

APRIL LUNCHEON PROGRAM

The Sarasota Orchestra

with Joseph McKenna

Thursday, April 16, 11 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Sarasota Yacht Club

\$45 for Arts Advocates members

\$50 for nonmembers



Join Sarasota Orchestra CEO Joe McKenna for exclusive updates on the new music center. As the Gulf Coast's first and only purpose-built acoustic music hall, the new music center is designed to support education, spark creativity, and provide meaningful gathering spaces for people of all ages. He will share detailed architectural schematic renderings that reflect both the artistry and functionality that will define the orchestra's new home.

CEO and President Joe McKenna is responsible for executing the strategic direction of the board and ensuring the organization's financial security. During his tenure, the endowment corpus increased by more than \$10 million, the youth orchestra had its debut performance at Carnegie Hall, and the orchestra re-launched its brand including the name change to Sarasota Orchestra. Joe holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in trombone performance and music education from the New England Conservatory.

REGISTER HERE
BY APRIL 10



Meet & Mingle:

There is social time that begins at 11 a.m. before lunch. Come early to meet other members and friends who also love the arts.

FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

Dear Arts Advocates Members and Friends,

Looking back on March's events

Suzanne Havens held an opening reception for *Paintings: Thesis, Antithesis, and Synthesis* on March 7 in the Arts Advocates Gallery. Her talk centered on her having studied art and art history, realizing that the world of art itself moves sometimes gradually and sometimes suddenly between depicting visual forms (thesis), rejecting form altogether (antithesis), and then creating a synthesis that is something new.

There was a Talkback Tuesday held on March 10 in the Arts Advocates Gallery that featured a talk by Ronnique Hawkins titled "Roots & Radiance: Learning Their History". Ronnique is a visionary artist, activist, and educator whose life's work bridges creativity, justice, and youth empowerment.

Our March luncheon at the Sarasota Yacht Club featured guest speaker Thayer Greenberg, managing artistic director of the Sarasota Players. She talked about The Players' season, their planned move to the Payne Park Auditorium, and their education programs.

Looking ahead to April 2026

Our next Talkback Tuesday is April 7, 4-6 p.m. in the Arts Advocates Gallery and will feature Justin Gomlak – "From Broadway to the Classroom: Building Creative Futures." Justin's journey is a masterclass in artistic evolution; he has built a career defined by versatility, passion, and purpose.

A Behind the Curtain: Exploring the Van Wezel from the Art to the Stage tour will be held on April 13, 1:30-3 p.m. at the Van Wezel.

Our April luncheon featuring Sarasota Orchestra will be held on April 16, 11 a.m.-1 p.m. at the Sarasota Yacht Club. Guest speaker Joseph McKenna, the president and chief executive officer of the orchestra, will talk about the orchestra's future state-of-the-art 1,800 seat purpose-built acoustically sound concert hall.

Our next member artist exhibit is Art Venti's *The Imagination of Art Venti*, in our gallery from April 4-25, Saturdays only from 2-4 pm. The opening reception is April 11.

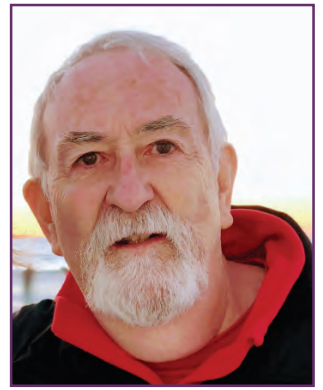
A tour of Palmetto Village is scheduled for April 14 from 10:30 a.m. to noon. The tour includes a variety of historical buildings pertaining to Palmetto.

A workshop at Selby Gardens is offered by Suzanne Havens on April 27. "Make Your Flower and Garden Photographs Special" will cover both beginner and intermediate concepts, and is not specific to a particular camera model, so you may use your smart phone, fixed lens camera, and advanced camera with interchangeable lenses.

We extend our sincere thanks to the Observer Media Group for their generous sponsorship of our exhibitions and luncheons through May 2026.

Stay connected through our weekly e-blasts, monthly newsletters, or by visiting www.artsadvocates.org for updates and event registration.

Warmly,
Bill Rusling
President, Arts Advocates



Bill Rusling, President

Ask the President

Questions? Comments?
Suggestions for luncheon speakers, art talk subjects, or other ideas for next season?

[CONTACT BILL HERE](#)



The Arts Advocates Gallery is located inside the Crossings at Siesta Key mall, 3501 S. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota. Enter the mall through the doors next to Connors Steak & Seafood and turn left.

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APRIL - MAY MEMBER ARTIST EXHIBIT

THE IMAGINATION OF ART VENTI

Saturdays, April 4-May 30, 2-4 p.m.

Opening Reception April 11

Arts Advocates Gallery



Enjoy Art Venti's "pencil paintings" – magnificent, extremely detailed works created with layers and layers of delicate colored pencil strokes on very large paper. His compositions often address environmental and socio/political issues. The larger pieces take 3-5 months to complete. Since moving to Sarasota, Art has produced his largest and most complex and meticulous works, the sizes having increased up to 110" in width.

In this exhibition of selected recent works, Venti's imagination is not constrained to conveniently fit into any one category: there are elements of abstraction and glimpses of "reality." One might guess at surrealism, but these original works cannot be narrowly defined to fit into even such a broad genre. Venti's objective is about taking a fresh look at the traditional landscape.

By using this familiar format, a dialogue is created between the viewer and the image. The brain always attempts to organize the lines, shapes and colors it perceives; with no easy reference point, there may be no connection. A recognizable arrangement, even though out of the ordinary, begins the communication.

Art Venti is a NY born artist celebrated for his unusually imaginative large scale color pencil work on archival paper. He has been a professional artist for over 40 years. He is a Signature Member of the Color Pencil Society of America (CPSA), having won several awards in their national and international juried shows.



This exhibit is sponsored by Observer Media Group.

Talkback Tuesdays

Join us for our final in-depth interview of the season. This program fosters meaningful conversations and community engagement through open dialogue with featured guests. Hosted in the Arts Advocates Gallery, admission is free for Arts Advocates members and \$5 for nonmembers.



April 7, 4-6 p.m.

Justin Goplak

Broadway actor and education director of the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall

From Broadway to the Classroom: Building Creative Futures

[REGISTER HERE](#)



Justin Goplak Greer's journey is a masterclass in artistic evolution. From center stage on Broadway to the heart of arts education, Greer has built a career defined by versatility, passion, and purpose. A trained opera singer, retired Broadway dancer and actor, and now a respected arts educator and DEI practitioner, Greer brings a wealth of experience to every role he inhabits—onstage and off.

Over a remarkable 15-year Broadway career, Greer performed in iconic productions including *Annie*, *Anything Goes*, *Shrek the Musical*, *Seussical the Musical*, *The Producers*, and *Annie Get Your Gun* starring Bernadette Peters.

Today, Greer channels his performance expertise into education and advocacy, serving as director of education and community engagement at the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall.

Tour: Behind the Curtain: Exploring the Van Wezel from the Art to the Stage

April 13, May 18, 1:30-3 p.m.

Take a guided tour of the paintings and sculptures owned by Arts Advocates on display at the Van Wezel. After that, step onto the stage where a Van Wezel guide will give you a peek behind the curtain and share stories and anecdotes about the colorful world of show business!

[READ MORE HERE](#)



Coming Up

Tour

Palmetto Historical Park and Village

April 14, 10:30 a.m. - noon

Enjoy a tour of the **Palmetto Historical Park and Village**, 515 10th Avenue West, Palmetto that includes a variety of historical buildings: the 1880 Heritage Post Office, the 1936 School House, the 1900 Cottage Museum, the Heritage Chapel, and the Cyprus House Military Museum. Additionally, the Manatee County Agricultural Museum is on the grounds and available to tour. Please arrive 10-15 minutes prior to the start of the tour. Parking is behind the village off 6th Street West and on 10th Avenue West.



Optional post-tour dining options:

Eleanor's Coffee and Cake is in the former 1912 Palmetto State Bank building. Eleanor's has a menu of quiche, salad, sandwiches and sweets as well as locally roasted coffee. You'll also find an 1800 English Country house room in this building. The RiverHouse Waterfront Restaurant is also nearby in Palmetto at 995 Riverside Drive.

\$15 for Arts Advocates members
\$20 for nonmembers

[REGISTER HERE](#)

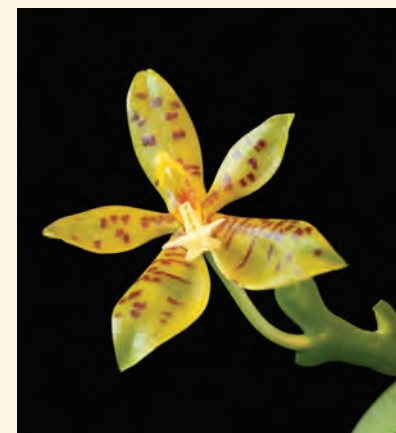


Workshop

Make Your Flower and Garden Photographs Special

April 27, 9:45 a.m. - 1:30 p.m. at Marie Selby Botanical Gardens

Ever wonder why some of your flower and garden photos just don't look as spectacular as you expected? Learn how to make more compelling flower and garden photos through demonstration and hands-on practice in the Marie Selby Botanical Gardens learning center, gardens and conservatory with instructor Suzanne Havens.



[LEARN MORE](#)



What do musical theatre performers have in common with an architect?

What about dancers and an entertainment designer?

A filmmaker, artists, and a musician?

The full scholarship committee reviewed the recommendations from the Performing Arts and Visual Arts sub-committees. **With unanimous agreement, we are pleased to announce that 10 scholar artists will each receive a \$5,000 scholarship to continue their education.**

We can't let the cat out of the bag just yet and tell you who the recipients are. At this point, they don't even know! When the announcement is made, you will see some returning scholars along with six exciting new scholar artists! Thank you to the generous donors who allow us to award \$50,000 in scholarships this year. This is particularly important at a time when arts funding is under pressure.

We are planning a great program for our **Thursday, May 14 scholarship luncheon at the Sarasota Yacht Club**. You will not only meet the recipients and see their exciting work, you will also hear from them individually. Most students attend local schools and we are optimistic that they will be able to participate in the program – unless, of course, they have exams! School does come first.

Please join us at this heartwarming event AND bring your friends. If you would like to support the event, please note the donor and sponsor opportunities are listed on the events page at [ArtsAdvocates.org](https://www.artsadvocates.org), along with tickets to the luncheon. All donors and sponsors are invited to a pre-luncheon meet and greet with the students and their guests.

With 26 applications this year, the 10 students selected are truly the cream of the crop. We can't wait for you to see this for yourselves.



REGISTER NOW!





Presented by the
Community Foundation of Sarasota County



Power Your Arts Passion

Giving Challenge 2026: Noon April 15 to noon April 16

**Your donation (up to \$100) to Arts Advocates will be matched 100% by The Patterson Foundation!
So...your \$25 donation becomes \$50 and your \$100 donation becomes \$200.
Of course, you can donate more than \$100. Your gift of any amount furthers
the mission of The Fine Arts Society of Sarasota/Arts Advocates.**

- Continue the robust scholarship program that annually provides \$5,000 scholarships to 8 to 10 emerging artists of all genres
- Sponsor programs and exhibits at the gallery and at Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall
 - Maintain our welcoming gallery
 - Manage operating expenses in a prudent manner

Here's how to POWER YOUR ARTS PASSION

- Have your credit or debit card ready
- Go to <https://www.givingchallenge.org/organizations/lmsxiqud-1456>
 - Make donation
- Pat yourself on the back for Powering Your Arts Passion!

Marie-Louise McHugh

Why I Joined Arts Advocates



A few years ago, during one of my snowbird visits to Sarasota, a friend invited me to join a tour of art in public places around the city. The tour was offered by Arts Advocates, an organization I had not heard of at the time. It turned out to be a wonderful experience. The tour was extremely informative and the guides were excellent. That experience encouraged me to learn more about Arts Advocates. When I discovered its gallery and scholarship program, I attended one of its luncheons and became a very interested member.

I am a native of Switzerland and lived near Albany, New York. There, I was deeply involved in the arts community, as a painter and as an organizer. I ran art festivals and exhibitions, and founded the artist group “Upstate 88.” After 2000, I began spending more and more winter time in Sarasota. Gradually I stepped back from the New York art scene and began exhibiting more frequently in the Sarasota area, including at the Arts Advocates Gallery. I am now a full-time resident of Sarasota.

As a painter, I have exhibited extensively in the northeast United States, Florida and Switzerland, including Boston and New York City, with both solo and group exhibitions. I was represented by the Phoenix Gallery in New York City for many years. My work can be described as narrative contemporary realism, focusing on recurring subjects such as the pear, the coneflower, and the female body.

I recently joined the board of directors of Arts Advocates and am looking forward to supporting and strengthening the organization’s membership as the head of the member engagement team while also serving while also serving as a host at the gallery.



HIGHLIGHTS FROM LAST MONTH



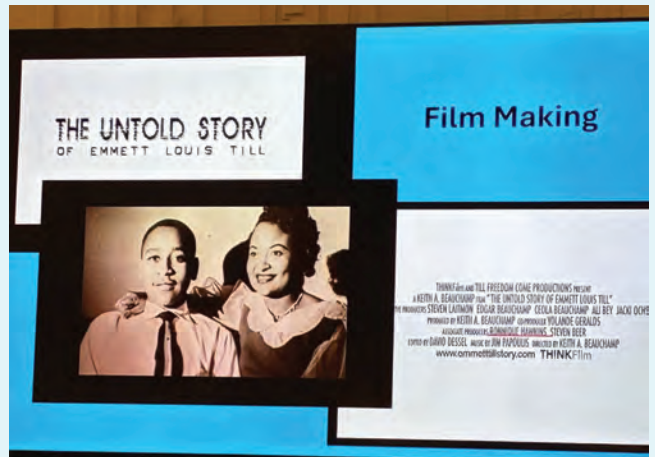
Thayer Greenberg, managing artistic director of the Sarasota Players, was our guest speaker for our March luncheon



Bill Rusling, president of Arts Advocates, is shown here with Ann Philbin, winner of the March raffle prize: *Florida Keys Fish Frenzy* by Suzanne Havens



Stephanie Frasher and Ronnique Hawkins presented "Roots & Radiance: Learning Their History," the March Talkback Tuesday



Ronique Hawkins was an associate producer of the film *The Untold Story of Emmett Louis Till*.



Excerpts of remarks by Tim Jaeger, Director + Chief Curator of Galleries and Exhibitions, Ringling College of Art and Design, at the opening reception of *Origins: Sarasota Artist Colony, 1945-1965*. The exhibit is on display until April 11. Arts Advocates loaned Ringling College nine paintings for this exhibit.

Printed with the permission of Tim Jaeger.

What you see around you tonight is more than an exhibition. It is a statement. It is a commitment. And it is, we hope, a lasting gesture of care for Sarasota's visual arts legacy—one that honors the artists who shaped this region's cultural identity and ensures their stories remain visible, accessible, and valued.

A few years ago, this project didn't exist—at least not in any formal way. What did exist were conversations. I had the great fortune of becoming close friends—and co-curators on this exhibition—with Bill Hartman. Spending time with Bill is very much like stepping into a living archive. What began

as casual conversations—looking through paintings, photographs, exhibition announcements, and ephemera—quickly deepened into something far more meaningful. We talked about old Sarasota. We talked about the artists who once lived and worked here. And we talked about how much of that history was quietly slipping out of view.

Those conversations became weekly meetings—sometimes twice a week—where hours would disappear as we traced names, timelines, friendships, rivalries, studios, and shared ideals. What became clear very quickly was that the Sarasota Artist Colony

was not a group of individuals working in isolation. It was a deeply interconnected community. These artists challenged one another, supported one another, and built something collectively that was far greater than any single career.

Artists such as Wilfred Berg, Helen Sawyer, Ben Stahl, Eugene White, William and Marty Hartman, Hilton and Dorothy Leech, Jerry Farnsworth, Judy Axe, Syd Solomon, and so many others found in Sarasota not just a place to work, but a place to belong. Drawn by the light, the climate, and the Ringling School of Art, they established studios, taught classes, exhibited widely, and fostered a spirit of collaboration that flourished between 1945 and 1965. Their influence continues to echo through Sarasota's art scene today.

Out of those conversations came a realization: we needed to do better. We needed to preserve, present, and protect this history in a way that was public, thoughtful, and lasting. That responsibility is deeply connected to Ringling College of Art and Design itself. Many of these artists taught here, studied here, or helped shape the institution in its early years. Preserving their legacy is inseparable from preserving the history of the College—and the values it continues to uphold: experimentation, rigor, and a belief in the power of creative community.

During this period, Sarasota became a magnet for experimentation, modernism, and cross-pollination across disciplines. Painters, designers, architects, educators, and performers formed a cultural ecosystem that placed Sarasota firmly on the national map.

And yet, over the last decade, the preservation of our local visual arts history has slipped a bit—not from a

lack of passion or care, but from a lack of structure, resources, and sustained attention. With the support of so many of you here tonight, it is our hope that this project represents a stake in the ground. A line in the sand.

This is us saying that Sarasota's cultural legacy matters. That its artists matter. And that their stories deserve to be visible, taught, and celebrated!

This exhibition is a visual tribute to that remarkable era. Through paintings, and archival materials, Origins captures a pivotal moment in Sarasota's cultural evolution—one defined by innovation, camaraderie, and shared risk-taking.



Now more than ever it's time for us to get together. Let this exhibition serve as both a reflection and a model—not just of where we've been, but of how we can move forward: by collaborating, by supporting one another, and by caring for what we love.

Most importantly, this project is about community. The artists represented here thrived because they believed in one another. They showed up for each other. They collaborated, experimented, and cared deeply about what they were building together. In doing so, we help ensure that Sarasota remains a vibrant, creative, and culturally rich community.

None of this would be possible without extraordinary support. I would like to thank our sponsors individually for their generosity and belief in this project: the Community Foundation of Sarasota County, The Exchange, Williams Parker Law Group, SRQ Media Group, Frank and Katherine Martucci, Richard and Pamela Mones, Sarasota Trading Company, The Johnson Singer Foundation, Arts Advocates, WSLR, and Home Resource. Your commitment to the arts strengthens our community in real and lasting ways.

We invite you to spend time with the exhibition, revisit the artists who shaped this place, and help carry their stories forward.



As a core element of its mission, Arts Advocates helps raise awareness of local arts organizations. Please support ongoing and upcoming programs in our community. Click on the links for more information about these events:

Artist Series Concerts of Sarasota

[Artist Series Concerts of Sarasota](#)
[DragonBoot Quartet presents a world premiere by Sarasota composer Roger Zare](#)

Hermitage Artist Retreat

[Repetition, Enfoldment, Concealment](#)

Manatee Performing Arts Center

[And Then There Were None](#)

Ringling College Galleries

[Anthony Rice: A Peaceable Kingdom](#)

Sarasota Ballet

[Foundations of Royalty](#)

Special thanks to the Observer Media Group for their media sponsorship of our 2025-2026 season!



save the dates

+ April 7

Talkback Tuesday:
Justin Gomlak – From Broadway to the Classroom:
Building Creative Futures
4-6 p.m.

+ April 11

The Imagination of Art Venti,
Opening Reception
2-4 p.m.

+ April 13

Behind the Curtain Tour
1:30-3 p.m.

+ April 14

Palmetto Historical Park and Village Tour
10:30 a.m. - noon

+ April 16

Luncheon: Sarasota Orchestra
11 a.m. - 1 p.m.

+ April 27

Workshop: Make Your Flower and Garden
Photographs Special
10 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

+ May 14

Luncheon: 2026 Scholarship Awards
11 a.m. - 1 p.m.

+ May 18

Behind the Curtain Tour
1:30-3 p.m.