We often tell visitors that, 'This is your space as much as it is ours.' We cannot do what we do without the support of our collective, and we want everyone who comes in to feel a sense of ownership for the space and the organization."

Donations can be placed through the MAC website, www.macart.org/donate.

Staunton itself has been supportive of the work of the MAC, Paul Cloud said. He said the collective has worked with various businesses and fellow nonprofits in the town, which he said has worked toward building a real community with both patrons and organizations with vested interest in bringing visitors to Staunton.

"Even the Mayor of Staunton, Mr. Craig Neuhaus, has been a huge supporter, taking a number of classes with us and allowing us to take over implementation of the city's

annual art fair," Paul Cloud said. "We have heard nothing but praise from everyone who has come to see us, and are so happy that we have found a need in this community that we are able to fill."

Since March 2017, more than 1,000 people in a town with a population of 5,000 have taken part in classes offered by the MAC. Paul Cloud said the collective covers more than Staunton, however, adding they serve the small communities across Macoupin County, and have friends come from Edwardsville, St. Louis and Springfield, among other places.

"We want the MAC to be a place where all are welcome, regardless of where you come from or who you are," Paul Cloud said.



In the future, Paul Cloud said the MAC is looking toward working with the regional office of education and perhaps even opening its doors a few days a week as a sort of after school program, which may feature free art projects for children.

"We want the MAC to be a safe place for kids to hang out after school, to work on their own creative projects with their peers, with help and inspiration provided by our staff,"

Paul Cloud said. "And we want all kids to be able to hang out here, regardless of their family's financial situation. We have been using money earned in our adult classes to help us supplement material costs for kids' classes in order to provide them at a reduced cost, but thanks to some generous donations from our patrons, we will soon be able to provide free kids' art activities at least one or two days a week."