

CONVERSATIONS



FRANK PROVENZANO

Common Ground a target for unsettling politics

Once a week, Kay White volunteers at Common Ground, a nonprofit social service agency based in Pontiac. She's the calming voice on the other end of the crisis line.

One day the callers were a couple of sexually active teenage girls. "It was clear to me that it was good that they had somewhere to turn," said White.

They're not alone.

Throughout the region, Common Ground has aided thousands who've called with serious - sometimes desperate - problems, and few places to turn.

"We give them time so they can talk through their whole problem," said White, a Bloomfield Township resident who also serves as chair of Common Ground's board of directors.

But today, the tables have turned. Where does Common Ground turn when they're faced with a problem? And who should come to their aid?

Penalized for its success

The problem is this: the Birmingham City Commission is holding up Common Ground's permit to hold its annual Art in the Park festival at Sheln Park in the downtown area. There's no question the commissioners support Common Ground's mission. But there's plenty of questions about why they are demanding a condition to be met before granting the permit.

Art in the Park, a two-day event in the fall, is entering its 24th year. The fair has become one of the top 35 rated art fairs in the country.

About \$85,000 was raised from last year's event. That's about one-sixth of Common Ground's fiscal budget to fund a 24-hour crisis line, victim assistance services and a prevention outreach program for schools.

Without a doubt, Art in the Park offers a compelling case of how art can bring people together for the greater good.

Sound naive? Not to White. And not to the many volunteers who meet year-round to plan the event.

Apparently, Art in the Park has become so successful that the Birmingham Commissioners see a way for other local nonprofits to benefit by becoming more closely aligned with the event.

To paraphrase Commissioner Mike Wooley, Common Ground should take Art in the Park, expand it and generate additional revenue which would be divided among different Birmingham nonprofits.

In more crass terms, Wooley's on-the-record comments revealed an unnecessary hard-ball position.

"This is a transition period and you're going to accept it," he told Common Ground at the last commission meeting.

"The more you buy into the process the more you will like it," he added.

Although Wooley's tone was conciliatory, the effect of his words aren't exactly subtle diplomacy.

In an ideal world, the commissioners should be congratulated for their benevolent spirit and foresight. But in reality, they should be scolded for their parochial attitude.

"At any time they could up the ante," said White. "It's unfair to penalize us for being successful."

Not enough?

At the commission's behest, Common Ground agreed to give \$1,000 each to Birmingham Youth Assistance, IAB Conservatory, Birmingham Area Seniors Coordinating Council and Birmingham Schools.

For the commissioners, however, that's not enough.

They want Common Ground to find a way to broaden Art in the Park to more directly involve local nonprofits.

That sounds like a good idea. But in reality, bigger is not necessarily better, nor will it guarantee additional revenue.

Art fairs develop a reputation based on the quality of exhibited work, how the artists are treated and the atmosphere.

Please see CONVERSATIONS, C3



STAFF PHOTO BY LAWRENCE R. MCKEE

Fortile ground: Nefertiti Steward, owner of Truth Book Store in Southfield, teaches customers the "other version" of American history.

Revisiting the American Dream

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

A reminder of the democratic promise

BY FRANK PROVENZANO
STAFF WRITER

There's nothing typical about Nefertiti Steward, from her earthy African apparel to her flashing smile to her ancient Egyptian namesake.

She is simultaneously an anachronistic and unquestionably contemporary.

If anyone needed convincing about how much America has changed since the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, just consider Steward: a proud African-American woman and successful entrepreneur with an evangelist zeal to educate her customers about the "other version" of American history.

That "other version" - filled with terms like enslavement, segregation and oppression - can be found on the shelves of Steward's Truth Book Store at Northland Mall in Southfield.

Each February during Black History Month is Steward's defining moment, a period when commerce becomes indistinguishable from the lessons of history.

Whether she's ringing up the sale of an African Kente cloth, a tribal woodcarving or the latest Terry McMillan novel, Steward



HUBERT WATKINS

Bluesman: Robert Johnson is among the many African American musicians in Steward's lexicon of melodic images.

and invariably hands customers a calendar of events sponsored by her store and held at the mall.

"Come back for one of our lectures and exhibits," she said. "Bring your kids."

Coming to an event means meeting African-American authors, witnessing an African martial arts exhibit, watching a one-woman play about the abolitionist Harriet Tubman and listening to a concert of African music.

That "other version" of American history, reminds Steward, is also filled with terms like struggle, spiritual survival and pride.

Through a color lens Ironically, the annual monthlong commemoration of Black History, American holidays - heavy on commercialism, corporate sponsorship and soft of substance.

Even Steward estimates that store sales will increase 70 percent in February, the highest monthly revenue except for the holidays.

Unfortunately, the effect of Black History Month is also

unfortunate, the effect of Black History Month is also

unfortunate, the effect of Black History Month is also

unfortunate, the effect of Black History Month is also

unfortunate, the effect of Black History Month is also

unfortunate, the effect of Black History Month is also

unfortunate, the effect of Black History Month is also

unfortunate, the effect of Black History Month is also

unfortunate, the effect of Black History Month is also

unfortunate, the effect of Black History Month is also

unfortunate, the effect of Black History Month is also

unfortunate, the effect of Black History Month is also

unfortunate, the effect of Black History Month is also

unfortunate, the effect of Black History Month is also

unfortunate, the effect of Black History Month is also

Celebrate Black History

Detroit Institute of Arts - 6200 Woodward, (313) 833-7900

■ "Gods of Africa in the Arts of Brazil," 2 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 8

■ "Jacob Lawrence: The Glory of Expression," a video, 2 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 14

■ Storytelling: African-American Life, 2 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 15

■ Storytelling: The Civil Rights Movement, 2 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 28

Museum of African American History - 315 E. Warren, (313) 494-5800

Exhibits: ■ "Of the People: The African American Experience"

■ "Walk to Freedom," a photo exhibit of the 1963 civil rights march in Detroit led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

■ "A Communion of the Spirits: African American Quilts," a photo exhibit by Ronald Freeman

■ "Life & Times of Paul Robeson"

Detroit Historical Museum - 5401 Woodward (at Kirby), (313) 833-8305

■ "Doorway to Freedom: Detroit and the Underground Railroad"

■ African American Family Day, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 21

Northeastern art gallery exhibits: ■ "Paintings of Vincent Smith" - D.R. N'namdi

■ "A series of paintings dedicated to the children of Mozambique; and, Africa," Moore Gallery, 304 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, (248) 642-2700

■ "Images of Africa" - paintings by local artists: "Works by Barbara Terry Roy," a series of paintings dedicated to the children of Mozambique; and, Africa," Moore Gallery, 304 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, (248) 642-2700

■ "Images of Africa" - paintings by local artists: "Works by Barbara Terry Roy," a series of paintings dedicated to the children of Mozambique; and, Africa," Moore Gallery, 304 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, (248) 642-2700

■ "Images of Africa" - paintings by local artists: "Works by Barbara Terry Roy," a series of paintings dedicated to the children of Mozambique; and, Africa," Moore Gallery, 304 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, (248) 642-2700

■ "Images of Africa" - paintings by local artists: "Works by Barbara Terry Roy," a series of paintings dedicated to the children of Mozambique; and, Africa," Moore Gallery, 304 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, (248) 642-2700

■ "Images of Africa" - paintings by local artists: "Works by Barbara Terry Roy," a series of paintings dedicated to the children of Mozambique; and, Africa," Moore Gallery, 304 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, (248) 642-2700

■ "Images of Africa" - paintings by local artists: "Works by Barbara Terry Roy," a series of paintings dedicated to the children of Mozambique; and, Africa," Moore Gallery, 304 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, (248) 642-2700

■ "Images of Africa" - paintings by local artists: "Works by Barbara Terry Roy," a series of paintings dedicated to the children of Mozambique; and, Africa," Moore Gallery, 304 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, (248) 642-2700

■ "Images of Africa" - paintings by local artists: "Works by Barbara Terry Roy," a series of paintings dedicated to the children of Mozambique; and, Africa," Moore Gallery, 304 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, (248) 642-2700

■ "Images of Africa" - paintings by local artists: "Works by Barbara Terry Roy," a series of paintings dedicated to the children of Mozambique; and, Africa," Moore Gallery, 304 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, (248) 642-2700

■ "Images of Africa" - paintings by local artists: "Works by Barbara Terry Roy," a series of paintings dedicated to the children of Mozambique; and, Africa," Moore Gallery, 304 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, (248) 642-2700

■ "Images of Africa" - paintings by local artists: "Works by Barbara Terry Roy," a series of paintings dedicated to the children of Mozambique; and, Africa," Moore Gallery, 304 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, (248) 642-2700

■ "Images of Africa" - paintings by local artists: "Works by Barbara Terry Roy," a series of paintings dedicated to the children of Mozambique; and, Africa," Moore Gallery, 304 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, (248) 642-2700

■ "Images of Africa" - paintings by local artists: "Works by Barbara Terry Roy," a series of paintings dedicated to the children of Mozambique; and, Africa," Moore Gallery, 304 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, (248) 642-2700

■ "Images of Africa" - paintings by local artists: "Works by Barbara Terry Roy," a series of paintings dedicated to the children of Mozambique; and, Africa," Moore Gallery, 304 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, (248) 642-2700

■ "Images of Africa" - paintings by local artists: "Works by Barbara Terry Roy," a series of paintings dedicated to the children of Mozambique; and, Africa," Moore Gallery, 304 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, (248) 642-2700

■ "Images of Africa" - paintings by local artists: "Works by Barbara Terry Roy," a series of paintings dedicated to the children of Mozambique; and, Africa," Moore Gallery, 304 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, (248) 642-2700

■ "Images of Africa" - paintings by local artists: "Works by Barbara Terry Roy," a series of paintings dedicated to the children of Mozambique; and, Africa," Moore Gallery, 304 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, (248) 642-2700

■ "Images of Africa" - paintings by local artists: "Works by Barbara Terry Roy," a series of paintings dedicated to the children of Mozambique; and, Africa," Moore Gallery, 304 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, (248) 642-2700

■ "Images of Africa" - paintings by local artists: "Works by Barbara Terry Roy," a series of paintings dedicated to the children of Mozambique; and, Africa," Moore Gallery, 304 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, (248) 642-2700

■ "Images of Africa" - paintings by local artists: "Works by Barbara Terry Roy," a series of paintings dedicated to the children of Mozambique; and, Africa," Moore Gallery, 304 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, (248) 642-2700

■ "Images of Africa" - paintings by local artists: "Works by Barbara Terry Roy," a series of paintings dedicated to the children of Mozambique; and, Africa," Moore Gallery, 304 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, (248) 642-2700

■ "Images of Africa" - paintings by local artists: "Works by Barbara Terry Roy," a series of paintings dedicated to the children of Mozambique; and, Africa," Moore Gallery, 304 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, (248) 642-2700

■ "Images of Africa" - paintings by local artists: "Works by Barbara Terry Roy," a series of paintings dedicated to the children of Mozambique; and, Africa," Moore Gallery, 304 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, (248) 642-2700

■ "Images of Africa" - paintings by local artists: "Works by Barbara Terry Roy," a series of paintings dedicated to the children of Mozambique; and, Africa," Moore Gallery, 304 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, (248) 642-2700

■ "Images of Africa" - paintings by local artists: "Works by Barbara Terry Roy," a series of paintings dedicated to the children of Mozambique; and, Africa," Moore Gallery, 304 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, (248) 642-2700

■ "Images of Africa" - paintings by local artists: "Works by Barbara Terry Roy," a series of paintings dedicated to the children of Mozambique; and, Africa," Moore Gallery, 304 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, (248) 642-2700

■ "Images of Africa" - paintings by local artists: "Works by Barbara Terry Roy," a series of paintings dedicated to the children of Mozambique; and, Africa," Moore Gallery, 304 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, (248) 642-2700

■ "Images of Africa" - paintings by local artists: "Works by Barbara Terry Roy," a series of paintings dedicated to the children of Mozambique; and, Africa," Moore Gallery, 304 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, (248) 642-2700

■ "Images of Africa" - paintings by local artists: "Works by Barbara Terry Roy," a series of paintings dedicated to the children of Mozambique; and, Africa," Moore Gallery, 304 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, (248) 642-2700

■ "Images of Africa" - paintings by local artists: "Works by Barbara Terry Roy," a series of paintings dedicated to the children of Mozambique; and, Africa," Moore Gallery, 304 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, (248) 642-2700

■ "Images of Africa" - paintings by local artists: "Works by Barbara Terry Roy," a series of paintings dedicated to the children of Mozambique; and, Africa," Moore Gallery, 304 Hamilton Row, Birmingham, (248) 642-2700



STAFF PHOTO BY JERRY ZOLNIEK

Maestro: Conductor Felix Resnick leads the Birmingham Bloomfield Symphony Orchestra in a program of Gershwin's pop, jazz and operatic songs.

BBSO's swingin' tribute to Gershwin

BY FRANK PROVENZANO
STAFF WRITER

In the thin air of the classical music world, the notion of a significant American composer is usually met with a polite guffaw.

Could the land of bouncy pop songs and floating jazz give birth to a melodic genius on the level of those powdered wig types of Colonial times?

It could and it did.

Nearly 75 years after his piano-roll performance of "I've Got Rhythm," audiences are still tapping their feet to George Gershwin's irresistible melodies.

On Sunday, Feb. 15 the Birmingham-Bloomfield Symphony Orchestra will honor the music of Gershwin in a program of his popular songs, and pieces from "American in Paris" and the opera, "Porgy and Bess."

The concert commemorates the centennial of Gershwin's birth, and highlights BBSO's annual benefit dinner.

"Gershwin is one of the most original geniuses," said Felix Resnick, BBSO music director and conductor.

For the last five years, the BBSO has been named best community symphony at the Motor City Music Awards.

The 70-member orchestra is made up of musicians from a range of ensembles and symphonies throughout metro Detroit.

"It's Wonderful"

"Gershwin was constantly evolving, exploring new ground," said Resnick, who founded the BBSO in 1975. He also plays violin in the Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

"His feel for rhythm is both exuberant and highly introspective."

And inarguably, Gershwin is distinctively American, a synthesizer and inventor.

In "Rhapsody in Blue," for instance, he fused jazz with the concerto form.

Unlike his European predecessors

Please see GERSHWIN, C2

What: "Celebration of George Gershwin's Centennial," featuring the Birmingham-Bloomfield Symphony Orchestra and special guest, the University Musical Society Choral Union. When: 7:30 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 15. Where: Temple Beth El, 14 Mile and Telegraph Road, Bloomfield Hills; (248) 645-2276. Note: Annual benefit dinner will be held prior to concert.

EXHIBIT

A tortured romantic leaves behind a trove



BY FRANK PROVENZANO
STAFF WRITER

In most of Martin Maddox's paintings over the last eight years, there's a palpable foreboding expression.

The sense of desolation pervades, even amid some humorous juxtapositions, such as a woman dancing with a bear, or a magician standing in front of animals decked out in black-tie attire.

For some artists, it might be a case of exploring a theme, or working through a psychological morass.

But for Maddox, it now seems as a chilling indication that the unbearable personal gloom was spreading with the dogged pervasiveness of oil seeping into canvas.

Maddox's most recent works completed before his death in December can be seen at the Robert Kidd Gallery in Birmingham through February.

What: Martin A. Maddox, 1954-1997: A Memorial Exhibition. When: Through Saturday, Feb. 28. Where: Robert Kidd Gallery, 107 Townsend Street, Birmingham; (248) 642-3909.

Painfully honest

"Untimely" may be the proper adjective to describe the death of anyone who succumbs in their early 40s.

But because of the depth of his talent and his rising popularity, Maddox's passing is also painfully tragic.

Not in recent history has the Kidd Gallery had this kind of anticipation for a show. Even before the opening, several pieces had been sold.

"It's not whether you've heard of Martin Maddox, but how many of his paintings have you seen, and how many do you have," said Ray Fleming, director of the Kidd Gallery, which represented the artist since the early 1990s.

Unfortunately, at a time when his talent was gaining recognition, Maddox could no longer withstand his addiction to crack and alcohol. Shortly after Christmas, he hanged himself.

"Martin wasn't really in control," said Fleming. "He just played the hand he was dealt."

Ultimately, Maddox may not have overcome his own demons. Yet in his most impressive

Please see ROMANTIC, C2

Searching for meaning: The paintings of Martin Maddox combine a Renaissance style with a contemporary sensibility.