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thought it was my civic duty and enjoyed what I was doing. It was exciting to be part of that era."

Nurturing the arts

Over the years, the arts commission nurtured groups such as the Oakway Symphony Orchestra (now the Livonia Symphony Orchestra) and the Theater Guild of Livonia-Redford in addition to hosting the arts and crafts festival, a bluegrass festival, and performances of opera and ballet. They even set up an arts hotline for community events.

"We started bringing in the Detroit Symphony and big bands on the lawn and big art shows," said 86-year-old Dorothy Terwin who joined the arts commission in 1980 and served as treasurer. "We were busy. The city bought many paintings and we took care of all the paperwork."

While the arts commissioners were securing works for city buildings, and hosting cultural activities, they never went back on their policy of not showing their own art, until now.

In addition to Stamelos, Griffing-Witt and Terwin, past and present arts commissioners Barbara Stewart, Billie Thompson, Jack Olds, Bob Sheridan, Fred Acerrri, Sara Dickson, Sy LeVine,

Lucille Kimpel, and Anne Pritchard are showing their paintings, woodcuts, pastels, ceramics, sculpture, photography, collage, and mixed media in the Fine Arts Gallery at the Livonia Civic Center Library through July. The venue is one of three the Livonia Arts Commission uses to showcase art on a monthly basis.

"Artists Through the Years" honors the memory of Marie Tuthill, one of the founding members of the arts commission as well as an award-winning artist and teacher. Tuthill died in 1999, chaired the first arts and crafts festival 25 years ago.

"I'm really excited about exhibiting with the rest of the commissioners," said Stewart who joined the arts commission in the 1970s and served for nine years. "I was flattered that they asked me to join the commission. It was kind of a turning point for me. I could finally admit I was an artist."

Stewart now has paintings in galleries in Northville, Lewiston and Elk Rapids. She exhibits in her first one-woman show at Primary Colors in South Haven in August.

"I knew the work they were doing on the commission was important," said Stewart. "I made so many friends and I loved being around other artists."

Stewart loved serving on the arts commission so much she and Griffing-Witt helped form the Livonia Cultural League in 1978. The nonprofit League was founded with the purpose of supporting the arts commission.

"At the time the Livonia Cultural League was needed," said Stewart. "The Livonia Arts Commission, being a city entity, was limited to the money they could ask for. We were trying to do things we couldn't do as a city organization. We tried to get the George Burns Theater off the ground but couldn't sell tickets."

By the time Billie Thompson was appointed to the Livonia Arts Commission five years ago, the league no longer existed but art and culture were well-established in the community.

"We were excited to start Fine

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traits, traditional to contemporary. I'm excited about the sculpture, everything from wood to stoneware, and bronze wildlife. There will be more scenic, landscape, wildlife, motion and nighttime photography as well as of the Amish country."

Ceramics, functional to decorative, and wood furniture, bowls and decoys are just some of the work that will be for sale. When Skaggs said there's something for everyone she was right. Judging by the long list of jewelry, glass, metal wall art, sculptures made from old bicycle parts, garden art, hand-made Ecuadorian musical instruments, and other items too numerous to mention, you'll have to be pretty picky not to find a little something to take home.

Unique setting

"In the village we have such a unique setting," said Skaggs. "Five of the buildings will be open. If they like history they should be interested in touring the buildings."

And for these two days only, the 1-4 p.m. tours are free. Take a peek into the Greek Revival Shaw and Kingley houses built in 1843 or the Newburg Methodist Church (1848) or Newburg School (1861). You'll feel like you stepped back into another time and place. And in fact you have.

Joshua Simmons purchased the property, now the site of the 103-acre historical park, back in 1824. That was 11 years before Livonia Township was established and 13 years before Michigan became a state. The village is divided into two time periods. The west-end illustrates what life was like in the mid-19th century while the east-end recreates the intersection of Newburg and Ann Arbor Trail as it was from 1915 to 1926.

"The setting is so nice in between the historical buildings and a nice garden setting," said Kathy Sandberg, a Plymouth potter who's been in the festival on and off for about 12 years.

Sandberg won Best of Clay for the past two years. This year

she'll try to break her record by bringing new work, which in many instances is functional as well as decorative. Among the choices are large platters that double as wall art, a vase in the shape of a female figure and clay pieces, painted with water lilies or koi.

One of life's joys

This is Julie Kachnowski's first year exhibiting her watercolor abstracts. A Redford artist, Kachnowski grew up in Livonia and learned to love art while studying with John Wagner and Connie Cronenwett at Stevenson High School. She earned a bachelor of fine arts degree from Eastern Michigan University before starting a family. Her daughter Jane Alexandra is 6-months-old and Kachnowski can't wait to start painting again.

"I'm very excited to get back to focusing on my art," said Kachnowski. "It's one of the joys in life. All of my work is based in nature. I try to look to things around me and paint them in a way all people can enjoy. I love color and shape and movement and try to portray them."

Kachnowski will find plenty of inspiration at Art in the Village at Greenmead.

"It gives you a chance to see what Livonia looked like in the 1800s. Even if you're not from Livonia you can see what your community was like," said Kathy Smith of J & J Concession & Nuts. Smith's been selling refreshments at the arts and crafts festival for 10 years.

And don't forget to buy some lemonade, almonds, fresh-cut fries or other snacks from her. Smith will be the one in the purple and pink T-shirt with the dog eating a corn dog on the front. Ask her about it. Smith swears the dog isn't one of the Newfoundlands she raises.

Have an interesting idea for a story? What's your favorite art fair? Call arts reporter Linda Ann Chomai at (734) 953-2145 or send e-mail to lechomai@oe.homecomm.net

Show Choir from page C1

Michael Schommer loves music so he isn't worried about studying his stuff in the solo with Kirby. A student at Allen Elementary in Plymouth, Schommer joined the Rising Star Singers two years ago. He also takes a music class at school.

"I like all the songs we do and Norma is fun," said Schommer who also sings a solo.

Unfortunately, Atwood hasn't been able to lead the young singers for the last three weeks due to surgery but she plans to be back on her feet by September when the fall session begins. In the meantime, Cynthia Hector is taking over directorship of the choir which has produced accomplished vocalists such as Sylvia White, a first place winner in this year's Schoolcraft College Honors Recital, and Sean and Casey McIntyre. The brother and sister duo recently returned from a national tour of the "Sound of Music" with Barry Williams from The Brady Bunch.

Having fun

"We're shining it all up before the performance," said Hector who earned a bachelor's degree in voice from Grand Valley State University. "They've worked very hard and perfected a lot of their steps and learned to work under a different director. But the biggest goal is to have them enjoy what they're doing and to truly believe that when they're feeling the music, the audience will too."

"I'm so excited, so thrilled to work with these kids. It's a good experience for them and me. And Norma and I already have a vision for next year. By then we could have a chamber, madrigal and show choir."

Adrianna Kalota, a student at Coolidge Elementary in Livonia, joined the Rising Star Singers three months ago because Atwood strives to present the show choir professionally. One way is by providing accompaniment by pianist Christy Slater of Northville.

"I like the music that we do and being accompanied by

piano," said Kalota, a soprano who began studying voice with Atwood two years ago. She'll sing "When You Believe" by Whitney Houston and Mariah Carey.

Working with an accompanist is also important to Rachel Arsenault, a 12-year-old student at West Middle School in Plymouth.

"I always loved to sing since I was little. I was in the chorus at school and plan to be in it again next year," said Rachel Arsenault who joined the singers two years ago. "My favorite part is singing and dancing and movement. It's helped me because I want to become a professional singer, to put myself out there and get a job."

Broadway bound

Several of the young vocalists plan on a career in theater or film. Amanda Kiel, a Hulsing Elementary student, has "always dreamed of being a singer" while Ryan Dooley revels in playing the part of the drama king during rehearsals with the Rising Star Singers. Dooley began acting at age six with the Whistle Stop Players at the Plymouth Community Arts Council. Later, he performed at the Marquis Theatre in Northville. He eventually, "wants to be a movie actor or director."

Christine Lietz, on the other hand, would settle for singer or psychiatrist. The 13-year-old Saline Middle School student joined the singers 6 1/2 years.

"I like being on stage and singing in front of people," said Lietz who'll sing "Hero" by Mariah Carey. "And I like being in the group, when new kids come to show them how to blend with their voices."

Showing younger singers the ropes is one of the reasons Kirby enjoys the choir as well.

"I like coming because this year I'm one of the older kids and she let me be in the back row," said Kirby. "Plus I want to grow up to be a singer or dancer."

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