

# O&E arts editor gets state award

By Judith Doner Berne  
staff writer

Corinne "Co" Abatt, who attempts to write objectively about the art world which touches our suburbs, couldn't edit out the superlatives Monday night.

Abatt, Creative Living editor for the Observer & Eccentric for 15 years, was one of nine recipients of the Governor's Arts Awards given by Concerned Citizens for the Arts in Michigan, the statewide arts advocacy organization.

"This is the most wonderful award I could ever imagine getting," Abatt said in accepting the Media Honor Roll Award before 550 bejeweled women and tuxedoed men on the stage of the renovated State Theatre in Detroit.

Abatt, a longtime Beverly Hills resident who was accompanied to the event by daughter Julie, publicly acknowledged she was a little uncomfortable in the spotlight. "I'd rather be covering it than getting it."

"It has been my privilege to get to cover you — the members of the arts world," she told the crowd. She noted memorable interviews with Emma Schaver, the opera singer from Southfield; Peggy deSalie, a Birmingham art dealer who endowed a wing at the DIA and an auditorium at Cranbrook; and internationally-known photographer Yousuf Karsh.

"THOSE PEOPLE were so alive as so many of you are here tonight."

In fact, a number of audience members have been the subjects of Abatt's feature stories, including Bloomfield Hills artist Aviva Robinson, whose husband Jack is CCAM chairman, and Birmingham-Bloomfield Art Association director Ken Gross.

Gross, who acknowledged he was one of the people who nominated Abatt for the award, said simply: "She lives it. It's beyond her job. That's the kind of thing this is all about — to recognize people who go beyond."

"She's unique. I deal with other press and it's just not the same."

The awards were begun six years ago during Gov. James Blanchard's first term when the Concerned Citizens for the Arts group posed the idea of giving the highest elected official in the state the opportunity to honor the arts. "This has become an exciting,

meaningful night," Blanchard told the crowd, "but of course the arts are every day. The arts are the glue that holds our society together."

Blanchard, defeated by John Engler last month, looked anything but depressed, vaulting onto the stage and whittling down his prepared speech because "People who are being honored never quite get their due."

HE INTRODUCED a number of local legislators, including state Sen. Jack Faxon, D-Farmington Hills, and state Rep. Judy Miller, R-Birmingham as well as executive director of the Michigan Council for the Arts, Bloomfield Township resident Bunny Goldman.

Jack Robinson led the audience in a standing toast to Blanchard who, no matter what political party you belong to, "has approached the issues honestly and set a high standard of public service."

"We also know he will continue to support the arts as a private citizen should he not return to public life," Robinson said.

Marilyn Wheaton, CCAM executive director, Tuesday said she has spoken to members of Engler's staff and "they have given me no indication that he would not be interested in continuing" participation in the awards.

This was the first time the awards presentation was held at an arts venue rather than a hotel ballroom. "We did better than we have ever done" on ticket sales — although the weather kept some from attending, Wheaton said. That included the Four Tops who were supposed to fly in to receive the International Achievement Award.

"I was very, very pleased," Wheaton said. "We've never had such a sophisticated presentation audio-visually. Personally, although I don't make the decision, I can't imagine having it any other place."

Other awards went to:  
• Arts Organization Awards — Kalamazoo Civic Players, William Bonifas Fine Arts Center, Michigan Arttrain.

• Business Honor Roll Award — Hudsons Department Stores.  
• Civic Leader Award — Walter Buhl Ford II.

• Michigan Artist Award — Bess Bonnier.

• Arts in Education Award — Karen VanderKloot DiChiera.  
• International Achievement Award — The Four Tops.



photos by JOHN STORMZAND/staff photographer

Corinne Abatt related three of her most memorable interviews in accepting the media award from Gov. James Blanchard.



Michigan Arts Council executive director Bunny Goldman (above) and Concerned Citizens for the Arts chairman Jack Robinson (right) obviously enjoying the evening.



Bob and Betty Jean Awrey of Farmington Hills had a good view of the evening's events.

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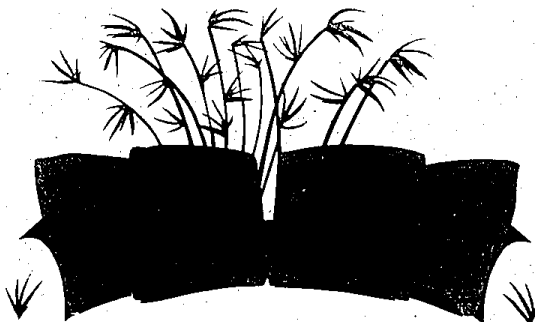
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