

Artisan's Asylum Annual Meeting Notes & Community Updates

October 2013

Thank you to everyone who attended Sunday night's **Annual Meeting** -- from my perspective, it was extremely productive and positive; the attendees asked great questions and provided constructive feedback. I've written up notes below on the topics we discussed. All powerpoints and supporting documentation are posted to the Wiki and [available here](#), and are also linked in the appropriate sections below. In a couple of places, I include some information that was not mentioned last night, but that is relevant to questions posed--so if you attended the meeting, it is still worth glancing through what follows.

As usual with these updates, what follows is a lot of text. For ease of working your way through it, here is the outline of what's included, with sections numbered. Feel free to skip down to what interests you!

- 1. Financial Update**
- 2. Board of Directors Year in Review**
- 3. Operations Year in Review: Themes & Thanks**
- 4. Upcoming/Ongoing Projects & Improvements**
- 5. Artisan's Asylum Greatest Challenges**
- 6. Director & Officer Elections**

Not included below are notes from the discussion of the three proposals for which we are soliciting community feedback: 1) a proposal to take on an additional 9,000 square feet of space in a neighboring building to increase our studio and storage rental capacity in the short term; 2) a proposal to move the SCUL bike shop in line with the electronics and hot works shops up front; and 3) a proposed set of revisions to our membership structure which we are exploring, with possible effective date in 2014.

There is already some heated discussion of the last proposal going on on our Discuss mailing list. These are proposals, not announcements of decided changes, and we welcome feedback. To serve that purpose, I am taking extra time to pull together documentation around these proposals to make sure that we are clear and complete in our presentation of the problems we're trying to solve, so as to best direct community energies towards productive alternatives to elements they find problematic.

Look for those emails over the next couple of days. In the meantime, here are the notes from the remainder of the meeting:

1. Financial Update: Year in Review, Year to Come

-- *Mimi Graney, Treasurer* ([powerpoint available here](#))

- Highlights from the report, regarding this past year:
 - We are now working from functional budgets, and have instituted regular financial reporting and new operational financial policies. We are continuing

work on a new data management solution to handle our point of sale, user database, and resource management systems.

- All of the above is particularly important because this spring we had our first formal CPA review, for the year ending June 2012, and are in the process of completing our first CPA audit, for the most recent fiscal year ending June of 2013.
- We have stabilized cash flow and have a small amount of security in the bank.
- Income doubled between June 2012 and June 2013, outpacing our also dramatically increasing expenses.
- Even with the increase in staffing, staff remains a small fraction of our expenses, even including payments for instructors -- appropriate for a non-profit.
- Contributed income remains a tiny portion of our income -- something which as a non-profit we need to and are working to begin to change in this upcoming year.
- Our budget for this coming year ([available in summary form here](#)) is extremely tight, and our expenses are scheduled to continue to increase in the years to come. It will be a priority for us to identify new sources of revenue, both earned and contributed. Ideas we are pursuing include the following:
 - Daytime programming for: youth (dependent on finding a new insurance provider, which Molly is currently working on), workforce development, the elderly, and the disabled.
 - Corporate retreats & team-building activities
 - Shop & equipment sponsorships
 - Off-site educational programming
 - Grants focused on STEM education, STEM education for women, workforce development, arts workspace, and innovation sectors.
- A huge thanks and credit due to Dmitri Litin, our Controller, for the Herculean effort he has put in over the past year to inform and fully execute these changes, bringing our financials up to reportable standards.

2. Board of Directors Year in Review

-- Aaron Falk, Chair ([powerpoint available here](#))

- Board accomplishments from this past year included the following:
 - Regular monthly meetings
 - Approving Budgets and reviewing Financial Reporting
 - Creating Policies & Reviewing Legal Agreements
 - Approving Capital & Other Investments
 - Building 13 expansion
 - Staffing increases & job descriptions
 - New high-capacity tool purchases
 - Filling empty board-appointed seats
 - Launching Bylaws Revision Process
 - A huge amount of work since May has been put into coming up with a draft for a revised set of bylaws, in consultation with a law firm which generously offered its pro-bono services, and then in working through that

draft with the community to identify and unpack a series of contentious issues.

- As already announced on this list, due to the time the process has been taking and the fact that some of those issues remain unresolved, the Board is pausing its work on the bylaws for now to give the community the opportunity to elect new Directors and Officers. The current board will be summarizing their process so far to hand off to the new board, noting the areas of general consensus and highlighting the issues still being worked out. The new board will then have the responsibility for moving the process forward when the new Directors and Officers are elected in the beginning of November.
- [Minutes from this past year's board meetings are available here](#). Missing are notes from the board retreat in June and our most recent meeting in September, both of which should be approved at the upcoming meeting on Wednesday night and posted by the end of the week.

3. Operations Year in Review: Themes & Thanks

-- *Molly Rubenstein, Interim Executive Director*

- Our first two years were a story of breakneck growth of our community, our programming, and our facilities. In contrast, this last has been a year of catching up and filling in everything we missed on the way. Adding the staff, the operational infrastructure, the policies and procedures that we desperately need to handle the size of operations we currently face. Our job now is to thoroughly streamline our systems so that our existing staff can support the increased volume of users and activities we'll need to cover our increasing expenses in the years to come. Some highlights from this year:
 - No facilities expansions in 13 months! Which might be an Asylum record, or close.
 - 3 new staff members hired, and a total increase in staff capacity of 40%
 - New systems: purchasing, billing, refund & cancellation requests, email, phone, calendars & document sharing, equipment maintenance reporting, and improvements to front desk operations.
 - Facilities Improvements: replacement of low-capacity hobbyist tools with industrial equivalents, increased availability of consumables and safety gear, improvements in infrastructure like woodshop air filtration and flammables storage, and increased member engagement in shop management and curriculum development.
- Particular thanks to:
 - Lenny Foner, for the significant improvements to the efficiency and accuracy of front desk operations, and to all our heroic front desk volunteers, for adapting to each new change and keeping the Asylum open and operating every day.
 - Rob Masek, Facilities Manager, for managing to continue to address the long-term needs of the many while responding to the immediate needs of individuals arising every day.

- Our instructors and shop volunteers, for dealing with changing systems and working hundreds of hours to help make sure others can make the things they dream of.
- Our members, students, and users, for patiently continuing to report problems and repeat requests to help us improve, and for adapting to those changes when they come along.

4. Upcoming Projects & Improvements -- Molly

- **Shops & Tools**

- Building 13
 - For two months we have been all ready to go to the city to submit our building permit for our new, ventilated shared workroom and classes space in Building 13. But at the last minute we were jilted by our general contractor, and have been scrambling to find someone to take on the job. Rob is currently getting quotes from various places, but if you have a local contractor you highly recommend, let him know!
facilities@artisansasylum.com
- New Welding Bays
 - The new welding ventilation has already been ordered and is on its way! So new welding bays are coming soon to a shop near you. Specifically, the shop currently dedicated to our CNC plasma cutter and Multicam industrial router. This will allow us to offer welding capacity to our members even while welding classes are going on in the shop. Our apologies for how cramped the schedule has been these last few months.
- Shopbot & Laser Cutter
 - We know you want them! We are currently considering proposals that might allow us to bring in both of these machines within the next 2-6 months -- but we have not made any final decisions. As soon any plans are made, we will let you know!
 - At whatever point we do get a laser cutter into the building, anyone who has paid us for training on our old laser cutter will receive training on the new machine free of charge.
- Multicam
 - There seem to be rumors flying around about the future of the Multicam industrial CNC router. The machine has only recently been made available for training and member use, and is being evaluated over the course of the next few months for its long term sustainability in our space. That means that there is some possibility that we won't be able to continue to house it in the long term -- but it is a machine with incredible capacity that would be both expensive and unfortunate to have to remove from the building, so we are doing our best to see if we can make it work.
- Hot Crafts Studio
 - Is expanding! Keep an eye out to changes to that shop that will include a six-bench fully-outfitted jewelry workstation and an 8-seat torchwork table. This will increase capacity in our increasingly popular jewelry and

glassworking programs, and make it easier and more appealing for members to use that space for their own work.

- **Communications, Accounts, & Billing**
 - New Data Management System/ERP
 - Billing has been one of the biggest ways we've frustrated users this past year, and we're actively working on a new solution to handle our point of sale, user database, and resource management systems. This will eventually enable exciting features like reinstating an automatic payment option and users viewing and managing their accounts and paying bills online. Lenny is currently working on this program with lots of input from staff and volunteers. We will be reaching out to the community soon to help test modules are in development.
 - New Class Registration System
 - Over the next 3 months, Brian Johnson, our new Programs & Marketing Coordinator, will be evaluating, selecting, and implementing a new alternative to Eventbrite for registration for our classes and programs. Features of the new system will include: improved channels for direct communication between teachers and students; a central location for additional resources, links, videos, and assignment descriptions; easy viewing of past classes and class materials for students and instructors; and greater efficiency in class posting for administrators.
 - Website Improvements/Redesign
 - After the above two projects are completed, Brian will be overseeing a redesign of our website, which is a project that had already started when I first got to the Asylum, over two years ago. New features of that will include improved flow, better visual storytelling, and a number of tools to highlight member work and contributions, and better connect the public to resources our members can offer them.
- **Community Building**
 - Volunteer Program
 - Brian and Jess Muise, our new Customer Services Coordinator, are currently working on a comprehensive volunteer program for the Asylum which would enable us to extend the types of predictable benefits we currently offer front desk volunteers and shop monitors to those who help out at the Asylum in other ways, and increase the percentage of the benefits we offer our volunteers that are actually useful to them. The program will also include better new volunteer orientation, regular volunteer recognition, and some fun regular volunteer parties and activities so we can all hang out, possibly even outside of the Asylum.
 - Member Engagement in Decision-making
 - We have struggled over the past two years to figure out how to balance the need for efficient decision-making at an organization of this scale with our commitment to engaging our community in problem-solving around our unique challenges. In order to improve our performance in this area, we will be looking this year to work with the community to codify what types

- of decisions we solicit community input for, and what the process is for gathering and processing that input.
- New Member Orientation
 - Jess will be working to put together a New Member Orientation handbook and process, to help smooth the entry process of new members into our community, answer common questions, and help ensure that new inmates understand what being a responsible member of the community looks like, as well as making it easier for them to find out about all the great perks and features that come with joining.
 - Events
 - We've identified that we want to hang out more as a community! Brian will be working on adding to our existing roster of programming designed to provide an excuse for Artisan's Asylum community members to spend time together, and even possibly make stuff -- or show off stuff they've made.
 - **Health & Safety**
 - Air Quality
 - Rob is continuing to look into improvements for the dust collection system in the woodshop. In the longer term (possibly next year), we are exploring the option of raising woodshop walls to the ceiling, to help prevent dust from making its way into the rest of the building.
 - Noise Pollution
 - In addition to the possibility of raising walls, we are just starting to do research on other ways to dampen noise in our shops. We may be seeking out donors who might be willing to contribute to solving this particular problem.
 - Untrained Users in Woodshop
 - There has been a lot of concern over the past few months about members using woodshop tools irresponsibly or unsafely. Rob has been collecting a group of shop monitors, to increase oversight in that area, and a team has come together to develop a series of new curricula to improve the effectiveness of the basic level of training in the shop. The first of those classes is being prototyped this week -- so you should see new offerings appearing for the woodshop soon!
 - At some point there will be a discussion of methods for making sure existing users meet the same standards as members who get the new trainings -- but that's a problem we have not solved as yet.
 - Emergency Plans & Procedures
 - This year we will be working to improve our emergency procedures, providing emergency contact info and procedure descriptions in every shop and common area, making our incident reporting form more easily available, and possibly having the occasional fire drill. We have also talked about exploring the option of providing CPR and First Aid training on site; we'll be looking into what that would entail.

5. Biggest Challenge the Asylum Faces

One of the great questions last night was "Last year you said that cash flow was the biggest problem the Asylum was facing. It seems that problem is somewhat resolved. What would you say is the biggest problem facing the Asylum now?"

Last year, the cash flow problem was about getting through individual weeks and months. Now, we have the day-to-day and month-to-month pretty well in control. Our biggest challenges all have to do with threats to our longevity.

- Need to increase revenue, without expanding
 - In the past two years, our biggest increases in revenue came through expanding our square footage. Now, we're running out of square footage available to us. And although our current revenue is sufficient to cover our current expenses, our current revenue isn't sufficient to cover our expenses when they increase next year, or the year after. And any lease we sign for the year after that is likely to require an even bigger jump in our expenses. So we have to work hard and get creative about increasing our revenue streams with the square footage we have available to us. This is why we're pursuing daytime programming, off-site programming, and grants, donations, and sponsorships. This is also why we're trying to restructure membership in such a way as to encourage members not to cluster their shop usage all at the same times of day.
- Location Security
 - The value of property in Somerville is dramatically increasing (we like to say in part because of us). Unfortunately, that means that we may end up being priced out of this building once our current lease ends in fall of 2016. For this reason, we will be starting our next lease negotiations with our landlords this year, and exploring what other options might be available to us if we were to have to move locations in three years.
- Health & Safety
 - Although we work very hard to create safe shops and generally a safe space here, we have a large amount of people spread over a large space doing things of varying level of risk at all hours. A bad accident or other threat to the safety or security of our members could cripple the community. So we continue to work hard to find ways to keep everyone safe, without overly constraining what they are able to accomplish here.
- Community-Building & Morale
 - We have an incredible community here at the Asylum, made up of many different types of people trying to do very different types of things in the same space and time. Some conflict is inevitable -- but sometimes there are sources of negative energy that begin to spread through the community. Often that energy is directed at the institution itself -- but it can affect relationships between members, as well. We need to do more to foster a sense of community among the users of the space, and to engage our community members well enough in dialogue with the staff, volunteers, and board to be able to address the underlying issues that cause the negativity to develop in the first place.

6. Board of Directors and Officer Elections

- Who's up for election?
 - Members are currently electing 2 Directors, to fill Aaron Falk and Gui Cavalcanti's seats on the Board.
 - Also being filled are 3 officer positions: President, Treasurer, and Secretary. Those positions were most recently held by Gui Cavalcanti, Mimi Graney, and Carolyn Emberley, respectively.
 - Aaron and Gui have not made public statements about whether or not they will be running for Director seats.
 - Mimi Graney will be running again to fill the seat of Treasurer. Molly Rubenstein will be running to fill the seat of President, with the understanding that the description of the responsibilities of the President as described in our current bylaws most closely fit those held by the Executive Director -- were that description to change significantly in a new set of bylaws, she will happily resign the seat.
- Official Responsibilities of Directors & Officers
 - The responsibilities of the Board and the various Officers are described on pages 6-10 of [our current bylaws, available on our wiki here](#), Articles 4-8.
- What has the experience been like?
 - Calvin Domenico, elected Board Member, briefly described his experience of being on the board, I believe more or less as the following:
 - This board was doing catch-up, filling in all the things that should have been done starting a year or two years before.
 - Meetings were long, usually 3-4 hours, and sometimes stressful.
 - As a Director who has also been a member, instructor, and volunteer, he ended up having to wear his Director hat a lot while at the Asylum, even if he was there for another purpose.
 - Even so, the experience was rewarding, because they were able to make a real difference.
 - Individuals should be excited to run for the Board now, when so much of the little nitty gritty stuff has been taken care of, and they can focus on their real job, which is thinking about what the Asylum is meant to/trying to be and helping make sure it can get there.
- How to Run for the Board/Resources for Voting Members
 - [A full description of the process is available here](#), and more emails will be sent on this particular subject, but here's the bare bones outline:
 - Interested candidates need to fill out a short application and collect 10 member signatures on [this petition](#) and submit them by noon on Saturday, October 19th to our Election Commissioner, Andrew Anselmo, at election-commissioner@artisansasylum.com, or to the front desk.
 - Sunday, October 20th, 7pm will be the Candidates' Forum, where candidates can introduce themselves to the community, and those in the audience can ask questions of the candidates.
 - Voting will begin the evening of the 20th, and continue at the front desk until 7pm Sunday, November 3, two weeks later.

- There is a discussion mailing list, voters-discuss@artisansasylum.com, which is automatically populated with everyone we believe to be a current voting member, but which anyone can join by sending mail to voters-discuss-subscribe@artisansasylum.com.
- Motion Proposed
 - A motion was proposed at the end of the meeting by Andrew Bressen, and seconded by Arthur Torrey. I do not have the text of the motion here, but it was a proposed operational policy that would preclude directors and officers with potential related party conflicts of interest from serving simultaneously. More information about this I believe will go out on the voters-discuss list, and an announcement will be made to this list with more information once the voting period is set.

Again, more to come very soon about possible additional rental space, movement of the bike shop, and proposed membership changes.

If you have any pressing questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to [sign up for my office hours](#) tonight, Tuesday, October 8, 5-7pm.

Thanks again to everyone who came out Sunday night!

Molly Wenig Rubenstein

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