



Thursday, June 28, 2007



Peggy Keenan, co-chair of the Women's Club of Madison Arts Festival, with *Tres Gatos*, painted steel, by Gilbert Boro of Old Lyme. The artwork is a recent addition to the Madison Sculpture Mile. Photo by Nancy Dionne

By Susan Talpey
Living Editor

For art-lovers who long to know the story behind a remarkable piece of work, the Women's Club of Madison has a local solution. Its first annual Arts Festival brings together more than 50 artists exhibiting and selling work on the Madison Green on Sunday, July 8.

"It's very nice to be standing next to the artists whose work you're looking at and be able to find out the history behind the work and how they got the ideas," says Peggy Keenan, festival co-chair. "It's interesting to discover who or what was the subject of the artwork and why the artist created it in the style they chose."

In addition to the fine arts exhibition and sale, the Women's Club of Madison Arts Festival will feature an all-day concert, book signing events in conjunction with R.J. Julia Booksellers, and tours of the Madison Sculpture Mile.

"We wanted to do a celebration of the arts and so we've bought together music, food, author signing, and artists from New York, South Carolina, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts, as well as many local artists," Keenan says.

The festival is not only a major fundraiser for the club but an opportunity to showcase artistic talent on the shoreline.

"When we were planning the festival we talked to some of the local art societies and were told many of the art shows run for several days; that it's very difficult to find a one day event," Keenan says. "We also discovered that many of the local shows and venues are expensive, so we made the festival affordable for starting artists, as well as our many seasoned names."

With a range of artists and mediums, Keenan says the quality of work will impress even the most discerning art collector.

"Each artist is more stunning than the last," she says. "Every artist is different and

they all have their own focus and style. It's interesting to see Madison depicted in one way and then someone else will do it so differently in another media."

Keenan says the response from participating artists has been overwhelmingly positive. "The artists have responded in a very enthusiastic manner," she says. "We began contacting artists a year ago, to give them an opportunity to put together a strong representation of their work. It's especially exciting, especially for artists who this may be their first or second show."

Festival organizers have been greatly supported by local businesses and arts groups, says Keenan.

"R.J. Julia's have come on board and arranged for several authors, including Suzanne Brown, author of *Summer: A User's Guide*, to meet and greet and signed copies of their books," she says. "Culinary Concerts is doing the food and the Art Center at Killingworth will be talking about its art school, which is a great way to introduce children to art."

Also visiting the R.J. Julia Booksellers author tent to sign copies of their books are Shira Boss, *Green With Envy*; Jami Attenberg, *Instant Love*; and Esther Freisner, *Nobody's Princess*.

In addition, the Hollycroft Foundation are hosting tours of the Madison Sculpture Mile, leaving from the Green throughout the day. The Mile has several new works in place, making it a great opportunity for visitors and locals alike, says Keenan.

Musicians taking the stage throughout the festival include Briana Whaley, Jack Caldwell, John Fuzek, Tony Lee Thomas, Chuck E. Costa, Lara Herscovitch, and Ian Charles.

"This is a list of incredible, established musicians," Keenan says. "The all-day concert makes the Green a great place to bring a picnic and enjoy the music."

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The First Annual Women's Club of Madison Arts Festival

The Women's Club plans to make the Arts Festival a feature on its annual fundraising calendar.

"We'd like to make it an event that people look forward to every year, one that fills the Green," Keenan says. "Eventually, we'd like to open it up to local high schools and have a free student displaying area. Putting your work out for the very first time is a daunting prospect for many artists and we'd like to help young artists take the step from producing art to selling it for someone else to appreciate in their own home."

Keenan, a member of the Women's Club for more than 20 years, says the group works hard to give back to the community.

"All funds raised from this event will go right back into the community, through money we disperse to local charities," she says. "Some organizations who've received funding from our efforts are Women and Family Services, Red Cross, ABC House, and Meals on Wheels."

Keenan says organizers hope that local families will take advantage of the relaxed summer event.

"What could be better than being outside with free music all day, a place to wander?" she says. "It's a laid-back, relaxed atmosphere to look at the art and find something you'd love to take home."

The Women's Club of Madison Arts Festival is at the Madison Green, Sunday, July 8 from 1 to 7 p.m. The free event will take place rain or shine. For information, visit www.artfest@womensclubofmadison.org. The Women's Club of Madison is looking for members, visit www.womensclubofmadison.org.