Celebrate St. James – Past, Present, Future
Annual Report – 2024

Mission Statement:
Celebrate St. James – Past, Present, Future, a 501c(3) not for profit organization, was incorporated in 2017 to preserve and celebrate St. James' cultural history and to inspire an appreciation and knowledge of the arts in our community. Its goal is to revitalize St. James as the flourishing hamlet it once was by bringing the cultural arts to our area to drive economic growth and prosperity.

Executive Board Officers:
Doris Meyer, President
Jack Ader, Executive Vice President
Arline Goldstein, Vice President / Art Education
David Kornblith, Vice President / Kids Community
Randi Kuveke, Treasurer
Susan Meyer, Recording Secretary
Kathy Ebert, Corresponding Secretary

Special Area Managers:
Elaine Demy, Summer Concert Coordinator
Patricia Clark, Grants Application Manager
Margaret Gershowitz, Membership Records Coordinator
Charles McLaughlin, Volunteer Coordinator
Natalie Weinstein, Advisory Council Chair/Fundraiser Advisor

Employees/ Independent Contractors:
Matt Kelly, Program/ Events Coordinator
Tracey Balaker, Social Media Coordinator

Advisory Council:
Frank Dalene, Neil Rosen, Phil deBlasio, Mike Morbillo, Patricia Clark, Gordon Siess, Tony Chiofalo, Tara Jerome, and Natalie Weinstein

Theater History Researchers & Consultants:
Prof. Christina Hurtado and Robyn Given of Stony Brook University

A Review of 2024 – A Year of Progress and New Developments

Introduction:

The year 2024 was one that marked significant progress for Celebrate St. James (CSJ) with the purchase of the building located at 176 Second Street in St. James by the Town of Smithtown from private owner and co-founder and first president Natalie Weinstein. With this purchase, made possible by a Suffolk County JumpSMART grant awarded to the Town of Smithtown specifically for this purpose and the granting of a ten-year lease for one dollar a year to CSJ with an option to renew, a path was cleared to move forward with our goal to transform the historic former Calderone Theater to become a state-of-the-art St. James Community Cultural Arts Center (St. James CCAC) with small theater and outdoor plaza. By the end of the year, plans were well underway for the first step in this transformation for the installation of an elevator lift for ADA compliance with access to the second floor, an installation made possible by a Suffolk County JumpSMART grant.

Along with this progress in securing a long term home base for our organization, new developments arose that expanded our vision for the future of our organization as one that would dedicate itself to the construction of our St. James CCAC to be energy efficient and environmentally friendly. Guided by two internationally renowned leaders in the field of "green" building, Frank Dalene and Neil Rosen, who joined CSJ's Advisory Council, formed earlier in the year, the St. James CCAC will serve our community and its environs as the first LEED (Leadership in Energy Efficiency and Design) certified arts center/theater building on the planet. The significance and importance of this is monumental and a great source of pride for CSJ. In addition to Dalene and Rosen, other advisory board members, Phil DeBlasio, a highly respected local general contractor, and Mike Morbillo, a gifted architect who worked with CSJ in the past with the building of Celebrate Park on Lake Avenue, have joined us to help realize our vision for a St. James CCAC that will allow us to carry out our mission to promote the cultural arts in a way that demonstrates how they are what unites us without barriers or boundaries. Furthermore, a natural outgrowth of this goal will be an economic boost to our area as more and more people will be attracted to all that we can offer in our Center.

This report will reflect on the past year's efforts to engage the community with our mission and goals through our event series and special events, classes offered, community outreach, social media, fundraising efforts, and how to secure a successful future for Celebrate St. James with a sound and stable financial status.

Events Held in 2024

Series

Art Show Opening Receptions

The opening receptions for our monthly art shows held this past year proved to be highly popular with attendance by many, both artists and non-artists alike. The changing themes of the juried shows were intriguing, and the curator, V.P. Jack Ader added to the interest with a short talk to enlighten and edify the audience. The judge who selected winners clearly explained her rationale for selecting work for first, second, third, and honorable mention awards. We unfailingly received comments that our opening receptions were the best they'd ever attended and that they especially appreciated the elegant refreshments and live background guitar music played by Lou Mazzaferro.

These free receptions continue to be a wonderful way to bring people into an awareness of the building and inspire membership in CSJ as well as a steady source of income through the entry fees paid by artists and 20 percent of sales of work.

Game Nights

Our Friday night Game Nights were very successful in terms of attracting a diverse population: people young and old, residents of St. James and beyond, and people with friends and others on their own. For a modest admission fee of $10, we provided a welcoming atmosphere with refreshments, a proper set up of tables and chairs, and an array of board games for selection. Since the overhead was so low, these events were financially profitable. Like the art show opening receptions, they provided us an ideal opportunity to reach people who may not have known about our organization and all we have to offer in so many other ways.

Coffee House Nights

Since 2022, the "Coffee House" series has become a mainstay on CSJ's calendar.

Our upstairs space has proven ideal for a "coffee house" vibe with the set up of electric candle lit tables and chairs and complimentary coffee/tea/treats included in the admission cost. Local musicians/singers performed and their popularity on Long Island was a factor in inspiring people outside of St. James to come to our Center, and, once again, making it possible for us to raise the profile of CSJ.

Living History

The term "living history" was first used in 2022 and was understood to mean a presentation given by historical re-enactors, and so we held events with performers who gave talks as Mark Twain, Alice Roosevelt, and Abraham Lincoln and so on.

However, the term grew to reflect how history is "alive" in our day by recognizing the current connections to our past and how they continue to affect us.

Our Living History events proved to have appeal in various ways: for people who are interested in local history and came to hear historian and author Kerriann Flanagan Brosky about her books on historical mysteries; for people who are intrigued by historical ghosts and showed up for a talk and ghost investigation with medium and paranormal investigator Joe Giaquinto; and people who appreciate historical connections to people known to them today such as CSJ member Anna Marie deLeyer who delighted the audience with her memories of "Snowman", the family horse who was an international sensation as a jumper and the subject of the documentary film "Harry (Anna Marie's father) and Snowman".

Classic Films

Like Game Nights, these Sunday afternoon events were held with a very low overhead cost. Movies deemed as classics were shown, simple refreshments served, and commentary offered by V.P. Jack Ader. While attendance was not as great as we would have hoped it was still an opportunity to meet people who are interested in film and learned about CSJ if they were not already aware of our existence and all we offer. The continuation of the Classic Film series will be reconsidered for the future, maybe with a new slant such as calling it a "club" or focusing a specific genre such as silent films or foreign films.

Membership Meetings

Historically, our monthly membership meetings generally have not been exceptionally well attended, and we have continued to address the challenge of how to make the meetings more appealing. We implemented the idea to feature a speaker at the meeting by inviting Gary Carpenter to talk about health care services and Dr. Maria Benetos to talk about mental health and nutrition. Attendance was slightly better than average, and we will continue to consider ways to increase attendance, either with a speaker or decreasing the frequency of meetings.

Summer Concerts

The 2024 summer concert series, curated by, was tremendously successful with great crowds filling the lawn and surrounding seating areas in Celebrate Park, Thanks to financial aid from the Suffolk County Parks Department and several private sponsors, local bands were hired to perform, and their popularity attracted many people to attend our weekly Sunday evening concerts. Each concert was an opportunity to meet people who were not previously aware of our organization or the building at 176 Second Street where our events are held. Volunteers manned the CSJ table and walked though the audience to sell raffle tickets for a 50/50 that consistently proved profitable for us. The sales of raffle tickets also provided an opportunity to talk with people individually in the audience and get to know us.

Special Events

Business Expo
In an effort to develop a friendship and partnership with local business owners, they were invited to attend a meeting to form a "business community". As a follow up to that meeting, a business expo was held where businesses were able to set up tables and present information to the general public who were welcomed to attend at no cost. A second business expo was held a few months later and business owners had the opportunity to give talks to an attentive audience about the work they do. This outreach to local businesses resulted in a number of memberships at the business level, and we will continue to reach out to local businesses for mutual support.

St. Patrick's Day Parade
CSJ participated in the annual St. James St. Patrick's Day Parade sponsored by the St. James Chamber of Commerce with members riding in a festively decorated truck bearing our banner. This was an opportunity to raise awareness of our organization among the hundreds of spectators standing along Lake Avenue and engaging in the spirit of community created by the event.

St. Patrick's Day Celebration
An Irish themed dinner and a performance of traditional Irish music and dance was enjoyed by the many who attended. It was also a chance to highlight and stress that such a celebration is not only a recognition of the contributions of Irish immigrants in this country but of all immigrants who are a part of our nation's tapestry.

St. James Has Talent
This carefully and ambitiously curated show presented local talent of the highest caliber. The venue was Nissequake Middle School, and this allowed for the sale of more tickets than is possible for any event held in our Center. Not only did this two- night show prove to be financially successful, but it conveyed a message of support of the arts in our community, a message both from us and to us. The production was carried out in a professional manner with the printing of a program and high standards of lighting and sound, etc. and was later aired on local television.

The Green Initiative: Shaping the Future
Internationally renowned leaders in the field of green building construction, Frank Dalene and Neil Rosen, gave a talk before a room filled to capacity with attentive and intrigued listeners including Town Supervisor Ed Wehrheim and Information Officer Nicole Garguillo. The speakers inspired the audience by outlining how the use of solar panels and environmentally friendly materials can be used to reduce carbon footprint and significantly save money spent on utility bills. Their talk resonated not only for CSJ since they will guide us in plans for future construction of a St. James CCAC but with the public at large who learned what it can mean for them personally in their homes.

"Peter and the Star Catcher"
Lighthouse Theater Company partnered with CSJ to present this Tony nominated play about the backstory of Peter Pan. The performance was held in the St. James CCAC, and the upstairs space was transformed into a "theater" by the clever and ingenious staging of the cast and crew. This two-night performance was very well attended and inspired a bond of mutual support with the president of Lighthouse, Tony Chiofalo, who will be an invaluable guide to us in mapping our future to include a small theater that presents theatrical productions.

Kids Community/ Mother's Day Gift Making
A gift to give a cherished mom was the theme of this Kids Community event held the day before Mother's Day. Kids were led to create a one of kind card for moms while enjoying pizza and parents/guardians had the chance to get to know more about our organization.

CSJ's Annual Gala (See Fundraising Initiatives)

"Guys & Dolls"
CSJ and Lighthouse Theater Company partnered for a two-night performance of this play held at Mills Hall / St. James Episcopal Church. These sold out performances wowed the audience with the talent and staging of the play in a dinner theater style setting. Generous sponsors donated desserts, namely cheesecake and apple strudel, desserts that are associated with the play. Rave reviews of the performance affirmed our partnership with Lighthouse and the appeal of such productions.

Kids Community/ Holiday Party
This annual event featured the return of the popular children's book author, Jessica deGorter, who read from her book, My Favorite Day of the Year, about how cookies can celebrate a holiday in a special way. Kids were given cookies and ingredients for decorations of their choice and a goody bag to take home. There was also dancing to the holiday songs of Nick Loidice and photo ops with Santa. The party ended with a surprise performance of songs by some of the cast of Lighthouse who sang a few songs from their upcoming show, "Winter Wishes".

"Winter Wishes"
This holiday musical review was produced by Lighthouse Theater Company with CSJ and Catholic Daughters of America as co-sponsors and held in the auditorium of St. Philip and James Elementary School. Again, this production was a stellar performance and the profits were generously shared with our organization.

Classes

Art Classes
A number of art classes were held including "So You Think You Can Draw", and the
"Joy of Watercolor". These classes were held in the St. James CCAC and although they were successful and enjoyed by those who registered, it was a reminder to us that when our building is renovated with classroom space and a "slop" sink for artists that our classes can be offered in an even more effective way.

Line Dancing
These Monday night classes began at the end of the year and proved to be quite popular. The instructor, Natalie Boyle, entered into a contract to rent the space from CSJ and give 1/3 of her financial intake from each class to CSJ. The year ended with a holiday social and hopes are to continue the classes in 2025.

Community Outreach

Festivals and Fairs
CSJ participated in St. James Episcopal "Strawberry Festival", St. James Day, and Smithtown Day with a table set up with flyers for events, membership forms, merchandise such as pens and pads, and raffle prizes. Each of these raised the public profile of our organization and made it possible for those manning the tables to meet people and tell them about all our organization has to offer.

"Trunk or Treat" at Deepwells
This annual Halloween event held at historic Deepwells has been supported by CSJ for the past several years and we were a presence once again in 2024 with a trunk filled with candy to give kids and flyers to give parents about our upcoming events.

Holiday "Wishing Tree"
The tall and lush evergreen tree that stands outside the St. James CCAC was given a special purpose beyond simply standing in beauty. The public was invited to purchase a wooden star for $25 to adorn the tree, a star that would bear the words of a wish one wanted to send out into the universe. A number of stars were sold, and $5 of each one sold was donated to the Smithtown Emergency Food Pantry.
It is hoped that the "wishing tree" will continue to be a tradition to highlight a sense of community in the shared humanity inherent in hopes and dreams.

Tours of the St. James Community Cultural Arts Center
Free tours are open to the public during the week. Guided by VP Jack Ader, visitors can learn about the history of the building and its early years as a theater for movies and vaudeville shows, see the Movie "Museum", a display space that features such artifacts as movie posters once found in the walls of the building and song sheets made popular by George M. Cohan and Willie Collier, the latter of whom had a house in St. James and encouraged so many of his friends to summer here that St. James was known as "Collierville'. Visitors also have the opportunity to browse our gift shop and learn about our upcoming events.

CSJ Virtual Book Club
Since this monthly book club, led by member Dr. Christine Pacinello, meets on Zoom, it is a means to reach out to anyone regardless of where they live. We are interested in gaining the support of anyone who shares our mission and it has been our experience to receive donations from people who live at a distance. This virtual meeting is one way to forge connections to people far and wide – in addition to promoting the joy of reading and the value of literary analysis and reflection.

Volunteer Recruitment
We are always seeking to encourage volunteers to join our work to promote our events and help in various ways to carry them out. Thanks to our Volunteer Coordinator, a new position this year, we are better organized in our efforts to attract and retain volunteers.

Monthly Article in "Our Town"/ St. James
Although our local paper ceased publication in August, we had the privilege of having a monthly article written by our president included in it. This free paper was delivered to every mailbox in St. James and it was a good means of promoting our events and appealing to people to join us in striving to reach our goals.

Advertising in Smithtown News and Times Beacon Record
We are able to reach out to our community with ads for our events that appear regularly in Smithtown News at no cost, thanks to the generous support of its publishers. In addition, we take advantage of the steep discount offered to us for ads that appear in special themed inserts.

Special Reports in Newsday
Newsday reporter Jon Paul Salamanca has given enthusiastic attention to our goal of becoming a state of the art community cultural arts center and has met with us on several occasions. He reported on the The Green Initiative: Shaping our Future special event we held and the purchase of the building by the Town of Smithtown. We hope to continue to enjoy his professional collegiality.

Social Media

Our primary social media platforms are Facebook, Instagram, and Constant Contact. Our Facebook page posts feature flyers for upcoming events and photos of past events and our Instagram posts often are designed as reels with accompanying music. Facebook posts are shared with a number of other groups that target our desired audience and when appropriate we "boost" our posts. Constant Contact is also utilized to keep people up to date with our activities and we have approximately two thousand on our CC list.

Our website allows us to feature our upcoming and past events, sell tickets, and track attendance. Website management is an ongoing challenge in terms of striving towards best practice, and we are always seeking to learn from those who can teach us. We will continue to tackle this important aspect of presenting our organization to the public with an impressive online presence.

Fundraising Efforts

We have had a number of events designed to raise funds as opposed to the regularly scheduled events we have where our primary goal is to build support for our organization. These included the productions in partnership with Lighthouse Theater, namely Guys & Dolls, and Winter Wishes, CSJ's special production of St. James Has Talent, and other initiatives such as the Winter "Wishing" Tree. However, our major fundraiser of the year was our annual gala.

Our 2024 Gala, co-chaired by Matt Kelly and Susan Meyer, who worked with a committee comprised of Kathy Ebert, Randi Kuveke, Doris Meyer and Lisa Rivera of Bleu Sparrow Event Planning, was held once again at Flowerfield Celebrations in St. James. It was given the name "Curtain Call" and our honorees were invited to "take a bow" for their extraordinary contributions. This past year's gala, the fourth in the history of CSJ, was the most financially successful one to date, and this success was matched by the measure of the favorable impression it left with all who attended. Our honorees were carefully and thoughtfully selected each in a unique category: past president Patricia Clark as "Trailblazer"; "green" builder Frank Dalene as "Visionary"; historian Brad Harris for our inaugural Bull Smith Award; Councilman Tom Lohman for "Public Service; and Patricia Westlake as "Humanitarian of the Year".
The gala's success as a fundraiser was certainly in good part a reflection of the number of people who wanted to support a celebration recognizing these honorees.

The net profits of the fundraisers named above are as follows:

St. James Has Talent -- $4 482.00
Guys &Dolls -- $2,088.00
"Curtain Call" Gala -- $35,750.00
"Winter Wishes" -- $1,099.83
"Wishing" Tree -- $625.00

In addition to events to raise funds, we have been mindful of nurturing relationships with philanthropic individuals who favor us with their kindness and generosity. There is a member who lives out of state who regularly sends a couple of hundred dollars, and another two who have donated sizeable amounts in the past and have indicated that they each will give a large donation to us in 2025.

Financial Status

Early in the year, advisory board member Gordon Siess, suggested we conduct a financial analysis to gain better clarity on what regularly scheduled (not fundraisers) events were more profitable than others. We did this by looking back on 2023 and projecting how that information could inform our plans for 2024. That advice was well heeded, and we have avoided losing money on any event.
We have further safe guarded against financial loss for any event by revising the contracts with a clause that states that unless a certain number of tickets are sold (a number calculated that given our expenses we will at least break even), the event will not take place. In addition, we set the ticket prices for one amount for advance sales, and $10 higher for day of event.

Gordon further advised us to protect ourselves against potential liability by obtaining additional "Directors & Officers" insurance, and we now have this important coverage for non-profits in addition to our general liability insurance.

Our income has been supplemented by the monthly fee paid to us by East End Interiors and the North Shore Art Guild for the space they use on the second floor of our St. James CCAC. Whether this will continue in 2025 is uncertain.

Now that we no longer pay rent to Natalie Weinstein, we have one less significant expense, but we will be obliged by our lease with the Town of Smithtown to pay the utility bills and all expenses related to the maintenance of the building.

We recognize that in order for us to be able to reach our goal to transform 176 Second Street into a community cultural arts center, theater, and plaza that will stand in our community as a source of pride we will need major funding, and one of the main sources will be through the application and receipt of grant money. To this end, we are committed to this endeavor.

Conclusion

The past year has indeed been one of progress and developments, a year we can look back on as a banner year with CSJ receiving a Suffolk County JumpSMART grant of $100,000 grant for the installation of an elevator and signing a 10 year lease with option to renew with the Town of Smithtown that brings us so much closer to our goal of creating a community cultural arts center with small theater and plaza a reality.

Submitted by: Doris Meyer, CSJ President
February 24, 2025