

# CULTURE CLUB

PENINSULA ARTS & HUMANITIES ALLIANCE

## Door County Plein Air Festival



Two summers ago, the staff and Board of Directors at Peninsula Art School saw the opportunity to re-invent their summer fundraising event. With lofty goals of bringing new visitors to the county and diversifying the audience, the art school began planning what would become the Door County Plein Air Festival. Executive Director, Cathy Hoke Gonzales says, "As the leading visual arts organization in Door County, we should stay ahead of the curve and be on the cutting edge."

Hoke-Gonzales, and Community Relations Director, Cinnamon Rossman, traveled to California to San Luis Obispo's plein air events and watched with awe as the work of artists, volunteers and collectors fell into alignment. It was so smoothly run that imagining the same scale event in Door County seemed nearly impossible. Experiencing a festival from a visitor's standpoint

proved invaluable in preparation for the event.

Leading into the first festival, Rossman remembers the anxiety and anticipation, rolled into one. "There were so many new artists to meet, and so many details for every day to keep track of," she recalls. "Looking back, I wonder how we pulled it off with so little sleep."

But they did. In 2007, the art school hosted the first-ever Door County Plein Air Festival, with unprecedented success for such a first-time effort. Over 130 paintings were sold during the festival, and the event far exceeded expectations.

"With the success of last year, the bar has been raised even higher," says Rossman.

Artists from the Midwest and beyond will arrive shortly to begin painting for the 2008 Door County Plein

Air festival. Many of these artists have made careers of participating in prestigious festivals, like this one hosted by Peninsula Art School in Fish Creek. Their resumes are long with lists of awards and articles that have been written about their work. Each artist in the festival was carefully chosen, and collectively, their work begins to show the breadth of contemporary landscape painting.

But the Door County Plein Air Festival by no means "overshadows" the work of local artists. Peninsula Art School has invited all artists, from near and far, to participate in the Dockside Quick-Paint Competition as a part of the festival. On Saturday, July 26, artists will have two hours to complete a painting in Fish Creek's Clark Park. The Artist's Guild on Third Avenue in Sturgeon Bay will sponsor awards of art supplies for First, Second and Third Place. An



added bonus for the first place winner will be an invitation to participate as a featured artist in the 2009 festival.

Last year's Quick-Paint finished with a tie for first place by local artist Karen Cook and artist Mary Rypel Anderson from Abrams, WI. Neither artist had participated in a quick-paint before. Anderson remembers arriving in Clark Park at 6 am, and looking for scenes that caught her eye. She set up her easel and laid out her painting in her mind. When the horn sounded at 9 am to announce the start of the paint-out, she was prepared. She recalls the crowds from all the events in Fish Creek that weekend.

"There were people all around me, asking me questions," she says. "I just tried to keep my focus." After the painting was finished and hanging in the temporary gallery at Peninsula Art School, she took a break before returning for the reception that evening. When Anderson arrived, she found the

painting had already been sold. After votes from the gallery visitors that day had been counted, Anderson listened as she was announced as a first place winner. "I was very surprised when they called my name – very excited."

As a featured artist in the festival this year, Anderson is experiencing that same anxiousness. Even though she has last year's experience to build on, she still feels compelled to produce, "and not mess it up." The feeling is one that many artists have. The pressure to create 15 to 20 wonderful artworks in a short amount of time – despite the heat and the weather – can be enormous. Anderson says, "For me, it's all very new and scary."

The pressure hasn't overwhelmed her excitement to participate though. This year Anderson says she is, "Very excited and a little nervous...a lot nervous."

As a festival organizer, Rossman has faith in Anderson's ability. "The people's votes following the Quick-Paint were right on with my personal feelings," she says.

The Docks Quick-Paint will be open to all artists who wish to participate. "Last year, we had artists who traveled hundreds of miles to participate, and I think the desire to be a featured artist is so great, we will see that again," says Rossman. "I would encourage any artist who wants to be a part of the festival to try the Quick-Paint. It is a great way to get your name out there." Artwork created during the Docks Quick-Paint in 2007 sold very well, with about two-thirds of paintings gone by the end of the one-night reception.

For more information about participating in the Docks Quick-Paint, contact Cinnamon Rossman, at Peninsula Art School, 920.868.3455, or send an email to [events@peninsulaartschool.com](mailto:events@peninsulaartschool.com). A full schedule of the Door County Plein Air Festival is available online at [www.DoorCountyPleinAir.com](http://www.DoorCountyPleinAir.com)

*The Door County Plein Air Festival is sponsored by Cellcom, Thrivent Financial, Utrecht Art Supplies, Associated Bank and The Artists Guild.*