



The Villages Art League History 1989-2024

The Villages Art League was created in 1989 by a handful of resident artists who wanted to paint in the company of other artists. Eleanor Simmons was an advanced painter and along with her friends was just looking for a place where they could meet regularly to share a love of painting. This group was the original art club in The Villages when they started gathering in the Charlie Chaplin room at the Paradise Recreation Center offered by the Villages Recreation Department as a permanent meeting place.



Simmons

Members who were part of that original group along with Eleanor were Dorothy Bryant, Sis Cliffe, Marion Gager, Lucille Geddes, and Bunny Poulton. From the very beginning they had guest artists in for demonstrations.

Tony Peterlin joined in 1990 and along with Ron Saboda suggested that the club establish bylaws and elect officers. Al Englehart was an oil painter instructor and had experience in organizing clubs. Elections were held and Ron Saboda was the first president of the Villages Art league. Group meetings were held on Thursdays and the general meeting on a Tuesday evening which turned out to be unpopular. A decision was made to make it on the first workshop day each month and this practice still exists today.

In the early days there were art shows on Spanish Spring Town Square sponsored by The Villages where they provided the tables with easels on top facing two ways. The artists needed only to bring their paintings and display them on the easels. Subsequent art shows were held in the Charlie Chaplin Room at the Paradise Recreation Center when the club grew too large to accommodate both artist and paintings.



Hirzel

The First Annual Villages Art Show, sponsored by The Villages Recreation Department and the Villages Art League was held March 7 and 8, 1992 in the Rita Hayworth Room at the Paradise Center and featured 95 works of art by Village residents. Edwin Hirzel was President. That first art show was followed that same year by the Vision Art Fair and the Villages Art Fair held in the Charlie Chaplin Room at Paradise Recreation Center.



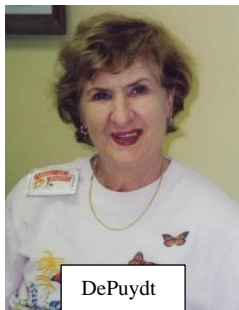
Malach

Eleanor Simmons was President in 1994-5 followed by Loretta Malach in 1996-7.

Lucille Meiers was President when Citizens Bank began displaying paintings of Villages Art League members in 1998. The program entitled "Artist of the Month" is ongoing and is co-coordinated by a VAL member. Nations Bank offered members another choice. The display program in other Citizen's and First Federal Banks was later established in 2003 and it continues today in area Citizens Banks.

Village Art League members participated in an art show at Katie Bell's on December 3, 1998. Jan Ramsey won 1st place in watercolor and second in overall show. Other winners were Marion Gager, 2nd place in acrylic, Peter Hawes, second place in watercolor, Bunny Poulton, 3rd place in acrylic and Lucille Geddes, honorable mention in watercolor.

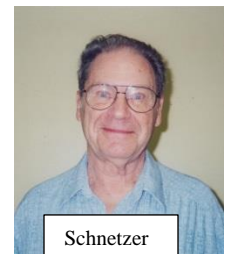
The Villages Recreation Department along with The Villages Art League and Visual Arts Association co-sponsored "Art in the Round" in the Carmen Miranda Room at Paradise in 1998.



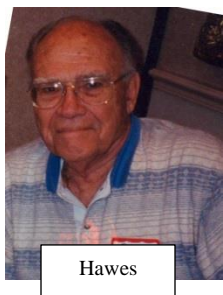
A year later, in 1999, the 2nd "Art in The Round" exhibit took place at La Hacienda Center to accommodate a larger number of participating artists who wished to exhibit. Artists rented eight foot tables for \$5 each. Among the artists represented were Lee Asta, Carla Barsy, Dorothy Bryant, Donna Caputo, Ginny DePuydt, Marion Gager, Ken Gerbig, Peter Hawes, Ray Johnson, Lucille Snodgrass and Helen Washington. The Villages Art League was 11 years old and had 49 members. Ginny DePuydt was President in 1999-2000.

The Villages Recreation Department opened the Village Gallery of Fine Arts in La Hacienda on August 4, 1999 to feature works of art by Villages residents. The grand opening of the Gallery of Fine Arts took place on Friday October 8, 1999 with a ribbon-cutting ceremony and refreshments of wine and cheese. That gallery is now known as La Galleria.

In 2000 and 2001 The Villages Art League and the Villages Recreation Department sponsored the 3rd and 4th Artist Showcase at Savannah Center. We had grown to 73 members and had started a second workshop at Paradise for our members to paint together. Art Schnetzer was President in 2001-2.



By the end of 2002 membership reached 130 and had to be frozen until a larger facility could be found to conduct meetings. In March of 2003 The Villages Recreation Department offered the Fox Glove Room at Saddlebrook Center for Monday morning meetings and workshops. The room can accommodate 140 people. Thirteen new members signed up that March when the freeze was lifted. By September 2003 there were 155 members. Peter Hawes was President.



The Art League kept the Charlie Chaplin Room at Paradise for Saturday morning workshops. Another location was added at Mulberry Recreation Center in the Arts and Crafts Room for Thursday afternoon workshops bringing the total number of workshops a week to three. The Village Art league's workshops are free to all members and demonstrations of art techniques are given at most every 1st Monday of the month meeting at Saddlebrook Center.

2002 was when member Adrienne Davis started a newsletter to keep members informed. Adrienne was co-chair of the Artist Showcase with Sally Primc and Pat Claunch. She also did the publicity for the art shows and worked with her husband Sandy on membership.

In 2003 fifty-eight artists and photographers participated in the 6th Artist Showcase. In addition to the artists' display, there were portrait drawing demonstrations, art-related door prizes, including original artwork, prints and notes and a raffle of original art work created and donated by member artists. A printed program was developed listing the location of participating artists and listing all the members who contributed to the success of the Showcase. A program is now offered at each Artist Showcase.

In 2003 members changed the Art League name of the group from Villages Art League to The Villages Art League. With the help of Art and Ginny Schnetzer, along with Adrienne and Sandy Davis, they started a HeARTS for Hospice Program with Cornerstone Hospice on 466. It offered patients in Hospice a chance to decide which paintings were to hang in their rooms matching their interests to paintings that The Villages Art League donated.

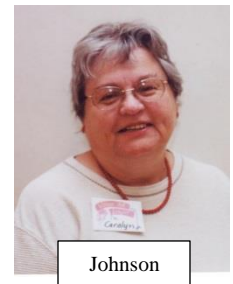
In 2003 the HeARTS for Hospice silent auction of members' artwork to benefit Hospice of Lake & Sumter took place with much success. It began with donations of paintings by the late Dorothy Caldwell and Catherine Becco to start the newly built Hospice on 466. We were joined by the Visual Arts Association.



2004 was the 15th anniversary of The Villages Art League and a yearbook was put together to commemorate the club's accomplishments and history.

2004-5 were the years John O'Hara was President. Wachovia and First Federal Banks brought our total of places to exhibit in banks to 5.

2006 was the year e-mails were started when Carolyn Johnson was President. The Artist Showcase was so successful it took over every room at the Savannah Center. Co-chairing with Peter Hawes in 2006 started Nancy Dias on a journey that spanned 5 years of being involved in organizing the Artist Showcase. This year the artist who was the Artist of the Month showed their work at monthly meetings at Saddlebrook. It has been done every month since then. The club started to send e-mails to the members as a way to stay in touch between monthly meetings. It is now a routine method to send members the monthly newsletter with information on current events.



In 2007 Nancy Dias organized a summer show that allowed the members to introduce some of the members other art interests besides the paintings that they showcase at Savannah's Artist Showcase. Nancy co-chaired with Helen Gromadzki that 1st Summer Art Festival and then went on to chair 2 shows a year until 2011. Nancy has been doing the registration for both shows since 2006. At the time no other clubs were having their own shows and the Summer Art Festival became a very popular summer event. It was determined by the Recreation Department that there were as many, if not more people in The Villages during the summer months. Invitations were sent to the Woodworkers, China Painters, Potters, Clayers, and Glass Fusion Clubs. It was an instant success. Every year since the Summer Art Festival sells out its spaces on registration day.

There are currently two art shows each year. The Summer Art Festival is held at Lake Miona Recreation Center the second Saturday in July. The Artist Showcase is still held annually at the Savannah Center on the Saturday after Thanksgiving, with the members voting to keep the Artist Showcase a Fine Art show and the Summer Art Festival the place for members to show their other art interests. Both of these art shows are the fund raisers that the club needs to continue with the expenses of running the club.

Ted Williams of Cornerstone Hospice contacted Nancy Dias in 2007 to paint a mural in the children's waiting room, a place where children or grandchildren could go while the adults spent time with their loved one. Joining her was Sheila O'Brien Wilson and Wendy Lahey. The entire room, every wall and the ceiling was painted in a jungle theme.

Diane Andrus was President in 2008-9. During this time the club donated art supplies to area school that had their art budgets cut. The club had a contest to design a new badge and Sandra McNeil won. More and more we relied on computers for emails and communications. Mary Ann Main, wife of Bill Main, started a new web site for the club making it a place to go for any club news and information. There you can find the History of the Art League, mention of our Founders, the By-laws, updates on the art shows, a calendar of events, read about the Artist of the Month or who will be demonstrating at the next meeting, and read the newsletter. Member artists made over 1000 hand painted cards to give Operation Shoebox, a local program to help our soldiers away from home. During the November Artist Showcase the public was invited to write a note to a soldier. At the Summer Art Festival in 2009 the club celebrated its 20th anniversary with an open workshop in the Arts and Crafts room for members to paint together and share in the celebration with the artists who enjoy showcasing their art work in our art shows.



Andrus



Evans - Naughton

In 2010-11 Susan Evans and Fran Naughton were co-Presidents. They initiated the Cultural Ambassador Program where members went into day care centers and volunteered their time reading to the students and sharing their love of art. During the planning of the Summer Art Festival, Nancy Dias put together a Patriotic Exhibit at Lake Miona and a raffle for a Frank Zampardi portrait raised \$1298 for Operation Shoebox.

Catherine Sullivan was the President in 2012-3 and started a Fall La Galleria Exhibit in September that hangs for 3 months. It was the first judged art show for the Art League. In 2012 Catherine introduced Artistry in Motion, artists taking turns painting during the art shows, and the finished paintings became part of the raffle that raises money for the club.



Sullivan



Dias

2014 was a year of celebration. A new black lanyard with silver lettering was handed out at the April 7 meeting to each member along with new badges designed to reflect the history of the club. The golf cart bridge that spans 441/27 was chosen to symbolize the growth of The Villages Art League that started in 1989 in Paradise on the East side of 441 to the club we are today in 2014. Membership has reached 265.

President Nancy Dias, at the April 7, 2014 meeting celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Art League, brought together all the past Presidents living in The Villages including the 1994 President and the Founder Eleanor Simmons. Although in her 90's she said she was *"thrilled with the invitation and wouldn't miss it for the world."* John Rohan Director of Recreation in The Villages made it a point to stop in to congratulate the Art League saying that *"It is truly the spirit of our community making partnerships, and relationships that all come together for the betterment of one another. Congratulations on this achievement."*

At that meeting all the officers were awarded pins for their recognition of service. Special awards went to Eleanor Simmons as Founder and past President and Adrienne Davis for her many contributions with Hospice and all the many hats she wore in service to this

club. Heart pins were awarded to many committee members for their contributions that kept the Art League moving forward. Heartfelt thank you's and applause went out to all the members who are always volunteering to help whenever needed but never get on any committee list that records their contributions.

In August of 2014, together with the Recreation Department, President Nancy Dias organized the opening of the new Eisenhower Art Gallery in the Eisenhower Regional Recreation Center where there will be a continuous display of artwork changing every two months. The opening Silver Anniversary Art Exhibit featured the artwork of ten Presidents still living here in The Villages as a celebration of the 25 year history of The Villages Art League and hometown talent.

The Villages Art League continues to grow as The Villages has expanded from the East side of 441 to beyond 466 to the second town square Lake Sumter Landing and to 466A and beyond to the third Town Square Brownwood at Highway 44 near Wildwood.

There were a few thousand residents when the founders started this club back in 1989 and now there are over 100,000. Where there was only one Recreation Center, now there are 32, and counting. We were the only art group back in 1989 and now there are hundreds. There are places all over The Villages where you can paint every day of the week. Art clubs are plentiful and diversified. It is a tribute to our members now and in years past who have kept the spirit of camaraderie and love of art alive in The Villages Art League.

Our members range from beginners to professional artists and teachers. All mediums represented include watercolor, oil, acrylics, colored pencil, pastels, graphite, pen & ink and photography. Because of the success of the Summer Art Festival, more Villages non-painting artists have been joining that include china painters, potters, clayers, and glass fusion artists. Dimensional artists have clubs dedicated to their art. Lately those clubs have begun having small art shows in their own club meetings to showcase their art. This is effecting how many members can get in our shows. Membership rose from 245 to 321.

On January 19, 2015 at the urging of our non-painting members a special meeting was called to discuss the future of the VAL. Everyone was given the opportunity to talk about what kind of club we should be. At the February regular business meeting a special paper ballot vote was taken as members entered the room. There were 150 members present and 140 voted with 90 voting to keep the club a painting club and 50 who voted to open it up and be inclusive of all art. This decision to remain a painting club will insure that our art exhibits in La Galleria, the banks, the new Eisenhower Art Gallery and our 2 art shows a year will be paintings.

Much of our success can be attributed to the partnership we have with the Recreation Department of The Villages. It has been a collaboration of shared mutual interests that has benefitted everyone. The membership is the main reason that this club has endured. At our monthly meetings we all have a voice and our ideas and suggestions are always welcome. We vote as a group for the betterment of all members. The Villages Art League welcomes all Village residents who are interested in painting.

Officers of 2014 decided on a one-year term so new officers were nominated and voted in for 2015. They are co-Presidents Diane Andrus and Jeanne Willette, Vice President John O'Hara, Secretary Bonnie Canning, and Treasurer Gail Parker.



Andrus & Willette



Willette

Officers for 2016: President Jeanne Willette, Vice President Ron Kucinski, Secretary Bonnie Canning, and Treasurer Gail Parker.

Officers for 2017: President Bonnie Canning, Vice President Jeanne Willette, Secretary Gail Parker, and Treasurer Jay Summers.



Willette, Canning, Parker, Summers



*Whetstone, Zalewski, Parker, Canning.
Missing-Summers.*

Officers for 2018: President Bonnie Canning, Co-Vice Presidents Janeen Whetstone and Dianne Zalewski, Secretary Gail Parker and Treasurer Jay Summers.

Bonnie Canning took the reins as president In March 2017, for a two-year term through February 2019, with a theme of "Volunteerism." She felt that the VAL would not continue to exist without participation of more active volunteers among all the membership; and that members could not always count on a few fellow members to always make sure that the

valued traditional activities of the VAL, like the two art shows, monthly meeting refreshments, email communications, membership processing, and other efforts continued.

At the suggestion of Membership Co-Chair Dore Via Dumas, the VAL started to reward members for their volunteer efforts by allowing them first choice on the most favored exhibit spaces in the Summer Arts Festival and the Fall Artists Showcase.

The one-time art donation to a local public school done in 2008, was replicated in December 2017, through the enterprise of Vice President Jeanne Willette, with a VAL donation of \$500 to The Lady Lake Elementary School. This was formalized in 2018 with the formation of a VAL Charities Donation Committee chaired by Co-Vice President Dianne Zalewski. Based on this committee's recommendations, \$1,000, and a large collection of member-donated art supplies, was donated to several needy elementary schools in August 2018.

And the VAL continued the acceptance of 3-D artwork, started under President Jeanne Willette's leadership, into the two major shows; as well as the celebration of both 2-D and 3-D artwork in the VAL's Member-To-Member Art Shows, held 3 times a year at the monthly meetings, and Artist of the Month and demo presentations.

Officers for 2019: Co-Presidents Fran Naughton and Diane Weekley, Vice-President Janeen Whetstone, Secretary Freddie Venturoni and Treasurer Gail Parker.

The VAL had 2 successful Art Shows this year with Show Chairperson, Janeen Whetstone, doing an outstanding job, organizing all aspects of both shows. A new change was made in that the Artists were allowed to set up on the Friday night prior to the show. This was a huge success for both shows.



Naughton, Weekley, Whetstone, Parker, Venturoni

The annual show "Inspired by the Masters" chaired by Catherine Sullivan was again a great success with many beautiful paintings.

In October a party celebrating 30 years since the organization of the Villages Art League, was held at the Savannah Center with a Hawaiian Theme, planned and organized by Co-President, Fran Naughton and her committee.

A new e-mail system was set up by Steve Lang. It is a system called Constant Contact.

The by-laws were amended and approved by the membership to change the election of officers to be in October to allow the new officers to take position on January 1st to coincide with the club's fiscal year.

December was the annual Christmas Party organized by a great team of volunteers. Great potluck dishes, singing and socializing. The education team collected donations of art supplies, monetary donations of \$400, and the club donation of \$533 in the form of on-line teacher supply gift certificates to help elementary art teachers in the area schools.

The membership experienced great growth and ended the year with 288 members.



Parker, Naughton, Sklon, Curlett, Kimmel

Officers for 2020: Co-Presidents Fran Naughton and Eileen Sklon, Vice President Adeline Curlett, Secretary Judy Kimmel, and Treasurer Gail Parker.

Officers for 2021: Co-Presidents Eileen Sklon and Diane Cita Timperley, Vice President Fran Naughton, Secretary Marge McQueston & Marilyn Wright, Treasurer Gail Parker.



Co-Presidents: Timperley & Sklon



Co-Presidents: Naughton & Willette

Officers for 2022: Co-Presidents Fran Naughton and Jeanne Willette, Vice President Eileen Sklon, Secretary Marilyn Wright, Treasurer Gail Parker.

Officers for 2023: President Lisa Melcher, Vice President Nan Kohr, Secretary Marilyn Wright, Treasurer Gail Parker.

The Villages Art League continued to thrive and grow during 2023, expanding well south of County Road 44. With close to 300 valued members and volunteers, The Villages Art League successfully hosted the Summer Art Festival, Fall Fine Art Show, Inspired By The Masters and Eisenhower Exhibits.



VP Kohr, Pres. Melcher, Sect. Wright, Treas. Parker

The members continued to enjoy the time-honored refreshment tradition thanks to Linda Yeck and her devoted group of volunteers and the recognition of members through our Artist Of The Month program thanks to Jo Magram. Membership continues to be documented with new members introduced at our monthly meetings thanks to Dore Via Dumas and VAL emails wouldn't have been delivered without Marilyn Wright.

The VAL was able to offer the membership demonstrations during the monthly business meetings once again thanks to Hallie Duetsch. The demonstrations scheduled were based on feedback from the membership and included nationally known artists, members, and various local artists demonstrating watercolor techniques, glue gun, collage, acrylic, glass,..... The VAL twice a year Member-to-Member event highlighted the depth and breadth of our members' talents.

The VAL was able to make a substantial donation to the Leesburg Center for the Arts and is planning to continue to support local charities.

2023 was also marked by the passing of our beloved Freddie Venturoni. Freddie was a very active member of both the VAL and VAA. She became well known not only for her beautiful artwork depicting buildings in The Villages, but her quick wit and humor. A Celebration Of Life took place on July 15th at the Rohan Recreation Center where the mural Freddie created is proudly displayed. She will be missed by all.

The December Holiday party was a great success thanks to an amazing team of volunteers. There was a potluck, music, dancing and even a snowball fight.

The VAL welcomes all Villages resident artists.



Officers for 2024: President Lisa Melcher, Vice President Ellen Hellwege, Secretary Gail Parker, Treasurer Janet Marks.

Treasurer Janet Marks, President Lisa Melcher, Secretary Gail Parker, Vice President Ellen Hellwege.