



ARTS WITH HEART

BY ALESIA GONZALEZ

Top: Hope McMuth, Director of Education for the Cummer, coordinates the Cummer's Arts Connections in Healthcare Programs.

James Jenkins is a man with a big smile. Which goes well with his heart. The principal tuba player with the Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra also works in an administrative capacity with the JSO. But that's not all: A painful personal experience a few years ago motivated Jenkins to create ongoing arts programs in assisted living facilities in Northeast Florida.

The inspiration for creating such programs was Jenkins' own father, who, due to diabetes, had spent the last seven years of his life at assisted living facilities. "With my visiting and spending a lot of time with him," Jenkins recalls, "I learned—discovered, actually—there was a real need to help the spirit of the health care environment. Not just for the patients, but also the doctors and staff. Because it's an alien atmosphere for the patients, and a



high stress workplace for everyone involved.

"So I thought it'd be a good idea for Jacksonville's performing and visual artists, and the corresponding entities, to somehow become organized to provide a specific service to the health care community." In addition to music, there are the visual arts, dance, and theater as well. "The

concept is to provide a comprehensive model," he says.

Jenkins' research introduced him to various networks and facilities where there have been documented successes with programs involving the arts with health care. Among them, Gainesville's Shands Hospital's Arts in Medicine Program.

In addition to his responsibilities with the JSO, Jenkins is now the founder and director of Body & Soul: The Art of Healing, an innovative program that brings the community's arts organizations and professionals into healthcare facilities. "We work with St. Vincent's Hospital", he says. "Or, as is the case with St. Catherine's Labouré Manor, which is an assisted living facility, we literally tailor arts programs to its needs and what it's able to house, based on the space, patient profiles and other prerequisites." It isn't just bringing in arts for

entertainment, he emphasizes—although that's certainly a welcome component. "We're actually studying the impact of bringing a comprehensive arts program into a facility like St. Catherine's." In addition to caring for the elderly, St. Catherine's services persons who need various degrees of permanent medical assistance.

St. Catherine's isn't the only facility to benefit from this innovative approach to healthcare. Northeast Florida State Hospital, a 593-bed mental-health treatment facility in MacLenny, operated under the Florida Department of Children and Families, is also part of the Art Connections in Healthcare Program. "We're able to customize programs for any given institution," Jenkins adds.

There are five components of Body & Soul. "Arts in Action" sponsors a monthly arts performance program in a given facility where musicians from the community are featured. For instance, last January, the JU Chamber Chorale performed at St. Catherine's. Subsequent performances have been presented by The St. Johns River City Band and smaller ensembles from the Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra. Local pianists and vocalists have also performed.

"Room Service," is another program offered," Jenkins continues. "A small team of musicians make room-to-room visits, primarily to residents who are unable to participate in the various social activities offered." These strolling minstrels perform three to five minute recitals inside the residents' rooms.

Mark Marble, Activities Director at St. Catherine's, helps coordinate the Body & Soul visitations. "That means working hands-on with both the JSO and Cummer Museum programs," he explains. Marble and his staff have documented impressive results, especially with the "Room Service" component of Body & Soul. There have been cases for example, when a patient, due to either illness or age-induced dementia, wasn't lucid or communicative. Yet, upon hearing the music, the person "woke up," made eye contact and started clapping their hands in rhythm. These positive effects may last for an hour or so after the mellifluous visitation.

"It's been very good," Marble states unequivocally of Body & Soul's success. There are about three to four visitations per month that Marble and his staff help organize and oversee. "We're there for an assistance role; to ensure things run smoothly for the



"Dr. Mark made my grandpa's heart as good as new."

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Body & Soul personnel and our residents."

Marble tells of a Mr. Timmons, who was typically non-verbal with staff and friends. However, when the musicians entered his room and began playing "Amazing Grace," Timmons woke up and actually started singing along. Mr. Marchy, who, according to Marble was very selective in his participation, had a profound reaction upon hearing the Body & Soul musicians. Marchy started crying and exclaimed, "This is the most beautiful thing I've ever heard!" The staff was truly touched by his reaction.

Says Marble: "We've had lots of feedback from the residents—as well as from their families—that they thoroughly enjoy it. They want them to return. They want more opportunities with the musicians and arts educators. They really like having someone from 'the outside' coming in on a consistent basis and doing arts programs with them. So they feel more connected with the city and what's going on in the community."

Yet another component of Body & Soul is "Community Ticket," whereby local performing arts presenters donate seats to some of the residents, and bring them to venues to experience some of these performances. The JSO, Riverside Fine Arts and TheatreWorks have all been helpful in providing tickets.

As Marble alluded, the musical component also works in cooperation with a Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens program. With "Helping Hands," representatives from the Cummer set up stations to provide hands-on visual art demonstrations and workshops—painting, ceramics, tile painting and more. Jenkins says the results have been "...very therapeutic." One of St. Catherine's residents, Mrs. Kruger, stated she was "overwhelmed by the classes" and really looks forward to them.

Yet another visual arts component is "Art in Public Places." Local artists' works are displayed in the various healthcare facilities, enlivening the atmosphere. "And perhaps more importantly," says Marble, "we set up specific locations in these facilities to display the art created by both patients and staff." St. Catherine's, for example, has created its own gallery area. There's also a painted tile exhibit.

Soon, Body & Soul will be implementing its programs in Baptist Medical Center and Baptist Cancer Institute, Jenkins says. The Cancer Institute's program will be a research-based program.

"We're also considering bringing in a major recording artist for some type of benefit concert," Jenkins says. "For instance, we're looking at flutist Herbie Mann. He's a prostate cancer survivor. He turned the corner on that whole thing and we got to know each other fairly well over the summer. So now he goes around giving concerts on behalf of prostate cancer awareness." Among other things, Mann started a foundation which facilitates PSA blood tests at his concerts.

While many facilities across the U.S. may employ its own art therapists, Marble says that having independent artists regularly visit a given facility is a fairly new approach in healthcare. "And we're definitely seeing some favorable numbers," Marble enthuses. "We actually conducted a survey for six months following our instigation of this program, and found a 31% increase in positive responses about our residents' sense of well-being."

As mentioned, Body & Soul is closely allied with The Cummer Museum and Gardens in creating Jacksonville's singular arts therapy programs. The museum itself was recently awarded the ADA Disability Friendly Award by the Mayor's Disabilities Council and the City of Jacksonville for its service to individuals with disabilities. It is the only



Individuals from St. Catherine's Labouré Manor, an assisted living facility, enjoying the Cummer's Art programs.



cultural organization to be so recognized, hence it should be lauded for its innovative approach in enabling the visual arts to reach the aged and the physically challenged.

"About seven years ago, we became the VSA (formerly Very Special Arts) affiliate," explains Hope McMath, Director of Education for the Cummer. "And just taking that under our umbrella required us to make the museum more accessible." She, and Chrys Yates coordinate the Cummer's Arts Connections in Healthcare Programs.

McMath point out that the Cummer, once having committed itself to the program, underwent some specific physical renovations. The facility made its luscious riverfront gardens accessible via special ramps, and installed them in corridors leading up to its Art Connections educational area as well. It also used large font sizes to label its artwork.

"We also created some hands-on exhibits like our Sculpture Timeline which allows people who are visually impaired or blind to actually touch the sculptures; it has Braille text as well. So we've tried to make the overall facility more accessible."

Once some of the physical renovations to the Cummer had been completed, McMath and Yates focused on tailoring specific programming. "While it's great to allow people in the door, you then have to give them something meaningful. For people with either physical or developmental disabilities, sometimes our regular offerings didn't fulfill their needs.

"So we began designing very specific programs for people with visual impairment, or for people who are hearing impaired," McMath continues. For instance, the Cummer now offers specific tours and has invested in certain art-making equipment that is adaptable. "It's actually hooked onto wheelchairs so that people who can't even hold a paintbrush can still paint! And there's certainly a lot more we'd like to do," McMath adds.

On Thursday, November 1, 10:30 AM - 5:30 PM. The Cummer will host an Art Education for the Blind Conference & Open House. The Cummer is also hosting the Arts in Healthcare Conference on Friday, November 2, 2001. There will be a presentation by Dr. John Graham-Pole, of Shands Hospital in Gainesville, who is an international expert on the Arts in Healthcare movement.

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