

History of the Organization (Provided by Jan Kirby, Director)

The *Oregon Trail Arts Association* was founded in 1963 to recognize the educational and psychological value of what art programs could do to impact a community. When Baker County dedicated its new library in 1970, the *Oregon Trail Arts Council* (our name at the time) saw an opportunity for a permanent home; our request to occupy the Carnegie Library Building was granted in 1971. When we filed for non-profit status, it was discovered that we would have to change our name because it conflicted with one in LaGrande. Contestants submitted the following suggestions:

1. Sagebrush Creative Arts Center
2. Pioneer Creative Arts Center
3. Creative and Performing Arts Center
4. Four Seasons Creative Arts Center
5. Elkhorn Creative Arts Center

The board added “Crossroads” to choice #3 and awarded \$10 to the Jay-C-ettes for their submission. That is how we became *Crossroads Creative and Performing Arts Center*, for which our non-profit status was gained in 1977.

In the beginning, classes were free unless the teacher submitted a request to the board to charge a fee. The fees ranged from 25 cents for an art lesson from Sr. Rose de Lima to \$1 for craft classes. Membership was left at \$3 per year but only after a “rousing argument at the board meeting.” There was also an ongoing concern about how to pay for heating the Carnegie Library Building in the winter months.

In January 1972, membership was 555. Concerns about direction lead Crossroads to accept assistance from the Oregon Arts Commission, which sent Mr. Angus Randolph to consult. His 16-page report is part of our permanent records. His recommendations included increasing membership dues, charging for classes, and offering more small plays. In addition, he explained what an art association is:

It defines by example what art is, to the public and its members through all functions. It makes art accessible to a community. It stands ready with open arms to receive anyone who wants to accept its function on an experience level. It is not simply a mirror for its public to gaze into. It is, in part, a reflection, but not a mirror. If a mirror at all, it is a special magical mirror, one that allows a person to see himself in a new way. Its role is twofold: a reflection of its community and an educational or sponsoring body. It is important to the business community and schools.

Crossroads continues to use these recommendations as a blueprint, and 175 to 200 people viewed our first professional exhibit.

Over the years, many plays have been performed at Crossroads. They include:

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| ➤ Tina and the Magical Dump | ➤ Dark of the Moon |
| ➤ Bus Stop | ➤ Butterflies are Free |
| ➤ Under Milkwood | ➤ Of Mice & Men |

- Alice in Wonderland
- Seven Keys to Baldpate
- The Informer
- The Monkey's Paw
- Not Enough Rope
- The Little Hut
- The Glass Menagerie
- Moon for the Misbegotten
- Last of the Red Hot Lovers
- Little Abner
- Once Upon a Mattress
- 6 Rooms Riv Vu
- Caberet Night
- Oklahoma
- Lion in Winter
- Magic Calliope
- Newcomer's Day
- Northwest Woman II
- Fiddler on the Roof (with the high school)
- Night Watch
- Nightwatch
- House on the Cliff
- Armed in the Spirit
- The Odd Couple
- See How They Run
- Apple Tree
- Exit the Body
- Belle of Amherst
- On Golden Pond
- Rediscover Crossroads
- Pajama Game

In 1977, Crossroads' board of directors numbered 16; there was an administrative director four days a week and a secretary two days a week. The Film Society was showing feature films five to a package for \$10. They ran every Friday evening for five weeks, provided there were no conflicts with anything else in town. These were shown in the top floor of the Phone Company building owned by Anthony Silvers. By August 1979, 5,000 people had either visited Crossroads or contacted us by phone.

The Fleetwood Theater, named for Orville and Leona Fleetwood—two of the original founders of Crossroads—had 430 people turn out for a ballet folk performance, and the Montana Repertory Theater performed Count Dracula. In 1983, Crossroads held five different Chautauquas throughout the summer—the same number the Portland area held. In April 1983, Crossroads was noted for nearly leading the state in per capita membership in local art organizations.

The 1980s were notable for Crossroads successes, but debts were mounting. In spite of growing income, the need for repairs to the Carnegie Library Building and exorbitant heating bills drove up expenses. A visiting architect in April 1983 said, "If we don't do something for this building right now, we may lose the 'old girl.'" By May, Crossroads was feeling the crunch of a slow economy, with many people leaving the town. A campaign to repair the Carnegie Library Building in four phases was begun, with \$18,000 set for each phase. In June, the city voted to spend \$9,000 on repairs, and in July, Crossroads received \$4,500 from the Oregon Arts Council. However, there was still a deficit of \$2,000.

In September 1983, a preliminary investigation to reduce the heating bill showed that the several thousand dollars spent on upgrading the furnace and weatherization of the building amounted to only an initial outlay. The building was in need of extensive repairs. The City of Baker owned the structure, but Crossroads was expected to keep it up. It was decided that the city and its citizens needed to determine what must be done to save this valuable community center.

Crossroads was fortunate to have the use of the building, but the organization's stewardship was limited by its own assets. Spending assets to save the Carnegie Library Building was not the primary function of the art organization. So, in August 1984, the doors were closed. Crossroads ended this year with a \$1,000 debt, partly due to a \$4,500 heating bill.

However, Crossroads reopened in October, after 200 people made membership renewals or contributions totaling \$5,300.

In July 1987, there was a \$5,000 utility expense. In 1988, Crossroads left the Carnegie Library Building.

The Oregon Trail Theater had success in the 1993-94 season, and some felt it was time to launch a more active organization. Therefore, the 95 members of the organization raised \$2,690. In October 1996, Crossroads was located in the Neuberger and Heilner building at 1901 Main Street.

Success at Crossroads only mounted from there. A comment from a student in the Artspeak Program from September 11, 1997 notes,

For me, this class stimulates me to think about my creative side. I never thought I was good at anything before. Now I find that I enjoy working in the garden, watching seeds we planted grow into food we can eat. I love caring for the flowers. I couldn't hardly draw a stick figure before and now I have the patience to sit down and doodle and it doesn't look too bad. I have really enjoyed and appreciated Debbie's help. This class is helping me find positive, wholesome, fun things in myself.

Further, the Board President's report at the annual membership meeting in June 2000 commented,

The past year has been primarily one of dealing with success. We have had a full year of classes. There are new risers for the theater productions; Portland Opera came to town and gave the audience at the Geiser Grand both a wonderful program and reasons to support Crossroads. There was a different show each month with a First Friday opening. The art at the Crossroads served both artists and the community by providing a different kind of market place.

Other comments attesting to the success of Crossroads include that of Maryalys Urey:

We cooperated with the Baker County Library to bring mariachi musicians and a slide show of Traditional Arts of the Oregon country to the community, and with the school district in several ways, including a visiting teacher from Japan who gave calligraphy and origami demonstrations.

And in a letter to the Oregon Arts Council written by Gordon Zimmerman in support of a feasibility study to determine whether Crossroads should move to the Carnegie Library Building, Mr. Zimmerman states,

Baker City has a long and storied history. We once had a large Opera House that was the center of culture from Portland to Salt Lake City. We now find ourselves with solid support for an arts program but with housing being a tenuous situation. The city has been approached by local entrepreneurs to turn the Carnegie Library Building into a bed and breakfast, a residence, office space, a police station, or a County Planning Department. The city would like to see the building used for finer things.

Finally, as Ann Mehaffy, Administrative Director of Crossroads points out,

July 1, 2001 marked the 30th birthday of Crossroads. Over the years, Crossroads has served Baker County well. We are indeed a crossroads for the community, bringing so many people together to share our unique and rich cultural resource. Few communities have one organization offering so much—classes, performances, exhibits, events, and a regional gallery shop. We also partner with schools, other organizations, and businesses to bring the experience of art to all, including at-risk, disabled, and disadvantaged members of our community.

Crossroads' role as a vital component of our community is unquestionable. In the past few years, we have experienced remarkable growth and success. Memberships and partnerships have increased, giving our community a better awareness of Crossroads while meeting the needs of our county. Our gallery shop, workshops, classes, and exhibits have brought in many new visitors to Crossroads.

The Carnegie Library Building is a distinct possibility as Crossroad's location. Large amounts of money, energy, and vision are required to make it happen. Yet Baker City is famous for finding these key ingredients to transform dreams into reality. It is time to dream again.

The needs that Crossroads fulfill include:

- Opportunities to study, teach, and exhibit art for artists
- Arts education, performing arts, and cultural events for the community
- Programs in schools
- Scholarships
- Networking with partners
- Established networks for artists to promote their skills and partner with other artists
- Mentor programs
- Economic benefits

Programs we offer include:

- Artspeak
- Hand-to-Heart Scholarship Fund
- Artists in Residence
- Crossroads Players Community Theater
- Children's summer art camps

- First Friday (since 1966)
- Art at the Crossroads
- Writing workshop

In addition, over 35 different, ongoing classes for children and adults have been taught through Crossroads. They include:

- Pottery
- Theater arts
- Ceramics
- Sculpture
- Drawing
- Painting (oils and watercolor)
- Calligraphy
- Photography
- Origami
- Book and paper making
- Writing
- Quilting
- Weaving and fabric arts
- Printmaking
- Tile work
- Metal work
- Dance (ballet, ballroom, jazz, modern, line, swing)
- Stained glass
- Yoga
- Puppet making
- Navajo weaving
- Conversational French
- Basketry
- China and glass painting
- Off-loom weaving
- Bas-relief
- Woodcarving
- Intermediate Spanish
- Cook It Fast – Cook It Nutritious
- Beginning to spin
- Simple bobbin lace
- Basic embroidery
- Machine embroidery
- Basics of drama and storytelling
- European folk dancing
- Guitar

Further, our partnerships include:

- Commission on Children and Families
- New Directions Northwest (Drug and alcohol treatment provider)
- Eastern Oregon Regional Arts Council
- Artists and cultural centers in Oregon, Idaho, and Washington
- Service organizations who request support, including the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center
- Betty's Books
- Community Connections

Crossroads is a magnet. The community is drawn to Crossroads for the opportunity to experience art, whether to enroll in one of our classes, view an exhibit, or purchase a unique gift. Our students range in age from four to over 75. There isn't an age group that hasn't been involved in Crossroads in some way, which is a testament to the importance of the arts. As the Summer 1999 edition of *Arts and Education* points out, "The arts are fundamental to what it means to be an educated person. To lack an education in the arts is to be profoundly disconnected from our history, from beauty, from other cultures, and from other forms of expression."

At Crossroads, we are proud of our contribution to the arts, which has broad and lifelong benefits. In fact, students who have a strong arts program history report better attendance, increased graduation rates, improved multicultural understanding, greater community support, invigorated faculty, and the development of higher-order thinking skills, creativity, and problem-solving abilities. Public recognition of Crossroads confirms our contributions. In 2000, we received an honor award from Historic Baker City for organizational achievement and were recognized with the Marketing & Events Honor Award from HBC in 2002.

Where we want to go next recognizes that where we have been and where we are now have contributed greatly to the quality of life people are seeking. We are the oldest cultural center of its kind serving eastern Oregon with a depth of offerings that is unparalleled.