

## **FLORIDA KEYS COUNCIL OF THE ARTS ART IN PUBLIC BUILDINGS OVERVIEW**

### **1. Description**

In partnership with the Florida Keys Council of the Arts, the Board of Monroe County Commissioners recognizes employees, celebrates art and history, and welcomes users of government services through the arts.

Volunteers manage rotating art exhibits in eight government buildings and one hospital spread along the county's 125 mile long island chain. Additionally, volunteers manage performing arts series offered in five locations.

The volunteer curators and site managers are arts council members and/or county employees. The program began in 1999 and was preceded by the Marathon "ArtPort" project founded by arts council advisory board member Marty Groffman.

The Florida Keys Council of the Arts currently facilitates rotating art exhibits in the Gato Building; the Key West International airport; the Marathon airport (a.k.a "Artport;") the Key Largo, Key West and Marathon offices of several commissioners; the Marathon Government Center and the Marathon Government Annex. The arts council also facilitates a concert series in the Lower Keys Hospital and in four county Senior Citizen Nutrition Sites in Key West, Big Pine, Marathon and Plantation Key.

The Lower Keys Hospital's art programming includes rotating exhibits of visual art and a performing arts series. Music is also heard in the Airport, featuring original recorded music by local musicians since 2003.

Additionally, the Florida Keys Council of the Arts serves as staff to an Art in Public Places committee. The AIPP committee is charged with purchase and installation of artwork under a 1% for Art program in any new major county construction. The committee is composed of five voting members, each appointed by a county commissioner. The county administrator appoints one or two non-voting members on a project by project basis.

The first 1% project is completed: The Roth Building, 50 Highpoint Drive, Plantation Key. Artists were selected in 2005 for commissions for the Freeman Justice Center currently under construction in Key West. Sites for upcoming projects include Fire Stations in Key Largo, Big Pine and Conch Key and the Medical Examiners complex.

## **ART IN PUBLIC BUILDING EXAMPLE - GATO BUILDING**

A notable site is the Gato Cigar Factory Office Complex. Contemporary painting, sculpture and photographs by local artists, some of whom also work as county employees, are featured in rotating exhibits.

A volunteer employee team first selected and prioritized display areas in 2001. Now, the team continues to recruit new artists, select art work, install the art and create signage, with assistance from The Florida Keys Council of the Arts.

The first floor lobby is a museum of Cuban-American history relating to a previous use of the site - the cigar manufacturing industry of the late 19th century.

The Gato Building had a history of uses beginning as a cigar factory. In 1942 it was purchased by the U.S. Navy and used first as a dormitory for civilian defense workers and later as a commissary. The Navy closed the commissary in 1989 and the building stood vacant for many years.

The structure was purchased by the County, sensitively renovated, and dedicated in 2002 as the newest County and State building. The Cuban-American Heritage Foundation Historic installed maps, photographs and artifacts of the old Key West neighborhood, the residents and the industry. Many employees and visitors recognize parents, grandparents and other family members who worked in the cigar industry in the historic photos.

The art makes the Gato Building come alive. People talk about what they like, what they hate, and what they would like to take home. Comments from visitors like, "I feel like I'm walking into an art gallery, not a typical government building!" are common.

As employees who work in other agencies visit the Gato building, they call the Florida Keys Council of the Arts and ask, "How can I get some art in my building?" Upon request, the Arts Council facilitates a committee process within any government building. Interested employees in such buildings select a volunteer site manager and committees of volunteer employees, who meet with artists, select and install the artwork, and create publicity for the artists and exhibits.

## ***2. Use of technology***

Calls to artists and volunteer opportunities are disseminated via "Calls to Artists" sent to all county media by the Florida Keys Council of the Arts, and published on the FKCA website, [www.keysarts.com](http://www.keysarts.com). Posters and flyers are posted

A signage template in MSWord is used for easy replication and identification of the artist, title of the work, media, size, and contact information.

### **3. Cost**

Direct costs to the county are minimal, primarily for the plastic sign holders. All artwork is on loan from participating artists. Administrative costs are absorbed by the Florida Keys Council of the Arts. Musicians are paid from funds raised by the arts council and its partners. The Arts Council operates in a public-private partnership with Monroe County Government, receiving office space, use of the mail room and telephone services, and some limited funding.

### **4. Results**

The Board of Monroe County Commissioners, in partnership with the Florida Keys Council of the Arts, recognizes employees, celebrates history, and welcomes users of government services through the arts. Government services are offered in a setting that is humanized and personalized through history and the visual arts.

The public appreciates the beauty and historical value of the exhibits. By participating actively in the selection process, employees feel a sense of pride and ownership of their work space. Employees feel comfortable and "at home," so to best serve the public cheerfully and efficiently.

Similar volunteer teams manage rotating art exhibits in commissioners' offices, airports and other public buildings. Key West, the county seat, has been named one of the top ten small-town arts destinations in the United States.

Monroe County government is proud to build community by recognizing and honoring its people, history and the arts.

### **5. Worthiness**

The Art in Public Buildings Program upgrades the working conditions of Monroe County employees and enhances the level of citizen participation in government programs. Government services are offered in a setting that is humanized and personalized through history and the visual arts. Key West, the county seat, has been named one of the top ten small-town arts destinations in the United States.

The Art in Public Buildings Rotating Exhibition program builds community by recognizing and honoring the Keys' people, history and the arts.

This overview adapted from the award-winning proposal to the National Association of Counties. Monroe County's Art in Public Buildings Program won the 2003 NACo Achievement Award. in recognition of an innovative program which contributes to and enhances county government in the United States.