



Marie McGee editor/591-2300

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Council for the Arts grows, flourishes

Chairman sees a golden era for the arts

By Brian Lysaght
Staff writer

Leon Cohan says with a smile that, yes, he's a big advocate of the arts — "270 pounds."

Light humor aside, Cohan's new role is combination promoter, advocate and master planner. The Detroit Edison executive, Bloomfield Hills resident and community leader is the newest chairman of the Michigan Council for the Arts, the state agency that promotes and allocates grants.

He was asked to take the job this summer by Gov. James Blanchard, whom Cohan once hired to be the state attorney general's office.

Initially, Cohan was reluctant to accept because of the time commitment — he is a busy man.

In the end, he was swayed by his interest in the arts, and Blanchard's commitment to the arts, he said. He has spent much of the first few months getting acquainted or, as he said, "finding my way to the men's room."

ACTUALLY, COHAN has submitted his ideas to the council staff, which will draw up policy and proposals.

"I think our goal should be to make this a golden era for arts in Michigan," he said. "It's a high goal but I don't think we should settle for anything less."

He would like the state to be noted for its art and artists. Such a reputation would boost the state economy and the quality of its citizens' lives, he said.

He defines the arts in the broadest sense — visual and performing.

He thinks special effort should be made to involve kids and senior citizens in the arts and to use the arts to promote racial harmony.



Leon Cohan

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— Leon Cohan
chairman, Michigan Council for the Arts

Getting kids hooked on art could keep them off the streets and away from drugs and crime, he said.

Art fights racism because an artist is judged by the quality of his work rather than his color, creed or religion, he said.

COHAN SAID he and his wife, Heidi, love the arts. They collect books, particularly art books and paintings, especially German impressionists. They travel to Europe when possible, often to attend music festivals. He plays piano, "extremely poorly," he said.

The Cohans' three grown children have an artistic bent. One son is a writer and lives in Royal Oak, another is a photographer in Boston and their daughter is a fashion designer.

Cohan, 58, is a Detroit native. He graduated from Wayne State University Law School in 1952, then served in a U.S. Army counter-intelligence unit in Europe after WWII, a period he described as "very interesting and very bad."

He joined the state attorney general's office in 1958 and became deputy attorney general in 1961. He joined Detroit Edison in 1973. He is senior vice president and legal counsel at the utility.

His list of community involvements is lengthy. He is president of the Jewish Community Council, an

umbrella organization of some 300 groups, and serves on the boards of the Michigan Cancer Foundation and Sinai Hospital. He is also chairman of the state Board of Ethics.

STATE SEN. Jack Faxon, D-Southfield, the legislature's arts expert, hailed Cohan as a negotiator and solver of disputes. He is well-respected in Lansing and well-connected in corporate, religious and civic circles, Faxon said.

"He's a bit like ancient Rome," the senator said. "All roads lead to him."

Cohan said he is no stranger to Lansing.

"I do know something about the system, and I can assure you I will use that knowledge."

The council's 1987 grants budget is \$11.8 million, which is distributed in grants to artists and arts groups.

Faxon said the council must be concerned with how to increase the size of the funding pie and how to slice it. Cohan said there is tremendous competition for grants, and deciding who gets money is one of the most difficult parts of the job. Acknowledging that, Cohan said he hopes to improve the relationship between artists and the council.

"I don't want (artists) to look at the council as a font for money because we have limited resources. But I want them to look at us as a friend and ally."

Director keeps the big picture in clear focus

By Corinne Abelt
Staff writer

Barbara Goldman of Franklin, known to her friends as Bunny, has been executive director of Michigan Council for the Arts since early 1985.

"I love it," she said of her job. "We're having a wonderful time... we've reached out to new constituents and the Governor has been highly supportive. I inherited a very healthy Council for the Arts. E. Ray Scott (former executive director) did a magnificent job."

Michigan Council for the Arts was established in June of 1966 by the State Legislature with a budget of \$5,000. In the 21 ensuing years, that figure has increased to the current \$14 million, making it the sixth largest state arts council appropriation in the country.

If other money for arts, allocated by the Legislature to other projects and institutions such as the Detroit Institute of Arts (\$16.4 million), are added in, the total amount Michigan puts into the arts comes close to \$40 million, making it second only to New York.

"With Blanchard, our support has grown by leaps and bounds. Even through the downturn our support has continually grown."

IN THE EARLY DAYS (of the Council) appropriations for the arts were the brunt of jokes and unkind remarks by some legislators and an uncountable number of their constituents. State Senator Jack Faxon was one of the early arts champions as were then Governor William Milliken and First Lady, Helen Milliken.

So what happened to all the naysayers and the doubters? What silenced them?

"The naysayers have admitted they were wrong," said Goldman, some even publicly, she added. They began to see the effects of the support for the arts in their own districts.

Over the years as the arm of Michigan Council for the Arts, MCA, has reached from the cities and

towns to the remote corners of the state, the actual size of the administrative staff in the Detroit office has decreased — from 36 in 1980, with a budget of \$5 million, to 30 in 1988 with a budget of close to \$14 million.

The Partnership Program is partly responsible for the change. "This is one of the things I'm most proud of. We have nine partners whom we contact to provide services in the field," she said.

They are: Michigan Association of Community Arts Agencies (MACAA), an Upper Peninsula office of MACAA, Midland Center for the Arts, Michigan State University Museum, Michigan Association of Arts Educators, Design Michigan, Michigan Corporation for Public Broadcasting, New Initiatives and Arts Midwest.

MACAA is the contact for technical service in the field to help organizations with fund-raising, administration and management.

The opening of an office in the UP, funded by Michigan Council for the Arts with one staff member, George Loudon, who is on the road two weeks a month, has resulted in a "proliferation of arts activities," Goldman said.

Midland Center for the Arts operates the performing and visual arts programs and the Michigan State University Museum handles the folk-life programs. The first was held as a special Michigan event on the plaza in Washington D.C. in conjunction with the Smithsonian last June. It was offered again on the Michigan State campus in East Lansing in August. Goldman said the Michigan Folklife Festival will be an annual event.

She said the Arts Educators are beginning to address the "putting arts education as basic to curriculum in our schools."

DESIGN MICHIGAN is developing opportunities to improve and coordinate design ideas in things as diverse as plays and programs to cities. The broadcasting people are planning and looking for media op-



Barbara Goldman

portunities for quality arts programs for audiences throughout the state.

"We've now hit the air waves," Goldman said with a smile. New Initiatives provides opportunities for minority organizations to take many different kinds of performances such as jazz, theater and dance to communities with large minority populations, which would not otherwise be able to enjoy them.

Arts Midwest, composed of representatives from nine midwestern states, offers opportunities for Michigan visual and performing artists to reach outside the state.

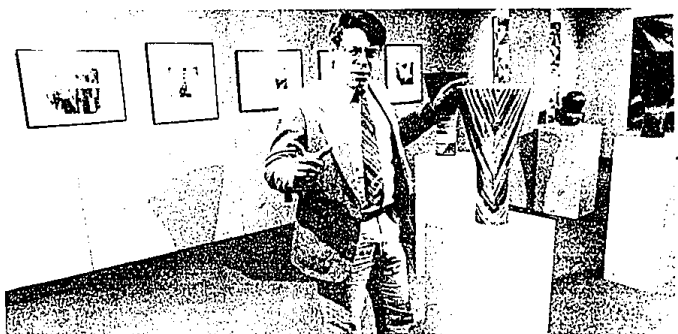
Round table meetings with the partners are held every six weeks. "The exciting thing is seeing our partners collaborate with one another... We function on a principle of trust," said Goldman, and added that it works extremely well.

EQUALLY SATISFYING to her is her 15-member council, appointed by the Governor, each from a different area of the state.

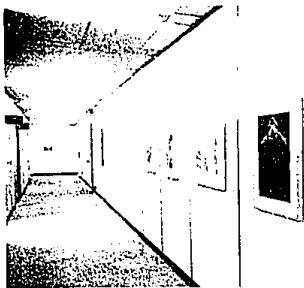
"Our council has been very supportive. Many states have had terrible problems with turf and ego. They are 15 individuals, yet each comes to the table as a representative of the whole state."

There are also nine regional regranting agencies in the state who process the mini grant requests from their region.

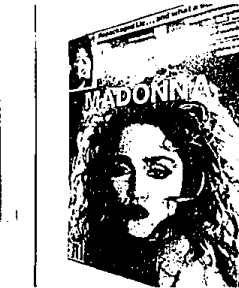
She credits ARTtrain for the existence of almost 50 art councils in Michigan. It was organized as a traveling art museum to bring art to people who were out of the mainstream of art activities and museums.



JERRY ZOLYNSKY/staff photographer



The new gallery of the Michigan Council for the Arts offices in Detroit is a showcase for the works of those who received MCA grants. At left, Craig Carver, gallery



director, talks about one of the pieces in the current exhibition. Above is a corridor in the offices, filled with works by Michigan artists.

Indian operas travel through Michigan



Scene from "Nanabush," a new one-act opera based on Great Lakes Indian literature.

By Mary Jane Doerr
Special writer

Karen DiChiera, director of Michigan Opera Theatre's Community Programs, turned to Michigan Indian folklore for ideas for two new operas. She and librettist William Kirk collaborated on "Nanabush" and James Hartway and librettists Anthony Ambrosio and Anca Vlasopolas wrote "Ke-nu."

"This idea has been tickling my brain for several years," said DiChiera. Last year "Nanabush" toured Michigan on the MOT in Residence Tour. This year the opera is part of the company's Overture to Opera and is scheduled for 40 performances in churches, schools and community groups in southern Michigan.

During the nine years that MOT Community Programs has been in operation, DiChiera has worked with many school districts.

"One winter, when I was in the Upper Peninsula, I worked with 30 Indian children for a day," said DiChiera. "For the entire morning none of the children spoke to me, answered a question or

made any verbal response.

"By lunch, I was exhausted. Then a little girl came up to me and said 'I think you're funny. Can I bring my friend to class this afternoon?' Something happened to those children at lunch because I could not keep them quiet all afternoon."

Since then, DiChiera has been talking with Hartway, composer and professor of composition at Wayne State University, about writing an opera about Indians.

After hearing of the tales of Nanabush from Jane Erickson, director of Indian Programs in the Lake Shore School District, DiChiera decided that she would compose an Indian opera with Overture to Opera manager and librettist, Bill Kirk.

Their opera is based on four Indian legends, "How the Rabbit Got Long Ears," "How We Got the Seasons," "Sun Versus Wind" and the "Origin of Corn." According to Schoolcraft's "Indian Legends," Nanabush is regarded by many Indians as the messenger of the Great Spirit, sent down in the character of a wise man and a prophet. He has all the attributes of a human being, but also the power to perform miraculous deeds.

In January, MOT Community Programs will begin the 1988 Michigan Opera Theatre in Residence Tour of Michigan. Besides "La Boheme," they will perform Hartway's opera "Ke-nu" in junior and senior high schools throughout the state.

"Yes, this is my first opera," said Hartway, who was commissioned to write the recessional for the Silverdome services for Pope John Paul II.

"No, Ke-nu is not a folklore figure," said Hartway. "After much research, my librettists made up the names."

Even if the name isn't from Michigan Indian folklore, the story was carefully researched.

It is about a tribe threatened by the impending cold, brought upon them by the Spirit of Ice and Cold. Ke-nu is chosen by the Medicine Man to go out and brave the dangers of the Spirit of Ice and Cold and save the people.

The opera is for five singers — two sopranos, a tenor and two baritone. The range for the singers, especially the tenor (Ke-nu) and the Medicine Man is high, up to a high D for the tenor, and G for the baritone.