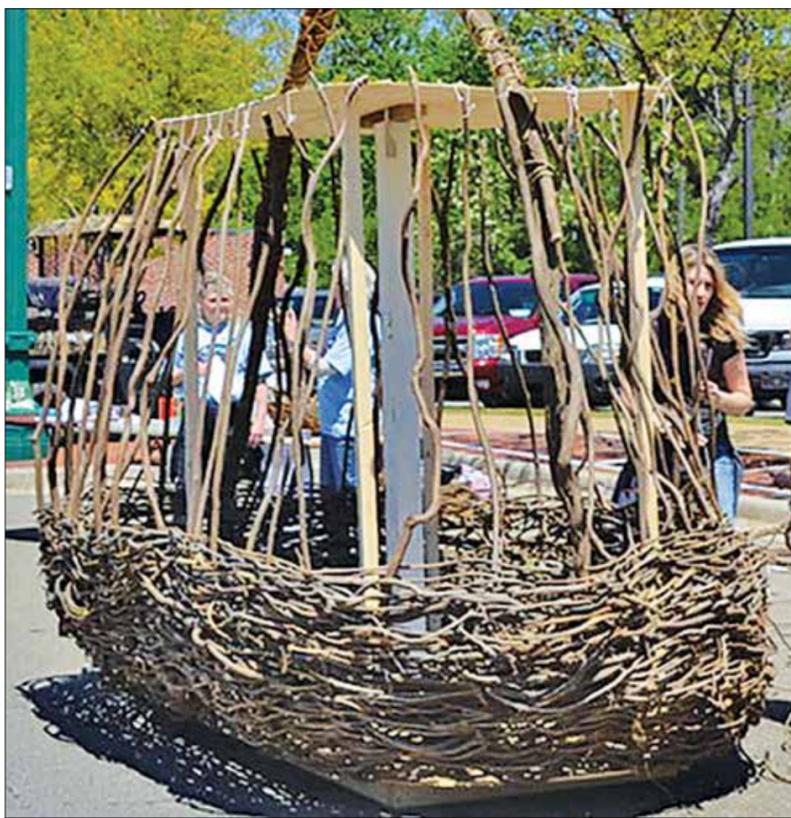


ArtWalk expansion, story of local marble ahead for Pickens Arts



In 2012, as part of Jasper Art Fest, PACA sponsored the making of a 12-foot high and 12-foot long kudzu basket. Hundreds of visitors and local people worked over the weekend weaving kudzu to complete the project. The only person who was not thrilled with the outcome was the mayor, who got a case of poison ivy while out helping harvest the kudzu.

BY CHRISTOPHER BARKER

The citizen group created in 2007 to support arts, cultural and historical efforts in Pickens County continues to evolve and has become more directly responsible for filling voids in those areas, including popular ArtWalks.

Pickens Arts & Cultural Alliance (PACA) emanated from the Pickens County 2000 Joint Comprehensive Plan that found a need for a greater emphasis on local culture and arts, says President Amelia McIntyre. Rob Jones, who was sole Pickens County commissioner at the time, was receiving requests to fund local arts and cultural efforts, and he needed what originally was “a quasi-governmental entity,” she says, “to evaluate the merit and needs of these groups and distribute money in an orderly way.”

The primary groups PACA was able to fund with a small amount of money from the county and Georgia Council for the Arts at that time were Tater Patch Players community theater, Marble Valley Historical Association and Sharp Top Arts Association. When the arts association disbanded, PACA stepped in and provided volunteers and funding for the Pickens



The completed basket developed a degree of fame as pictures circulated quickly on Facebook. The basket was featured over the course of two years on various Atlanta TV programs. It was large enough to hold about 12 adults or numerous children.

County Youth Art Month, which is in March.

“Tater Patch weathered the storm,” says McIntyre, and still anchors the Pickens performing arts community with occasional help from PACA, such as when a broken pipe flooded the theater group’s building.

PACA acquired non-profit status in 2010 and continued its work as a volunteer-driven organization with a mission “to lead and coordinate the development of



Lizzy Woodall served as PACA’s executive secretary and as a mime at the October ArtWalk Jasper during a break from studying drama in college.

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With very limited financial resources to distribute, PACA “never had any staff,” says McIntyre.

“Initially, our mission was to support other groups,” she says, “and not be in competition.” PACA sometimes partners with Pickens County groups and individuals creating area arts and cultural opportunities.

In 2012, PACA wanted to add something inexpensive but creatively significant

to the Jasper Art Fest, on which PACA partnered with organizers Ron Barnes and Susan Wright. The result was a 12-foot-by-12-foot kudzu basket that was the event’s centerpiece.

“Hundreds of children and adults came by to help weave the basket,” McIntyre says. “It was on Facebook and got feedback far and wide. The basket was a showstopper.”

Pickens arts funding became even more scarce when Georgia Council for the Arts encountered financial problems, and local fundraising helped. McIntyre said Peggy Rabin of Daisy Boutique in downtown Jasper offered space several years ago to collect gently worn shoes – including significant donations from Big Canoe – to be sold to a buyer with proceeds going to PACA.

Another fundraiser has been the sale of art donated from the Appalachian Folk School that can be seen on PACA’s improved website, pickensartsandculturalalliance.org.

But PACA’s financial picture has improved significantly, allowing the group to make a more significant impact in Pickens.

“In the last two years, our funding has steadily increased” with hotel/motel tax revenues replacing grant funding, says the PACA president. “In the last year, funding greatly increased with a change in state law concerning the definition of entities that offer lodging. Big Canoe is making a big contribution” through the taxes, she said, “and now we’re able to do things like the recent ArtWalk. The funding is making a difference in our community; we are trying to create programming that promotes tourism and the use of local lodging.”

This fall, PACA and the Jasper Downtown Development Authority co-sponsored a three-month series of ArtWalk Jasper, where on the second Friday evenings of September, October and November, 20 businesses hosted juried artists to exhibit,

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Deb Torell displays her fiber artwork at the Sharptop Distillery on Main Street in Jasper.



The Michael Opitz Group jazz band was a big hit at ArtWalk. PHOTOS COURTESY PICKENS ARTS & CULTURAL ALLIANCE