

From the T&D UPDATING THE ARTS

Pavilion due for improvements, center officials say

By PRINCESS B. WILLIAMS T&D Staff Writer Jun 24, 2015



LARRY HARDY/T&D

The Orangeburg County Fine Arts Center is seeking support for renovations to the old River Pavilion.

The Orangeburg County Fine Arts Center is seeking the community's support for its planned remodeling.

The center has a lot to offer the community, Executive Director Beth Thomas said. Painting classes, concerts, exhibits and book signings are just a few of the activities held there.

"We get a variety of artists to show, area artists, and a variety of art styles," Thomas said.

"Within the past year, we've presented bluegrass music, two jazz concerts, two different jazz groups and a classical piano concert ..."

The Fine Arts Center is also holding summer art classes for children. Two painting classes are scheduled for this week.

Thomas and board Chairman Cliff Emery discussed the center's plans with Orangeburg City Council last week. The center is located in the old River Pavilion in Edisto Memorial Gardens, overlooking the Edisto River. "I want everyone to know that we're active. We're busy. We're always doing things. We get visitors all the time. We've had registered visitors from every state except Hawaii," Thomas said.

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Thomas says the center welcomes everyone. As a nonprofit organization, activities are free or cost little.

“We want our building to look as nice as the gardens of the city, because we are in a magnificent location,” Thomas said.

Emery presented council with pictures of the current conditions of the building to show the changes that need to be made to the carpet, bathrooms, walls and other items.

“If we don’t do some things now, we won’t be here 30 years from now or 20 years from now,” Emery said.

Emery said about 6,000 to 7,000 people a year come through the arts center. The community needs to be looking at the wear and tear that puts on the building, and everything about it needs to be brought up to date.

Renovations will include adding two small galleries, relocating bathrooms, and adding a soundproof music education room, new lighting and flooring.

“We want people to walk in and go, ‘Wow! This is really an amazing place!’ ” he said.

The goal is to enhance the center’s member and visitor experience and increase the potential for revenue. “I think with an updated, improved and better-looking location, we can have some more rental income, which we don’t have now, and attract additional visitors and ultimately more members,” Emery said.

The estimated total cost of the project is \$286,850. Fine Arts Center representatives say they’ll also reach out to local corporations and the public at large for funding.

Councilman Bernard Haire recommended incorporating services from the nonprofit organization Habitat for Humanity to assist with some of the expenses and construction of the center.

“We’re certainly hoping that the council, the mayor and the city of Orangeburg will be able to support you in whatever way we can. The art center is very important to Orangeburg,” Councilwoman Liz Zimmerman Keitt said.

Councilman Charlie Jernigan suggested the remodeling of the Fine Arts Center be added to the list for the upcoming budget planning session. “We’re in much agreement of seeing that building being brought up to the 21st century,” Mayor Michael Butler said.

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