

Los Alamos Arts Council and Fuller Lodge: Over 40 Years of History

Local arts councils are essential to the artistic future of communities today. In our financial times, it is rare for individual donors or groups of donors to support the rich artistic life to which we have become accustomed, for the demands of art are enormous and the costs staggering. Many organizations have therefore turned to government agencies, businesses, and philanthropic organizations for support, but the time and effort needed to tap these resources are prohibitive for most smaller organizations. The local arts council is able to work with these resources as well as with the community as a whole to help fund arts projects which otherwise would be impossible. The local arts council acts as a liaison between state and federal Arts Commissions and the local community. It maintains a calendar of cultural events for the community and visitors, sponsors arts festivals and celebrations throughout the year, and encourages all types of arts programs affecting citizens of all ages.

The Los Alamos Arts Council was formed in 1967 to address the needs of the Los Alamos arts community. One of the specific needs that was perceived by the community as a whole was the need for a cultural center for Los Alamos. In 1966 the Atomic Energy Commission closed the hotel and restaurant operations of Fuller Lodge. The AEC asked Los Alamos what role this historic building should have in the future of Los Alamos. Charles Campbell, AEC Area manager, formed a committee, headed by Beverly Agnew, to sift through the many proposals for the use of the lodge. While that group was meeting, the feeling was growing among many citizens that this unique building, designed by John Gaw Meem in 1928 as the heart of Los Alamos Boys' Ranch School and later used by the scientists of the Manhattan Project as a social and community center, might now be entering a new stage in its history—providing a home for the artistic side of this scientific community.

And so, with the possibility that a cultural center might indeed become a reality, the American Association of University Women formed a study group that met from January to June 1967 to consider the feasibility of organizing an Arts Council. In June 1967 an organizational meeting chaired by Jean Van Dilla was held in which it was agreed to go forward with the formation of the Los Alamos Arts Council with Fuller Lodge as its home base.

In July 1967, confident that Fuller Lodge was indeed wanted and would be looked after, the AEC entered into a contract with the County Commission to manage the building in a manner which would promote the health, welfare, and recreation of all citizens of Los Alamos. The County would receive \$20,000 per year to maintain the physical plant. To celebrate the event, the first Los Alamos Arts Festival was organized by Rosalie Heller in August 1967.

In November 1967, the Los Alamos Arts Council was officially formed with Ruth Sherman as its first President. An Arts Council committee immediately began the work of drawing up guidelines for Lodge usage, which were approved by the County Council in early 1968. At that time, the County also signed a contract with the Chamber of Commerce to carry out day-to-day management of the Lodge, based upon Arts Council guidelines, in exchange for free office space and \$3600 per year. The Arts Council was appointed official advisor to the County in matters pertaining to Fuller Lodge.

So, from its inception, the Arts Council, as a non-profit tax-exempt organization, had two distinct functions:

1. The promotion of cultural activities in Los Alamos and the surrounding area.
2. The responsibility for developing and preserving Fuller Lodge as a cultural center for the use of all citizens of Los Alamos.

In keeping with these functions, the Arts Council has sponsored hundreds of events, festivals, crafts fairs, and classes throughout Los Alamos. In 1977, the Arts Council began the process of creating a non-profit art center for Los Alamos dedicated to visual arts and serving both as a gallery and a class center. This led to the formation of the Fuller Lodge Art Center, an offshoot of the Los Alamos Arts Council. In keeping with its mission, the Arts Council continually plans new events and festivals to meet the changing needs and desires of the citizens of Los Alamos. Some of these are the Kite Festival, Missoula Children's Theatre, Scarecrow Contest, Pumpkin Glow, the Fuller Lodge Open House, and Guitars at the Lodge, and the Coffee House Performances. The Arts Council also continues to sponsor student recitals, and the Brown Bag Performance Series at Fuller Lodge.

In 1995, the Arts Council came full circle back to the Lodge. In a renewed effort to maintain Fuller Lodge as a cultural center, the Los Alamos County Council determined that cultural users should have priority in determining the long-term usage of Fuller Lodge. As a result, the Chamber of Commerce was replaced as Lodge Manager by the Arts Council. However, no changes were made to the Fuller Lodge Use Policy, which over the years had ceased to give preference to cultural activities at Fuller Lodge. Furthermore, the County investigated the possibility of transferring Fuller Lodge Management to a County department in an effort to reduce the costs of operating this historic building. This transfer was done in 1998.

As the Arts Council celebrates its 44th year, it seems as important as ever to continue the process of defining Fuller Lodge as the cultural center of Los Alamos, and to continue as the Arts Connection to benefit all of the citizens of the community. Los Alamos has an ongoing opportunity to celebrate its own unique culture, traditions, art and history in a way that will preserve not only the building, but also the essence of Los Alamos for future generations.