

RiverArts Business Plan

Executive Summary

Chestertown RiverArts is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization that was created in 2012 with the merger of two longstanding arts organizations --- the Chestertown Arts League and Chester River Artworks. RiverArts offers a dynamic, unique and constantly evolving program of exhibitions, classes, lectures and special events.

Our highest priority for this year is to hire an executive director by generating increased revenue from a combination of membership, programming, sales, special events and donations. For example, in 2013, we will expand our membership by recruiting non-artists who appreciate art and enjoy being part of an engaging, creative, energetic and fun organization.

Although we have focused on the visual arts in the past, we intend to expand that focus to creativity in all of the arts and in our daily life. We will continue to offer monthly exhibitions, First Friday openings, and our popular special events including Studio Tour, Paint the Town, and Art in Bloom.

In addition to the adult programs, RiverArts will continue to offer and expand art classes for pre-K to 8th grade students. An example of a new children's program is a partnership with Garnett Elementary School and the Garfield Center for the Arts to teach problem solving and creativity skills to 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade students as part of their end-of-quarter, academic research projects.

It is estimated that revenue will exceed expenses by over \$26,000 in 2013. Estimated gross income is \$186,794 with estimated expenses of \$163,791. In the January to June 2013 timeframe, revenue exceeded income by over \$29,000. For 2014, execution of the strategies contained in this plan is projected to increase revenue whereas the engagement of an executive director will also increase expenses. Estimated gross income for 2014 is \$208,170 whereas estimated expenses are \$206,940.

While RiverArts is currently in a healthy financial position, new strategies must be implemented to maintain its position.

General Description

RiverArts Mission Statement:

To engage our community in the creation, appreciation, and support of the arts through education, events, and exhibitions.

RiverArts Vision Statement:

To inspire and foster creativity as a positive and sustainable force that enriches our community and establishes the region as a premier arts destination.

Description/Overview:

Chestertown RiverArts is a nonprofit community arts organization created in April, 2012, by the merger of Chester River Artworks and the Chestertown Arts League. As the new organization retained the 501(c)(3) status obtained by the Arts League, the official name is Chestertown Arts League, Inc. DBA Chestertown RiverArts.

Following the merger, RiverArts signed a 5-year lease for the premises at 315 High Street, Suite 106, Chestertown, MD. After renovations were completed, RiverArts opened for business in September, 2012. The leased space consists of a gift shop area, two gallery spaces (the small gallery is occasionally used as a classroom), kitchenette, restroom, large storage room and storage closet. There is a receptionist area and work station for the administrative assistant near the entrance, and free parking is available adjacent to the building.

RiverArts operates a clay studio in space rented from the Arts at Still Pond Station for \$1/year, which is located in the former Still Pond Coast Guard Station.

RiverArts is a membership organization with approximately 350 members. Dues are currently \$40 for an individual and \$55 for family membership. Members may exhibit artwork in the gallery and in the gift shop, and RiverArts receives 35% commission on each item sold. To exhibit in the Gift Shop, members must be approved by a jurying committee. There is no jurying process for the gallery, but hanging fees must be paid for each item placed in an exhibition.

RiverArts has one paid employee, an Administrative Assistant, who works in the gallery, for 15 hours per week from 11-4, Wednesday – Friday. The gallery is staffed by volunteers on Tuesday, Saturday, and Sunday. RiverArts also pays an independent contractor, the clay studio manager, to oversee the operations of the Clay Studio at Still Pond Station.

RiverArts sponsors educational classes in the arts for adults. These classes are open to the public, but higher fees must be paid by non-members. There is also a Children's Program providing arts education to children in the community which is funded by donations and some government funding.

Products, Programs or Services

RiverArts engages the community in the arts through exhibitions, special events and classes. Eighteen monthly exhibitions and seven special events are scheduled for 2013 and fourteen art classes have been lined up for adults this fall. Our exhibitions and special events have brought large numbers of the community into our gallery. With the assistance of a clicker, we counted 418 visitors at our May First Friday reception. Metrics are being developed to measure the effectiveness of each event.

Exhibitions

Sales and entry fees for RiverArts exhibitions provided a net profit of over \$13,000 and special events provided a net profit of over \$28,000. We provide a gift shop of unique, hand-crafted items open all year.

The Exhibitions Committee is exploring some new exhibition opportunities including a borrowed museum exhibit, a high tech show and a RiverArts regatta as well as examining how additional programs can be built around exhibitions. Marcy Ramsey is curating the Living River show in November in collaboration with the Chester River Association. Three programs have been designed around the show including Tom McHugh and Andy McCowan singing river songs, a panel of artists discussing the river as muse and a family scavenger hunt to introduce them to watersheds and environmental issues.

The detailed exhibition schedule can be found in Appendix A and the Fall Classes in Appendix B.

Special Events

Over a quarter of our revenue comes from our special events. Among our most popular are the **Studio Tour** and **Paint the Town**. Studio Tour, now in its 14th year, opens the studios of over fifty local artists for the public to visit during two fall weekends. The 4th annual **Paint the Town** brought 55 artists (49 of them from out of town) to Chestertown to paint Kent County. The four-day event culminated in a Wet Paint Show and Sale on Saturday night and a judged Quick Draw competition on Sunday morning.

A well-attended new event this year, co-sponsored by the Community Mediation Upper Shore, was **Art in Bloom** where 14 floral designers created arrangements representing a piece of art hanging in the gallery. A new opportunity for the 2014 year is the use of the **Mainstay** for a fundraising event.

Collaborating with Our Community

RiverArts has an established children's program where art instructors have taught in the public school's after-school program as well as in the Judy Center Program, the SOS program, and the Carter Center.

This year will include a new program that integrates creative thinking and problem solving with end-of-quarter projects for 3rd, 4th and 5th graders at Garnett Elementary School in collaboration with the Garfield Center, Kent County Historical Society, G.A.R. Post #25, Chester River Association, DCA and others as the project develops.

RiverArts collaborates with a number of other groups to both maximize promotional opportunities and to promote Chestertown as an arts destination including the following organizations:

- Community Mediation Upper Shore in the Art in Bloom fundraiser,
- Chester River Association for the Living River exhibition and programs
- Kent County Historical Society to develop and share oral history interviews of our African Americans who grew up in Kent County.
- Book Fest Committee to sponsor the Illustrating the Narrative Art Show
- Jazz Fest (Garfield Center) in coordination with Art in the Park
- Taste of the Town (DCA) in coordination with Paint the Town Quick Draw
- Sultana's DownRigging Partnership events (Photographing the Tall Ships at Night, Living River Art Show).
- National Music Festival rehearsals at our gallery
- Humane Society in coordination with Dog Days

Publicizing Our Programs

According to the Chestertown Spy editor, over 100 articles about RiverArts programs, classes and exhibitions were included in their online newspaper this past year. The Kent County News ran about the same number. A Communications Committee coordinates the press releases and marketing of RiverArts programs and events. Press releases are typically sent to 25 newspapers and magazines. The Tidewater Trader and the Studio Tour program also contribute to publicizing our programs.

Financial Results

RiverArts operates on a calendar year basis. We began operations in mid 2012 and at the end of fiscal year, 2012, RiverArts' total income for 6 months of operations was \$90,328 with expenses of \$74,201 resulting in net income over expenses of \$15,127. During this time the Clay Studio and the Children's Program ran deficits (though the Children's Programs received delayed grant payments after January 1 to offset most of the deficit). Income for educational programs was down, due to difficulties in getting the program launched. In its first year of operations, RiverArts successfully capitalized upon the enthusiasm of launching a new organization in a new space, and raised sufficient funds from donations to renovate the gift shop and gallery space. However, the feeling of newness has now subsided, and it is unclear whether the same level of revenue can be sustained. RiverArts has a critical need to hire an executive director, and the revenue stream which will fund this position must be identified and increased if RiverArts is to achieve this important objective.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

RiverArts formed a special committee to formulate a business plan and was assisted in this process by SCORE. During this process, the group discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the organization and developed strategies to accomplish future goals.

The following were perceived as major strengths of RiverArts:

- Beautiful gallery space and gift shop in the center of town
- Strong commitment and participation by board and volunteer members
- Successful, quality events and programming
- Welcoming atmosphere to the community, including non-artists

The following were perceived as major weaknesses of River Arts:

- Lack of executive director
- Financial uncertainty
- Lack of core organizational structure and need to reassess current standardized policies and procedures
- Lack of succession planning for volunteer leadership
- Overutilization of volunteers to accomplish core tasks
- Underutilization of facility

Strategies

The following strategies must be set in motion in order to capitalize upon the strengths of RiverArts and reduce the impact of its weaknesses:

- Hire an Executive Director
- Develop policies and procedures including robust budget processes and succession planning
- Evaluate the financial success of exhibitions, classes and special events
- Increase revenue and identify current and future revenue streams
- Develop a plan for use of volunteers and board members
- Develop a business plan for the future of the Clay Studio
- Retain members by identifying incentives for membership
- Grow our membership by recruiting non-artists
- Cultivate dedicated donors

Business Plan

The business plan which follows includes specific recommendations for implementing the strategies described.

Marketing Plan

The focus of the new marketing plan will be to devise strategies for increasing annual revenue by recruiting new members, cultivating additional donors and by attracting more prospective customers to visit the gallery and gift shop.

Retaining members

Current members are our most valuable resource and a plan will be developed to identify incentives that will retain members.

Attracting new members

The most promising avenue for growing our membership is by recruiting non-artists who appreciate art and enjoy being part of an engaging, creative, energetic and fun organization. This would require devising programs that provide creative stimulation on a variety of topics which do not require the participant to be artistically inclined to appreciate.

Cultivating dedicated donors

A long-term effort is required to build perceived value within the community and to invite wealthy donors who support other valued organizations to extend their generosity to RiverArts to make a positive impact in their community. Strategies will be devised to do this.

Attracting more customers

Among the strategies for attracting customers is a printed card listing all the galleries in Chestertown. Galleries could distribute them to visitors and also place them at local restaurants and businesses.

Marketing Our Products

Using our website to market our artist's work for sale in the gift shop would both keep potential customers current about what we offer and new inventory as well as serving as an incentive for artists to become members of RiverArts.

The complete Marketing Plan can be found in Appendix C.

Operational Plan

A set of standard policies and procedures for the operation of RiverArts needs to be developed, which should include a plan for creating, approving and evaluating a sound budget for the organization. A subcommittee of the business plan committee has been formed to complete this project.

The dues structure should be changed; member dues will increase to \$50 for individuals, and \$65 per year for families. It is important not to raise dues beyond

the point where cost would become a barrier to joining. RiverArts depends upon volunteer resources to staff programs and special events. To maintain and grow this resource dues, should be raised, but not prohibitively.

It is estimated that the clay studio's direct expenses exceeded its revenues by \$4000 in the 12 months ended June 30, 2013. For the first six months of 2013, the deficit is \$1426. The Clay Studio must become a program that generates income rather than drawing upon RiverArts for financial support. To accomplish this goal, the chair of the education committee will assume primary administrative responsibility for pricing and scheduling classes at the Clay Studio. In addition, a special committee will be appointed to develop a business plan for the Clay Studio and a method to monitor its budget.

RiverArts will continue to monitor the success of its exhibitions, classes, and special events. To insure that these activities generate income, hanging fees will increase to \$10 per item for members and \$20 per item for non-members. A policy will be defined that all classes and grants contribute to the overhead.

The small gallery space at RiverArts will be available for rental to artists for showing their work at a fee of \$600 per month or \$350 for two weeks. There will be a two week minimum for renting the studio gallery. The fee would be credited toward their 35% commission on sales owed to RiverArts. The entire gallery can be rented for \$600 for a one day or evening event.

Management and Organizational Team

The current management team consists of the board of directors and executive committee. To ensure that core tasks are handled by paid staff and to relieve heavy reliance on a few volunteers, a high priority is to hire an executive director.

The Business Plan recommendation is to hire a full time executive director as soon as feasible.

Though the Business Plan committee feels it is advantageous to have management on site at Still Pond Arts, it is unacceptable to have the clay studio operate in the red even with generous donations. If the clay studio is not operating in the black by the end of the third quarter, the position needs to be reconsidered.

Volunteers

Because RiverArts depends almost solely on volunteers to run its programs, exhibitions, fundraising events and maintain its day to day operations, volunteers are considered a major resource that must be supported and recognized. Consequently, we have focused on a number of recommendations to recruit, train, support, recognize and retain our critical volunteers.

Our volunteer program needs to differentiate between the volunteer committee /

event leaders and the many committee members who are the workers --- both groups invaluable to the organization but with different support needs.

The executive director will coordinate and manage the volunteers.

Volunteer Program Strategies

Recruitment and Retention

- Develop an ongoing process for recruitment and retention of current members
- Make a personal contact with each new member within the first month of their joining to identify areas of interest
- Schedule regular new member meetings to promote volunteer opportunities
- Coordinate volunteer needs through the standing committee chairs

Training and Support

- Provide quarterly training for gallery volunteers
- Plan quarterly committee chair meetings to share and troubleshoot challenges
- Train each committee chair to read QuickBooks reports for financial data on their activities to be used in their quarterly reports
- Invite committee chairs to executive committee meetings to share successes and problem solve challenges

Recognition

- Recognize volunteers on the RiverArts website for the volunteer work they do
- Develop a process for collecting volunteer hours per activity
- Develop a rewards program for those who volunteer significant amounts of time

Financial Plan

RiverArts maintains a checking account and a money market account at PNC Bank. As of July 7, 2013, the checking account had a balance of \$24,683, and the money market had a balance of \$58,006. Approximately \$8,000 in the money market consists of funds donated for the specific purpose of awarding prizes to artists. (There is also a CD at People's Bank in the amount of \$10,000 dedicated to the same purpose.) Apart from paying its monthly bills, RiverArts has no outstanding loans or debts. According to IRS Form 990 for the tax year ending December 31, 2012, RiverArts had total assets of \$66,802 and liabilities of \$1191, resulting in a net fund balance of \$65,611.

The Business Plan proposal is to establish a policy to maintain the net fund balance at a minimum of 50% of the current year's operating budget.

Based upon the Financial Plan presented, for the first six months of 2013, RiverArts had gross income from programs, classes, events and other sources of \$103,277

and operating expenses of \$73,840 yielding a half-year net income of \$29,437. By the end of 2013 and with the hiring of the executive director in the fourth quarter, it is estimated that revenue will exceed expenses by over \$26,000. 2013 gross income is estimated at \$186,794 and estimated expenses are estimated at \$163,791. By the end of 2014 and with the implementation of the proposals in the business plan and the hiring of the executive director, gross income is estimated at \$208,170 and expenses at \$206,941.

Appendix

Appendix A: Exhibitions Schedule for 2013

Appendix B: 2013 Fall Schedule of Classes

Appendix C: Marketing Plan

Appendix A: 2013 RiverArts Exhibition Schedule

Children's Art Show

Curator: Marj Morani Friday, January 4 | 5-8pm through January 26
Full of imagination and color, the Annual Children's Show spotlights the work of talented students from our local schools and from the Carter Center.

Out of Mind Art Show

Curator: Beverly Sheppard Friday, February 1 | 5-8pm through February 23
An art show featuring expressions of imagined images, dreams and ideas.

Instructors of the Clay Studio

Curator: Gia Campana Friday, February 1 | 5-8pm through February 23.
From beautiful vessels gracefully formed on the potter's wheel to imaginative hand-built forms, mosaics, and more, the Clay Show showcases the work of instructors from Chestertown RiverArts Clay Studio at the Arts at Still Pond Station.

African American Art and Stories Show

Curator: Lani Seikaly Friday, February 1 | 5-8pm
Featuring the art of Allen Johnson and Kevin Harris and the written stories told by eleven Kent County African Americans

Fiber Show

Curator: Sue Wright Friday, March 1 | 5-8pm through March 30.
Fiber takes center stage with gorgeous color, rich texture and meticulous crafting, and creativity as Chestertown RiverArts Annual Fiber Show returns with a new and beautiful selection of artistry in fiber.

Spring Fever Art Show

Curator: Sue Wright Friday, March 1 | 5-8pm through March 30.
An art show with works based on the universal yearning for spring during March.

Judged Photography Show

Curator: Sue Basener Friday, April 5 | 5-8pm This event runs through April 26. A photography show that will be judged by Neil Jackson and team with awards presented at 6:00.

Paint the Town Wet Paint Show and Sale

Saturday, April 27 | 5–7pm

First chance to view and buy the art that the plein air artists in town for Paint the Town have painted over the past three days.

Paint the Town Quick Draw

Sunday, April 28 | 11am – 12pm

A Quick Draw competition that is the final activity for Paint the Town event.

Second Look Art Show

Friday, May 3 | 5-8pm through June 1

Art show featuring a second look at works created by Paint the Town Plein Air artists.

Abstraction Art Show

Curator: Rich Hall Friday, May 3 | 5-8pm through June 1

An art show featuring “abstracted, deconstructed and unleashed” creative works of art.

Judged Member’s Show

Friday, June 7 | 5-8pm through June 29.

I Paint July Art Show

Curators: Cindy Stafford and Anne VanSant

Friday, July 5 | 5-8pm through July 27.

An art show celebrating summer.

Dog Days Art Show

Curator: Peg Harrison

Friday, August 2 | 5-8pm through August 30.

An art show featuring works based on the hot and hazy “dog days” of summer.

Works by Ann Cleary

Friday, August 2 through August 16

NY Artist Ann Cleary brings her multimedia and found items art to the Studio Gallery

Juried Art Show

Curator: Rich Hall

Friday, September 6 | 5-8pm through September 28.

An open Juried Art Show with cash awards for winning entries in multiple categories.

Wild Things Art Show

Curators: Terry Willis

Friday, October 4 | 5-8pm through October 26.

An art show featuring an exhibit of wildness in all its manifestations.

RiverArts Woodworking Show

Curator:

Friday, October 4 | 5-8pm through October 19.

Studio Tour Show

Curator: Cindy Fulton

Thursday, October 24 through November 16.

Living River Art Show

Curator: Marcy Ramsey

Friday, November 1 | 5-8pm through November 30.

Holiday Show and Sale

Curator: Sue Wright

Friday, November 22 through December 29.

The Holiday Show and Sale provides an abundance of creative and unique gifts perfect for the giving season. With most items priced under \$100, there is something for every budget and every style.

Small Jewels / Large Gems Art Show

Curators: Connie Schroth and Shelley Minch

Friday, December 6 | 5-8pm through December 29

Art in all sizes, styles and mediums that will make your holiday shopping a breeze.

Appendix B: Fall 2013 Classes Schedule

September

September 10 **Weaving a Vase with Heidi Wetzel**; RiverArts Studio Gallery

September 17 **Paint Along with Mike Rooney**, RiverArts Studio Gallery

September 18 – 19 **Oil and Acrylic Painting 101 with Mike Rooney**, RiverArts Studio Gallery

September 24 – **Weaving a Basket with Heidi Wetzel**, RiverArts Studio Gallery

September 27 and 28 – **Inspiration for Pottery Making with Simon Leach**, RiverArts Studio Gallery and Clay Studio

September 28 and October 12 - **Knitted Lace Berets with Sue Wright**, Cannon Street Studio

September 28, Oct 12, Nov 16, and Dec 7 – **Diagonal Hand Knitted Jacket with Sue Wright**, Cannon Street Studio

October

October 6 – 11- **Impressionistic Plein Air Painting with Lois Griffel** – Kent and Queen Anne's Counties

October 11 – **Understanding the Subtleties of Wood with Vicco von Voss**, RiverArts Studio Gallery

Working on the Wheel with Marilee Schumann – Clay Studio at Still Pond

Porcelain Pottery with Rick Bysger – Clay Studio at Still Pond

November

November 1 – 2- **Photographing Tall Ships with David Biehler** – RiverArts Gallery on Nov 1 and on sight, Chester River on Nov 2

November 8 – **The Impact of Nature on Culture with Vicco von Voss**, RiverArts Studio Gallery

December 13 – **A Hands-on Approach to Woodworking with Vicco von Voss**, RiverArts Studio Gallery

Appendix C: Marketing Plan

Chestertown RiverArts Proposed Marketing Plans Summary

The purpose of this plan is to devise strategies for increasing annual revenue by recruiting new members, cultivating additional donors and by attracting more prospective customers to visit the gallery and gift shop. It does not address the promotion of individual shows, since press releases, posters and advertising activities are included in each event plan by the exhibition committee managing the show.

The plan proposes metrics for measuring the effectiveness of each initiative and identifies both short-term marketing initiatives in which success can be measured upon completion, and long-term initiatives (such as cultivating dedicated donors) in which the relative success will be measured over time. In addition, the plan suggests events intended to leverage the assets that this committee identified as RiverArts' strengths in accomplishing its marketing objectives.

It should be noted that marketing is not advertising. Marketing is defined figuratively as "selling"—in that one must first "sell" the prospective customer on the benefits of acquiring a particular product or service in order to sell them the actual item. The most effective vehicle for "selling" is word-of-mouth delivered by an objective third party who will not benefit personally from the transaction.

Therefore, an effective and resourceful marketing plan for an organization such as RiverArts should include methodologies for engaging non-members and other organizations in entertaining and enriching events that are so satisfying that they tell others. Such enthusiasm creates highly effective (unpaid) third-party advocates. For this reason, the marketing committee must work closely with the program committee in devising programs that not only enlighten and entertain members and guests, but expand the organization's reach, build good will among a growing audience of supporters and generate profits.

Examples of proposed program-based marketing initiatives:

Attracting new members

RiverArts' current membership already includes a significant percentage of the artists and artisans in our region, and each show has attracted more new members from outside the area. With solid market penetration among artists RiverArts must rely on increasing non-artist members to grow the organization. We propose a lecture series based on the popular TED Talks that feature innovative thought leaders from different fields. The series would include a reception (with cash bar) for guests to mingle and peruse the gallery. An admission charge would apply for non-members.

Cultivating dedicated donors

This would be a long-term effort to build perceived value within the community and to invite wealthy donors who support other valued organizations to extend their generosity to RiverArts. This might be accomplished by planning exhibitions that engage other organizations, such as a nautical show featuring images of the Sultana with an invitation to Sultana Project supporters. One of their executives could welcome guests and give a brief description of their organization. We might also consider an exhibition of animal/pet images in partnership with the Humane Society. Such shows would afford opportunities for both organizations to expand their base of supporters.

Attracting more prospective customers

This would likely involve printed promotions at locations that attract tourists and local patrons. An inexpensive way to broaden our reach would be to partner with others in printing a joint promotion listing all the galleries in Chestertown. Galleries can distribute them to visitors and also place them at local restaurants and businesses. To increase on-site sales we might design themed gift shop displays targeted to gift-giving holidays and special occasions. Major retailers rely on this strategy to trigger impulse purchases that might otherwise be put off and forgotten,

and we can too.

Additional Details: Marketing metrics:

Measurement criteria differs between short-term and long-term marketing initiatives.

Short-term initiatives

1. The revenue generated by short-term initiatives must be significantly greater than the expenses required.
2. The net profit must warrant the volunteer hours required to plan, manage and execute the initiative.
3. The initiative must provide intrinsic value to members and attendees.
4. The initiative must position RiverArts as an innovative leader among comparable arts organizations and a positive influence in the community.

Long-term initiatives

1. The revenue and/or intrinsic value generated by long-term initiatives must be significantly greater than the expenses required.
2. The net profit and/or intrinsic value must warrant the volunteer hours required to plan, manage and execute the initiative.
3. The initiative must be consistent with RiverArts' mission and vision.
4. The initiative must provide intrinsic value to members, attendees, and prospective donors.
5. The initiative must position RiverArts as an innovative leader among comparable arts organizations and a positive influence in the surrounding community.
6. The initiative must provide a worthwhile benefit to the community that can be leveraged in securing individual and institutional donations and grants.

7. If possible, the initiative should be attractive to a broad audience and repeatable, so that the cash and effort required to produce subsequent editions is reduced while the number of attendees grows through word-of-mouth

Attracting new members:

RiverArts' current membership already includes significant percentage of the artists and artisans in our region, and each show has attracted more new members from outside the area. The high quality of members' work, RiverArts' very attractive gallery, well-managed monthly shows, our popular First Friday openings and reasonable membership costs have proved so effective in recruiting new artists members that a marketing initiative aimed at artists appears unnecessary at this time.

Therefore, the most promising avenue for growing our membership is by recruiting non-artists who appreciate art and enjoy being part of a an engaging, creative energetic and fun organization. This would require devising programs that provide creative stimulation on a variety of topics which do not require the participant to be artistically inclined to appreciate. It would be important to keep the programs consistent with RiverArts artistic mission of promoting creativity.

We propose developing a program series similar to the "TED Talks", in which thought leaders from different fields are given 18 minutes to "give the talk of their life". The acronym TED stands for Technology, Entertainment, Design and is promoted under the slogan "ideas worth spreading". The brief, intelligent, tightly focused presentations have attracted a large following.

A similar RiverArts series might be entitle "ICE Breakers", and the acronym could stand for Imagination, Creativity and Expression. "Imagination" could focus on individuality and unique and surprising perspectives that cause us to think outside our own experiences. "Creativity" could focus on innovative problem solving. "Expression" could include the performing arts and entertainment. Monthly presentations

would include a brief reception (with cash bar) prior to the presentation(s) and an open house afterwards for guest to mingle and discuss the presentation and peruse the artwork in the gallery.

Such a marketing initiative would be perfectly suited for the RiverArts gallery. We can leverage our attractive gallery and quality artwork to provide an entertaining venue and can count on our creative and enthusiastic members to provide a welcoming atmosphere.

Cultivating dedicated donors

This would require a long-term effort to build perceived value within the community and to invite wealthy donors who support other valued organizations to extend their generosity to RiverArts. The intent would not be to lure donors away from other organizations, but to provide additional avenues in which prospective donors can make a positive impact in their community.

In order to build mutually beneficial alliances with other organizations, we might host art exhibitions that engage other organizations, such as a nautical show featuring images of the Sultana with an invitation to Sultana Project supporters. One of their executives could welcome guests and give a brief description of their organization.

We might also consider such shows as an exhibition of animal/pet images in partnership with the Humane Society and/or Eastern Shore images with the Chesapeake Bay Environmental Center. Such shows would afford opportunities for both organizations to expand their base of supporters.

It might also be helpful to spend a few minutes at each First Friday event welcoming guests and listing our current and upcoming events and educational programs. We could resurrect the "People's Choice" award that was popular at the Arts League and incorporate awarding the prize with our welcoming talk. Combining the award presentation might entice people to stay for the presentation and could provide a receptive audience.

Attracting more customers

This would likely involve printed promotions at locations that attract tourists and local patrons and might include placing ads on our website featuring items in our gift shop. A cost-effective way to broaden our reach would be to partner with others in printing a joint promotion listing all the galleries in Chestertown. Galleries could distribute them to visitors and also place them at local restaurants and businesses.

We might also consider hosting reciprocal exhibitions with other nearby arts organizations so that our artists can reach new prospective buyers and we can attract new visitors into the gallery and gift shop. And by reinstalling the “People’s Choice” award (mentioned above) we would involve guests in evaluating each entry in the exhibition. This sort of scrutiny can deepen one’s appreciation of the work and inspire them to purchase their favorite.

To increase on-site sales we should change the merchandise frequently. It might also help to design themed gift shop displays targeted to gift-giving holidays and special occasions. Major retailers rely on this strategy to trigger impulse purchases that might otherwise be put off and forgotten. We can too.