



Letter in Putnam County newspapers discusses Arts on the Lake as example of a community cultural center

The following letter by Dr. Kathleen O'C. Hoekstra appeared in the *Putnam County Press* on March 28, 2012, in *The Putnam County News and Recorder* as "Arts Program Can Inspire Others" on Wednesday, March 28, 2012 and in the *Putnam County Courier* as "Learning From Arts-on-the-Lake Example" on Thursday, March 29, 2012.

Dear Editor,

It's been a long winter. The weather may have been decent enough, but there has been a definite chill in the cultural scene since Arts on the Lake, in Kent, closed in September for renovation.

I never realized how much a community cultural center could add to one's life, until I suddenly encountered its absence. Since opening five years ago, begun by community volunteers who gained the enlightened support of the Kent Town Board, Arts on the Lake made it possible for one to drop in to hear great music, see wonderful art, enjoy great theatre on virtually any weekend of the year in a repurposed firehouse.

And the best part would be that I probably knew some of the folks who were in the show, or whose work was in the gallery! A community cultural center in the truest sense.

These events were so skillfully wrought that I never really thought deeply about what it took to make them happen. Like many of us, I simply enjoyed myself. So, when they closed temporarily, the cultural beat truly slowed, except for some outstanding classical music concerts held in other venues.

I have since learned that, although the Center was closed, the planning work behind the scenes never stopped. So, on the weekend of March 31- April 1, in a 2 day re-opening celebration of workshops, exhibits, entertainment and refreshments, the directors will present a glimpse of what they have in store for us in the coming year.

The more I attend events at Arts on the Lake, and enjoy the endless diversity of programming and openness to new ideas, the more astonished I am that this little miracle in our county is down to a handful of volunteers and equally generous donors.

These volunteers and donors have a real story to tell other communities: Look around your town. Is there an abandoned church, or other historic building which isn't likely to find a buyer any time soon? One which may eventually fall to the wrecker's ball, taking with it a part of your town's history? Wouldn't it be the perfect setting for your own Arts on the Lake?

Here in Putnam Valley, where we have already lost too many historic structures to apathy and lack of vision, several residents have been trying to do just that with the landmark Tompkins Corners Church on Peekskill Hollow Road. With the kind of support

and investment which Kent Town Board made in Arts on the Lake, the Putnam Valley volunteers who have already demonstrated their commitment could bring such a center to life--transforming the many glossy images on Putnam County tourism calendars and brochures which proclaim the Church as a symbol of "Where the country begins" into an honest boast.

How many more lost landmarks will it take to herald where "The Country" ended.
Waddya say, Putnam Valley?

Dr. Kathleen O'C. Hoekstra
Putnam Valley