

Princeton Arts Society

Shortly after Cathy and Paul Kalenian moved to Princeton in 1987, the idea of a local arts organization began to develop. They met and struck up friendships with many artists including Vern Hall, Ronny Waters, Rig Washburn, Irene Veendorp, Leslie Gabosh, Merry Pratt, Barry Van Dusen, and Katharine Poor. When they inquired where they could view the artists' work they learned there was no local gallery and their wheels began spinning as to how to create such a space. In 1989 they brought together many of these artists together at their home on Merriam Road to brainstorm and plan to establish a group now known as the "Princeton Arts Society".

When Vern Hall was first asked to attend one of these brainstorm sessions, his response now known to all was "is this an idea of substance or something thought up over cocktails at a party?" Vern ended up being one of the group's strongest supporters and a longtime friend of the Kalenians.

At the time, there was an empty storefront at the newly constructed Post Office Plaza, and the Kalenians asked owner Bob Mason if he would let the group use one of the windows for a rotating art exhibit of local artists. The concept was to provide a bio on the artist and several of their pieces with contact info so passers-by could contact the artist directly to purchase a piece. The storefront was only a window display with no interior access. Cathy used her PR background to interview and write a bio on each artist, many of whom used the sheet for future art exhibits. Every month for quite awhile, various artists were on exhibit.

Ronny Waters and Cathy Kalenian began talking about the need for a permanent space, and the Princeton Center School at the time was empty and available. They proceeded to visit other former school buildings in Massachusetts including one in Concord to see how they were managed and used. They found exhibit space and artists' studios all in one location. After approaching the town of Princeton, it was determined that the former school building could be used in such a way and a committee was formed to oversee its use. Over time, the Princeton Arts Society utilized much of the second floor for exhibit space and a weekly portrait workshop which still operates to this day. An annual member art show began to occur and

monthly meetings of its members as well. Other spaces were rented to artists, a chiropractor and other private consulting businesses.

As time progressed, the leadership of PAS evolved to a new and diverse group of people and the organization has remained very active. Ronny and her now deceased husband, Tom, moved Charlottesville and the Kalenians moved to Santa Fe before returning to Maine in 2022. Other initial members have also moved or passed but Princeton remains a vibrant arts community – a legacy to its founders.