

# Orlando®

The City's Magazine



## 25

WHO TAKE A LEADING  
ROLE IN THE ARTS

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# 25

*Who Take a Leading Role*  
*in the*



BY JIM CLARK

The Orlando arts community is facing its biggest challenge to date—coming up with the money necessary to build a world-class performing arts center. But the arts in Orlando have faced serious problems in the past and managed not only to overcome them, but to move steadily forward.

PHOTOS BY PHELAN EBENHACK  
ILLUSTRATION BY BRITTANY CABRAL





**Jim Atchison**  
at Orlando Science Center

## It *wasn't*

long ago that that the local symphony was going out of business and people were referring to Orlando as a cultural backwater.

Today, we have a successful Orlando philharmonic, ballet and opera along with a number of theater companies, museums and art galleries.

There is also the promise of a new Orlando Performing Arts Center (OPAC), although it is still in doubt whether the city will end up with a small-town-class center rather than a world-class center.

So who influences the arts in Orlando? Who are the local men and women whose support and leadership determine what's available to Orlando's arts audience—and

where and when? Who can turn an idea into reality?

Orlando magazine surveyed leaders in the arts and asked them for the names of the people responsible for making the arts community thrive. The list they came up with is wide ranging and includes some surprising names.

The people surveyed were asked who has the clout to get things done. We asked for those people who can be counted on to write the checks, do the heavy lifting when volunteers are needed and move others to embrace a project.

The 25 are listed in alphabetical order; ranking them in order of importance proved too difficult, because they represent such diverse interests.

*Jim Atchison*

The SeaWorld president has put out the

welcome mat for local cultural groups, including the Orlando Philharmonic. Other theme parks are bigger, and both Universal and Disney also make significant contributions to the arts (there is someone from Disney on nearly every board in town). But whether it's hosting a fundraiser for the arts or encouraging talent, Atchison has established himself as the go-to guy.

*Rita Bornstein*

She's no longer the president of Rollins College, but she casts a long shadow. She's been working hard on behalf of the performing arts center and United Arts, and her years at Rollins earned her tremendous respect and plenty of clout. What's more, during her presidency, Bornstein spearheaded the remarkable renovation of the Cornell Fine Arts Museum as well as the construction of the Tiedtke Concert Hall.

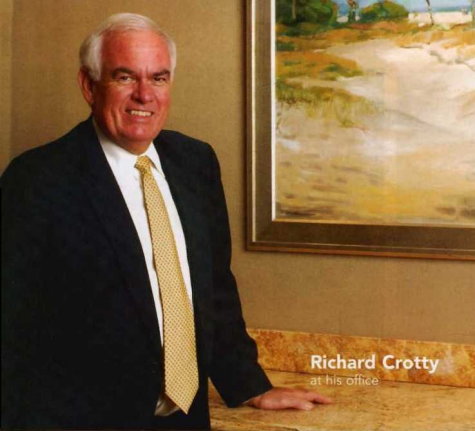


**Rita Bornstein**  
at Cornell Fine Arts Museum



**Hal Kantor**  
at Orlando Museum of Art





**Richard Crotty**  
at his office



**Elizabeth Maupin**  
at the Bob Carr

## *Richard Crotty*

The Orange County mayor holds the purse strings for the tourist tax. That's the pot of gold for any performing arts center and for the Tourist Development Council itself, which spends that resort tax money and contributes to the arts. Crotty's role in the proposed OPAC has been that of bookkeeper rather than leader. He seems happy to tell Orlando Mayor Buddy Dyer how much money is in the pot and let Orlando make the decisions. But it will be part of his legacy, and it's a shame he isn't pushing to build one of the nation's finest performing arts centers.

## *Buddy Dyer*

The Orlando mayor has talked a good game about the arts in Orlando since he came to office, and he's made some strides. He has pushed through the CityArts Factory—a marked improvement—and he has worked to support the proposed OPAC. But the feeling in the arts community lingers that he would prefer a skybox seat at the Citrus Bowl to an orchestra seat at the performing arts center.

## *Alan Ginsburg*

When Dale Chihuly, the master glass artist, came to Orlando, he made three stops: the Orlando Museum of Art where his fantastic works were on display, and the homes of Alan Ginsburg and Steve Goldman. Ginsburg made his fortune in construction, but he's made his mark in the arts. He serves on the boards of the Orlando Museum of Art and United Arts, and has been involved in the OPAC effort.

## *Steve Goldman*

Get philanthropist Steve Goldman on your team and you've got a full-service backer. He not only contributes and actively serves on boards, he also opens his one-of-a-kind home to a variety of arts groups for parties and fundraisers.

## *John Hitt*

The University of Central Florida president stepped in to save the former Civic Theatre and helped create the Orlando-UCF Shakespeare Festival. Now, he is moving to build an arts center on the UCF campus. While others talk, Hitt actually gets things done.

**Buddy Dyer**  
at City Arts Factory





**Sara Van Arsdale**  
at Orange County Regional  
History Center

## Hal Kantor

Kantor the new president of United Arts, and he's been a major player at the Orlando Museum of Art. By day, Kantor is a high-powered lawyer who is extremely well connected, and he knows who to call—and what to say—to get things done. His term at United Arts should see some real progress.

## Richard Kessler

Kessler is best known as the owner of four-star hotels, including the Westin Grand Bohemian downtown, where the staff answers the phone with "Welcome to the Westin Grand Bohemian, an experience in art and music." Kessler's hotel features an art gallery with rotating displays—any other hotel owner would have long ago replaced it with a far more profitable T-shirt shop. Kessler's quarter-million-dollar Bösendorfer piano welcomes guests (Kessler himself plays the piano), and fine art is displayed throughout the hotel. He funds scholarships for Orange County arts teachers and serves on the OPAC board.

## Margot Knight

The head of United Arts hit town like a tornado and hasn't slowed down. Shy she ain't. In the process, she's rubbed lots of people the wrong way. But the bottom line is that the main job for United Arts is to raise money to fund the arts in Orlando. And you can't argue with success—would you rather have Miss Manners or a big check? United Arts has helped local arts groups to expand and flourish.

## Hy and Harriett Lake

The couple turns up at nearly every cultural event in Orlando. And it's a safe bet that if it weren't for them, many of those events would not be taking place—they are marquee sponsors of most of the main arts institutions in town. Harriett's got a bar and a Festival of New Plays named after her at the Orlando-UCF Shakespeare Festival, and she puts her money where her passion is for arts groups all over town.

## John and Rita Lowndes

The couple led the effort to transform what had been the old science center and the old history museum into a theater. When people first began talking about a Shakespeare theater, the typical reaction was, "In Orlando?" But it is working, and John and



Rita Lowndes have three qualities the community needs: They are prepared to dig into their own pockets, have acquired enough friends throughout their lives who will help, and have the determination to get it done.

## Harvey Massey

His business empire includes one of the city's biggest exterminators and Massey Persons Brewer, one of its leading communications firms. But Massey has used his success to push the arts, and between his cash and his business moxie, he is a major contributor.

## Elizabeth Maupin

It's difficult to imagine the Orlando theater community without *Orlando Sentinel* theater critic Betsy Maupin. Her decades in Orlando have established her as the voice of the Orlando stage. Her cheerleading for the proposed performing arts center cost the newspaper credibility, but her support of smaller theater companies has helped them survive. Her reviews can make or break a play.

## Marilyn and Michael Mennello

Every year the couple hosts a fundraiser for the Mennello Museum of American Art, and you have only to look around at those lavish and well-attended affairs to see what a lifetime of building relationships and

friendships can produce. The guests range from the politically important to the area's top business leaders, and the proceeds range in the hundreds of thousands. The couple has created something special with their namesake museum, and the city is indebted to them for adding that gem to its cultural offerings.

## Sibille Pritchard

The outgoing chair of United Arts is also a major player as head of the Florida Arts Council, board president of the Orlando Ballet, and a leader in efforts to preserve Eatonville and put on the annual Zora Neale Hurston Festival of the Arts and Humanities. As a developer with projects on International Drive, she gets things done.

## Jim Pugh

The successful real estate developer must wonder what he has gotten into. He agreed to lead the drive to build a performing arts center—it must have seemed like one of those wonderful honors given to civic leaders. Instead, he's found himself in a battle. Public opinion polls show widespread support for the OPAC, but the bizarre plan to tie the performing arts center with other projects has left Pugh on the outside looking in. If Pugh can pull it off and give this city the first-rate center he has envisioned, they should name the building for him.



**Richard Kessler**

at the Bosendorfer piano in his Westin Grand Bohemian Hotel



**Sibille Pritchard**

at her downtown office



**Harriett Lake** at her namesake bar in the Lowndes Shakespeare Center

Courtesy of Orlando-UCF Shakespeare Theatre

**David Schillhammer**  
at the Lowndes Shakespeare Center



## Harris Rosen

The hotel king probably is seen by most as a tough businessman who gets what he wants. But to the arts community, his hotels have been a financial lifeline. Rosen is committed to the community and makes his hotels' facilities available to local groups for fundraisers at rates they can't get elsewhere. He has also pushed the Tourist Development Council to expand its financial contributions to the arts.

## David Schillhammer

In the early 1990s, the local symphony—the Florida Symphony Orchestra—went belly up. The organization had been in rocky financial shape, and then the musicians demanded more money and wouldn't listen when told the cupboard was bare. At that point, Orlando seemed like the least likely place to start a new orchestra. Fortunately, David Schillhammer didn't listen to conventional wisdom, and his Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra became a cultural institution seemingly overnight. Under his management, the Phil has a busy schedule of more than 100 performances throughout the year, both in its signature series at the Bob Carr and in many other less formal venues with reduced or even free admis-



**Rick Walsh**  
at the Mennello Museum

sion. The programs feature everything from the classic to the classy, and have been popular with audiences.

## Chuck and Lynn Steinmetz

What are the odds that two of the biggest supporters of the Orlando arts community should be in the extermination business? But Harvey Massey and Chuck Steinmetz both made it big in bugs. Lynn and Chuck Steinmetz are major cultural contributors, opening their wallets and their home to help advance the arts.

## Sara Van Arsdale

It's difficult to remember the old Orange County History Center. It was more a curio shop than a museum. If you owned something that was big and you didn't want it—if in fact nobody wanted it—you could pay someone to haul it to the dump, or you could donate it to the history center. Sara Van Arsdale changed that. She was tireless in pushing to move the center out of a corner of what is now the Lowndes Shakespeare Center. Without her efforts, it's doubtful that the magnificent Orange County Regional History Center in the old courthouse would exist. It has become a downtown hub, and the exhibits are first-rate.

## Rick Walsh

The Darden senior vice president is not only personally involved in arts leadership, but he also heads the Darden Foundation, which gives millions of dollars a year to worthy causes. Darden is the only Fortune 500 company headquartered in Orlando, so the good news is that Darden can give

money, and the bad news is that everyone in town turns to Darden for help. Now that Walsh is retiring, he will undoubtedly become even more involved in the cultural community.

## Kathy Waltz

The publisher of the *Orlando Sentinel* gets decidedly mixed reviews from the arts community. For her personal involvement she gets an A, but her newspaper's cultural coverage gets a D on a good day. Waltz is involved in the arts community, and unlike some whose service on local boards such as United Arts is mostly for show, Waltz is engaged and contributes. And under her leadership, the newspaper is a financial contributor to a number of arts groups. But the news pages of the *Sentinel* are a cultural backwater. The paper once had a classical music critic, an art critic and a book editor/critic on staff. But cutbacks have hit cultural coverage particularly hard. *m*



**Kathy Waltz**  
at the Bob Carr