

MARCH LUNCHEON PROGRAM

The Sarasota Players with Thayer Greenberg

Thursday, March 19, 11 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Sarasota Yacht Club

\$45 for Arts Advocates members

\$50 for nonmembers

Our speaker, Thayer Greenberg, is managing artistic director of The Sarasota Players, the longest-running theatre in Sarasota. Thayer will discuss The Players' season, their planned move to the Payne Park Auditorium, and their education programs which include classes, camps, workshops, and performance groups. As a special treat, several actors will attend and sing music from their production of "Les Misérables."

Thayer is a lifelong educator with over 15 years of experience directing, producing, teaching, and developing arts programs in Chicago, New York City, and Florida. She has established a reputation for ensemble-driven storytelling and creating collaborative environments. Her artistic vision emphasizes inclusivity, accountability, and long-term sustainability of arts programming.

The Sarasota Players launched the careers of many performers who went on to stardom on Broadway, in Hollywood, and on TV, including Academy Award nominee Montgomery Clift, actress Jayne Meadows, comedian Paul Reubens (Pee-wee Herman), and Ashley Rose Orr who starred as Gretl on Broadway in *The Sound of Music*.



REGISTER HERE
BY MARCH 13



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,

On February 6 there was a special presentation, co-sponsored by Art Center Sarasota, featuring the artwork and legacy of Sarasota Art Colony artist Eugene White, known for his paintings of vintage Florida. The presentation was led by his daughter, Annie Bixler, along with Alecia Harper, Art Center Sarasota's centennial archivist and guest curator.

Our February member artist, Lynn Coppinger, held an opening reception on February 7 at the gallery. Her whimsical and abstract artwork reflects a playful and imaginative spirit.

Our Talkback Tuesdays series continued February 10 with a talk by Dasha Reich titled "The Flag: Nine Artists, Nine Flags." She and a panel of participating artists shared their insights on the "Flags" exhibition currently on display at the Art Ovation Hotel.

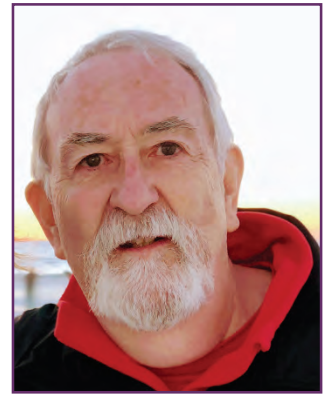
Our February luncheon featuring the Jazz Club of Sarasota was held on February 19 at the Sarasota Yacht Club. Ed Linehan, president of the Jazz Club, discussed its programs, including the annual Sarasota Jazz Festival. His talk was complemented by a performance by jazz pianist Chris Neville.

Looking Ahead to March

Suzanne Havens' opening reception of "Paintings: Thesis, Antithesis, and Synthesis" will be held March 7 from 2-4 p.m. in the Arts Advocates Gallery. Having studied art and art history, Suzanne recognizes that the art world often shifts—sometimes gradually, sometimes suddenly—between depicting visual forms (thesis), rejecting form altogether (antithesis), and ultimately creating a synthesis that introduces something new.

A Behind the Curtain: Exploring the Van Wezel from the Art to the Stage tour will be held on March 9 from 1:30-3 p.m. at the Van Wezel.

Our next Talkback Tuesday is March 10 from 4-6 p.m. in the Arts Advocates Gallery and will feature Ronnique Hawkins presenting "Roots & Radiance: Learning Their History." Hawkins is a visionary artist, activist, and educator whose life's work bridges creativity, justice, and youth empowerment.



Bill Rusling, President

Our March luncheon featuring The Sarasota Players is March 19 from 11 a.m. - 1 p.m. at the Sarasota Yacht Club. Guest speaker Thayer Greenberg, managing artistic director of The Sarasota Players, the longest-running theatre in Sarasota, will discuss the organization's season, its planned move to the Payne Park Auditorium, and its education programs.

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

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

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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MARCH MEMBER ARTIST EXHIBIT

PAINTINGS: THESIS, ANTITHESIS, AND SYNTHESIS

Opening Reception March 7
Saturdays, March 7-28, 2-4 p.m.
Arts Advocates Gallery

As Suzanne Havens studied art and the history of art she realized 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. Havens flows from painting visual subjects, abstractions of feelings, and where visual references are evident but altered from nature to heighten her subjective emotion. Viewers may experience joy, mystery, and rebellion via layers of flowers, feathers, sails, gardens, rocks, breezes, water, and dancers, defying the restrictions of time and space. Havens collects concepts and images through reading, hands-on gardening, making photographs for Marie Selby Botanical Gardens, cultural and nature travel, boating, visiting art exhibits, and studying painting and photography via traditional methods and digitally.

Suzanne started expressing herself with drawing and painting before she started school. She earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts at Michigan State University, taught high school art, earned a master's degree in international business, and had an exciting career in marketing and advertising. All the while she continued to experiment with painting and photography.

In a way, this exhibition is a non-linear retrospective of Suzanne Havens, who has been sheltered from the marketplace and thus free to paint for personal expression. This will be the first exhibition of many of these paintings. Check out SuzanneHavens.com to see her blog of paintings and photos.



This exhibit is sponsored by Observer Media Group.

Talkback Tuesdays

This series features in-depth interviews with local creatives, educators, journalists, and nonprofit leaders who are shaping the city's dynamic creative community. Each session fosters meaningful conversations and community engagement through open dialogue with featured guests.

Hosted in the Arts Advocates Gallery, Talkback Tuesdays are from 4-6 pm. Admission is free for Arts Advocates members and \$5 for nonmembers.



March 10

Ronique Hawkins

Founder of Learn My History

Roots & Radiance: Learning Their History

[REGISTER HERE](#)



Ronique Hawkins is a dynamic artist, activist, and educator whose work bridges creativity, justice, and youth empowerment. Trained at top institutions including the New York Film Academy and Sanford Meisner Intensive, Ro's career spans television, fashion, and documentary filmmaking. As producer of the Emmy-nominated *The Untold Story of Emmett Louis Till*, she became a trusted voice in civil rights advocacy.

Ro founded two nonprofits, The ALM Foundation, which supports multicultural assistance for historical cold cases, and Learn My History Foundation (LMH), which empower youth through genealogy, filmmaking, and mentorship.

Inspired by her late mother and her own cancer journey, Ro's work is deeply personal and fiercely inclusive. Her response to anti-Semitic backlash with love and resilience reflects her guiding principle: "An injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."



April 7

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.

Tours Coming Up

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

March 9, 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](#)



Palmetto Historical Park and Village

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

This tour includes a variety of historical buildings pertaining to Palmetto. Explore 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. Carla Favorite, the park's education and engagement coordinator, will be our guide.

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



[REGISTER HERE](#)



Elisabeth Trostli

Why I Joined Arts Advocates



When asked why I joined Arts Advocates, my honest answer is, “I didn’t.”

Actually, I was enticed to join a distinguished, long-established organization known as the Fine Arts Society of Sarasota (FASS).

In 2012, I was invited to exhibit my paintings in *Galleria*, a truly grand artist exhibition held at Ringling College. The exhibition was part of FASS’s annual, all-volunteer Creators and Collectors Tour, a major fundraising initiative that also featured studio visits with some of Sarasota’s most creative artists.

Attending my first FASS luncheon at the Bird Key Yacht Club was a turning point. Sitting among some of the most cultured, intelligent, and engaging women I had ever met, I felt an immediate sense of purpose and belonging. I realized I had found an organization where I could channel my talents, explore new creative possibilities, and grow—perhaps even become one of these remarkable women myself.

Though the organization evolved to become known as Arts Advocates, its beauty and strength have always resided in the dedication and collaboration of its volunteers.

As a member, I’m thrilled to participate in several Arts Advocates committees, including:

- **Scholarships**, addressing Arts Advocates’ primary mission: Supporting the education and careers of talented college students involved in the arts.
- **Salons**, hosted in members’ homes and studios, offering access to private and exclusive art collections.

- **Educational tours**, organizing and planning adventures from Venice to St. Petersburg, which include museum visits, enjoying local cuisine, attending rehearsals, and experiencing behind-the-scenes performance and art studio spaces.

- **Luncheon programs**, featuring engaging presentations from local leaders in museum, theater, music, film, dance, and visual arts organizations. In tandem with other volunteers, I had the opportunity to plan festive luncheons and socials, welcoming speakers and guests from across Sarasota’s vibrant arts community.

Under the leadership of President Bill Rusling, Arts Advocates secured gallery space in the Crossings at Siesta Key mall to house paintings from its historic collection of Sarasota Art Colony artists. At that point, I became curator of an additional gallery space devoted to rotating monthly exhibitions. This space showcases work by member artists (including myself) and local art groups, complete with opening receptions and artist talks—further strengthening our shared creative community.

Arts Advocates has offered me far more than membership alone. Volunteering and participating has provided me purpose, inspiration, and a meaningful connection to Sarasota’s rich artistic legacy PLUS lifelong friendships with some magnificent people!



Coming in April

Exhibit

The Imagination of Art Venti

April 4–May 30, Saturdays only, 2–4 p.m.
in the Arts Advocates Gallery

This exhibit invites you to 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, Florida, he has produced his largest and most complex and meticulous works, the sizes having increased up to 110” in width. This is your opportunity to view them, and to meet and talk to the artist.

This exhibit is sponsored by Observer Media Group.



Luncheon

Sarasota Orchestra

April 16, 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. at Sarasota Yacht Club

Music lovers will soon enjoy the first purpose-built acoustically sound concert hall in southwest Florida. The Sarasota Orchestra has already broken ground for its new state-of-the-art 1,800 seat venue on Fruitville Road that will also include a 700-seat recital hall. We’ll learn more from Joseph McKenna, president and chief executive officer of the orchestra.



[REGISTER HERE](#)



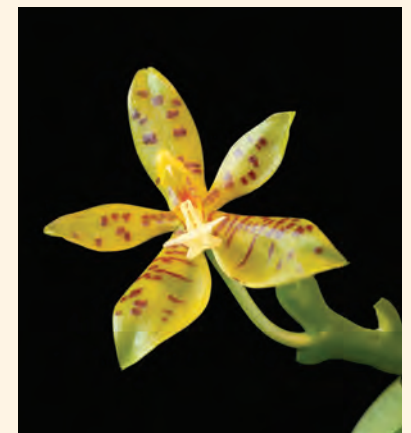
This luncheon is sponsored by Observer Media Group.

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](#)



Help Us Celebrate Our Scholar Artists!

We need you and as many of your friends as possible to help us celebrate our amazing 2026 scholar artists. This year, we had a record number of applicants, 26 in total. Now, we'd like to have record attendance at the scholarship luncheon which will be held **Thursday, May 14 at the Sarasota Yacht Club!**



Please join us when we introduce our 2026 scholarship recipients and share their exciting work. It is, without a doubt, the most heartwarming and fulfilling event of the year.

Over the next six weeks, the scholarship committee will review the submissions in detail and select the 2026 recipients. We offer a huge thank you to our donors who have contributed to the scholarship fund. Their generosity allows us to award a total of \$50,000 in scholarships this year.

If you would like to support the event, donor and sponsor opportunities can be [found here](#). Donors and sponsors are invited to an exclusive, pre-luncheon meet-and-greet with our winning students.

Seeing the extraordinary talents of our scholarship recipients and getting to know something about them provides an opportunity to introduce more people to the important work of Arts Advocates – and hopefully, to increase our membership. ***Please help us do just that!***

REGISTER NOW!



ANNUAL FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN

Thanks to you, our generous donors, the annual fundraising campaign raised \$41,268 to support our mission.

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\$10,000 and Up

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ENTHUSIASTS

UP TO \$199

Jerry Blumengarten

Beverly Burger

Nancy Bushnell

Carol Camiener

Barbara Campo

Candace Cox

Carol Darling

Michelle Sheppard

Robyn Virball



HIGHLIGHTS FROM LAST MONTH



Dasha Reich, Jana Millstone, and Marianne Chapel were three of the artists featured in the Talkback Tuesday “Dasha Reich – The Flag: Nine Artists, Nine Flags.”



Jana Millstone's *Lessons Lost*



Dasha Reich's *American Kitchen*



Ed Linehan, Jazz Club of Sarasota's president, was our February luncheon guest speaker.



(L-R) Lynn Coppinger poses with Louise Tesmer, winner of Lynn's painting *Vintage Meets Virtual*, which was February's luncheon raffle prize.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM LAST MONTH



Living Creatively: The Art of Lynn Coppinger showcased Lynn's passion for multiple mediums, including colored pencil, oil, acrylic, pastel, ink, and mixed media.



Eugene White's daughter Annie Bixler kicked off the discussion about her father, Eugene White.



Annie Bixler discussed her dad's work, including being a sometimes unwilling model as seen in the ballerina painting.



Eugene White's tiny painting of the old Sarasota dog track was passed around.



Art Center Sarasota's Alecia Harper gave a fascinating presentation about White's work and career. At left is a painting of White's wife who frequently modeled for him.



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:

502 Gallery

[Flo Singer, Legacy Artist](#)

Ringling College Galleries

[Origins: Sarasota Artist Colony
1945-1965](#)

Sarasota Contemporary Dance

[SCD + Piazzolla](#)

Sarasota Jewish Theatre

[Cherry Docs](#)

Sarasota Orchestra

[Dance the Night Away](#)

Sarasota Players

[The Crucible](#)

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



save the dates

- + **March 7**
Paintings: Thesis, Antithesis, and Synthesis
Opening Reception
2-4 p.m.
- + **March 9**
Behind the Curtain Tour
1:30-3 p.m.
- + **March 10**
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Their History
4-6 p.m.
- + **March 19**
Luncheon: The Sarasota Players
11 a.m. - 1 p.m.
- + **April 7**
Talkback Tuesday:
Justin Gornak - 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.