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**Notes from editor (not for publication):**

Notes from editor (not for publication): What a nice interview. I shuffled a few things around with the introduction. Please make sure I didn't totally botch what you meant at line 74.



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 | ~~River Gallery School of Art celebrates River Gallery~~  
2 | ~~School marks 50 years of studio art for all-creativity and~~  
3 | ~~community-~~

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

4 | ~~Kimberly Carmody and Donna Hawes reflect on the~~  
5 | ~~school's half-century legacy of bringing art instruction to a~~  
6 | ~~communityGallery 34 exhibition launches a year-long series-~~  
7 | ~~honoring the school's legacy~~

####END SUBHED####

8 | TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

~~"When Ric and Barbara had the idea of providing a~~  
~~place to nurture each person's creative spark, a different kind of~~

art school was born. I was lucky enough to walk up the stairs of 127 Main many years ago and I discovered there a second home.”

— Lydia Thomson, former RGS Artistic Director

AMONG AN IMPRESSIVE LIST OF ENDURING AREA ARTS ORGANIZATIONS THAT CONTRIBUTE INVALUABLY TO GREATER BRATTLEBORO’S CULTURAL CHARACTER IS BRATTLEBORO MUSIC CENTER (FOUNDED 1952), BRATTLEBORO MUSEUM & ARTS CENTER (1972), ACTORS THEATER PLAYHOUSE (C. 1975), THE VERMONT JAZZ CENTER (1975), BRATTLEBORO SCHOOL OF DANCE (1976), SANDGLASS THEATER (1982). AND THE RIVER GALLERY SCHOOL SCHOOL OF ART (RGS).

THIS YEAR IS THE 50TH BIRTHDAY OF THAT AS DESCRIBED IN its publicity, the River Gallery School and gallery on Main Street. According to a press release, the RGS of Art (RGS), founded in 1976 by Barbara Merfeld Campman and Ric Campman, “has grown over five decades into a vibrant, inclusive arts organization serving people of all ages, abilities, and experience levels.”

“At the heart of River Gallery School’s work is the belief that everyone benefits from creative expression,” school leaders write. “The school is committed to fostering an inclusive art-making community, with programs intentionally designed to support equity, access, and belonging.”

The birthday bash planned includes a year-long series of events will honoring the school’s legacy 50th birthday, starting with a show in the RGS Gallery 34 that opened on Feb. 6, “A Shared Legacy: Artwork by the Founding Family,” a show now open at the RGS Gallery 34. It features works by the elder Campmans, as well as by members of the founding family, children and grandchildren among them: Taj Campman, Finn Campman, Helen Schmidt, Maeve Campman, Tula Campman, Aleika McAllister, and Akirno Carl Raychaudhury.

30 The Commons had a chance to talk recently with RGS  
31 Executive Director Kimberly Carmody, and Donna Hawes, who'd  
32 held that position in the past.

33 I value that the RGS is among the most enduring arts  
34 establishments in the area. And I admire its capacity to garner  
35 such support — volunteer and otherwise — and its leaders'  
36 eagerness to collaborate and cooperate, to reach out and to  
37 serve.

38 "When Ric and Barbara had the idea of providing a  
39 place to nurture each person's creative spark, a different kind of  
40 art school was born," Lydia Thomson, former RGS artistic director,  
41 says. "I was lucky enough to walk up the stairs of 127 Main many  
42 years ago, and I discovered there a second home."

43 The Commons talked recently with Kimberly Carmody,  
44 the organization's executive director, and Donna Hawes, who'd  
45 held that position from 2014 to 2022.

46 \* \* \*

47 **Annie Landenberger (AL):** Fifty years! Congratulations.  
48 What's in the works?

49 **Kimberly Carmody (KC):** We normally rent our Gallery  
50 34 out each month to local artists and they do with the space  
51 what they like, but we put that on hold ~~that's and t so~~ the School  
52 is doing a [can present a] slate of shows this year to celebrate. The  
53 work will be for sale and, in honor of our 50th, 50% of the  
54 proceeds will come to the school and 50% will go to the artists.

55 The first is this shared legacy show which honors the  
56 founding family. The second show will be an exhibition of River  
57 Gallery School teaching artists past and present — an alumni  
58 show for teachers, essentially.

59 We're also going to honor Bob George, our local  
60 treasured photographer, with a summer show of his work over the  
61 decades in Brattleboro [and at RGS, including where he has  
62 taught archival prints courses on making archival photo prints].

63 -Then we have a couple of events coming up in the fall  
64 that will culminate the 50th.

65 | Our second-to-last show in Gallery 34 in October will  
66 | have all the pieces that are donated by local artists for “Off the  
67 | Wall,” ~~At~~ Nov. 7 Golden Anniversary Gala at Retreat Farm’s  
68 | North Barn ~~will also be our signature fundraiser, “Off the Wall,”~~  
69 | ~~where we receive donations from local artists.~~ People participate  
70 | by lottery ticket and literally get to take things off the wall. And so  
71 | that’s going to be our real birthday party. We’re going to  
72 | celebrate, give back to the community, have amazing food.

73 | ~~And so our second-to-last show in Gallery 34 will have~~  
74 | ~~all the pieces that are donated for Off the Wall shown in the~~  
75 | ~~school in October.~~

76 | We’ll end the year with a children’s show because, you  
77 | know, the children are the future.

78 | ~~And w~~We are also making a documentary this year to  
79 | honor our 50 years. That’s going to show at Latchis Theater in  
80 | early December. We’ll have a Q-&A afterwards and a little  
81 | reception ~~at the pub.~~ So that’s the slate.

82 | And we’re going to have a number of events that will  
83 | target very specific audiences.

84 | ~~AL: That’s a lot. Can you tell me where the school stands~~  
85 | ~~now financially?~~

86 | ~~KC:~~ We are envisioning and manifesting raising an  
87 | additional \$100,000 this year toward our general operating costs  
88 | so that we can continue not only here on site, but in the Art for  
89 | All program, which is out in the community. ~~And we’re going to~~  
90 | ~~have a number of events that will target very specific audiences.~~

91 | ~~AL: And that will go toward.~~

92 | ~~KC: We’re raising funds to go towards our general~~  
93 | ~~operating costs so that we can continue [...] not only here on site,~~  
94 | ~~but in the Art for All program, which is out in the community.~~

95 | ~~A.L.:~~ You offer a range a range of programs. Could you  
96 | describe them?...

97 | ~~K.C.:~~ At a staff meeting yesterday, we shared ~~out~~ about  
98 | what people are doing and the work that’s happening right now  
99 | in the community and with classes on site here ~~—~~. We offer

100 | studio classes for children, classes for middle school, for tweens,  
101 | for teens, for adults;

102 | We offer very specific classes in watercolor or pastels or  
103 | drawing, as well as workshops. These are led not just by  
104 | teaching artists who are employees here, but by local artists who  
105 | come share their expertise.

106 | -All of those offerings are doing really well. We had the  
107 | best tuition enrollment we've ever had, I think, this past fall.

108 | **A.L.:** What's the draw?

109 | **K.C.:** What we put first is nurturing people's  
110 | relationships with their own creativity. And linked with that is  
111 | community.

112 | -People, even people who have their own studios at  
113 | home, come to River Gallery to work because of the community.  
114 | And that is really, I think, what people are turning to and  
115 | embracing to get past the news every day.

116 | **Donna Hawes (DH):** The longevity of the school is the  
117 | amazing foundational community here. Everybody needs each  
118 | other when they come through that door. It's very comforting.

119 | -There's been such support over the decades: it's clear  
120 | that nobody wants to see it go away.

121 | **A.L.:** Sounds like you're the school is in good health.

122 | **K.C.:** We're not in any way fearful that the doors will  
123 | close. However, the amount of funds that it takes to offer the  
124 | kinds of programs that we have here [and in Art for All programs  
125 | in the community is significant].

126 | It takes time and planning and organization and admin  
127 | and networking — those are the kinds of hidden costs.

128 | One of the intentions is to really create sustainability in  
129 | the programs we're doing: Working with refugees;  
130 | Working with Bradley House seniors [in collaboration with  
131 | Brooks Memorial Library through a Creative Aging Grant from  
132 | the Vermont Arts Council]. Working with Ability Arts [for  
133 | individuals with disabilities] in our Ability Arts program.  
134 | Working with Families First, and Art in Schools: we're

135 | ~~w~~Working with four public schools [for our Art in Schools](#)  
136 | [program](#).

137 | I'm trying to establish that kind of longevity so we're not  
138 | simply reacting, but we're actually able to provide a bedrock,  
139 | which is what then goes to feed our mission revolving around the  
140 | belief that Ric and Barbara instilled in everything here: that  
141 | creativity is a birthright. We provide that opportunity for people  
142 | to really delve into that.

143 | **D.H.:** It's the lifeblood for so many. [It's the value] of  
144 | hands-on experiences.-

145 | I have witnessed over the many years that it really is  
146 | important to get your hands dirty and get them into something  
147 | that's engaging, that has a push and pull.

148 | You're learning, you're experiencing, and you're doing it  
149 | all within a safe community. It's very joyful and very positive, and  
150 | it keeps people coming back to themselves.

151 | **A.L.:** What's your demographic?

152 | **D.H.:** The demographic obviously in this community is  
153 | aging. Regardless of that, the age demographic here is mixed,  
154 | isn't it?

155 | **K.C.:** It is. We still have a large demographic of people  
156 | that I would say are over 55 for sure. And we're doing a really  
157 | steady job of outreach to children and teenagers.

158 | -The demographic that's most challenging is young  
159 | adults. They have families, and they're working. But we really  
160 | make an effort to have classes on weekends and evenings, so  
161 | we're seeing those folks as well.

162 | **D.H.:** Of course, there're the younger students starting  
163 | with toddlers on up, which is the feeder to the adult programs.

164 | **A.L.:** And those numbers are pretty steady coming  
165 | through even though people are having fewer babies?

166 | **K.C.:** Yeah, you know, ~~w~~We just completed a strategic  
167 | plan with the board. And one of the things we've really been  
168 | looking at is what growth means for River Gallery School.

169 |           And the best discussions that have yielded some answers  
170 | to that question have come from looking, for instance, at the  
171 | Child Studio. When Barbara started that, I went to it — the day  
172 | the school opened in 1976.

173 |           **A.L.:** Wow. Pretty special that you were here at the  
174 | beginning.

175 |           **K.C.:** There were never more than 12 kids in that class. It  
176 | was always between six and 12 kids. That’s exactly what we have  
177 | now. We are offering it a couple more days a week and changing  
178 | it a little bit, but all of those classes have between six and 12  
179 | kids. That is the winning recipe.

180 |           When you find something ~~like that~~ that works for over 50  
181 | years, you realize that is sustainable for our community here.

182 |           And there are more people coming from local towns  
183 | now into Brattleboro for those experiences than there were in the  
184 | 1970s and ‘80s. People who live in Wilmington or Dover or over  
185 | in Keene might not have come to Brattleboro for an art class then.  
186 | Today they do.

187 |           **A.L.:** Among your alumni, as you look back, have any  
188 | among them gone on to work as fulfilled lifetime artists?

189 |           **D.H.:** Oh, yeah. ~~I think we have some of that data,~~  
190 | ~~certainly a lot of that data anecdotally.~~

191 |           **K.C.:** Definitely. Costume designer, filmmaker, illustrator,  
192 | cartoonist, painter. But one of the things also that has come out of  
193 | so many of the programs that started when you were here as  
194 | director, Donna, is having young people in high school come to  
195 | assist and learn about teaching.

196 |           And with an effort to codify things, we now have a  
197 | program we’re calling “Creative Career Pathways” that’s currently  
198 | funded by the Vermont Women’s ~~FoundationFund,~~ and  
199 | specifically supports interns here who are in high school and in  
200 | college to help in our programs. And part of that involves their  
201 | having exhibitions here.

202 |           We have a lot of kids that came up in the Child Studio  
203 | program and then went to ~~I~~teen ~~S~~studio. And then they came

204 | back and helped in the camps with the little kids. And now  
205 | they're helping with programs, with window displays; they're  
206 | helping me research for grants and the like — giving them an  
207 | understanding and experience of what arts administration is like.

208 | **A.L.:** About how many folks are enrolled in RGS  
209 | programs?

210 | **K.C.:** Over 1,200 in 2025 — and that includes all the  
211 | Art for All programs. We're out in four different public schools,  
212 | we're working with seniors, refugees — lots of partners.

213 | **A.L.:** For Art for All, where you're really reaching out, are  
214 | you grant-dependent for any of these programs?

215 | **K.C.:** This past year, we raised around \$100,000 in  
216 | grants. That's in the budget. And so, yes, usually it's a  
217 | combination of participants [contributing], tuition in some cases,  
218 | as well as grants. And individual donors.

219 | **A.L.:** Has the current [national climate for federal arts](#)  
220 | [climate funding](#) had an impact on you?

221 | **K.C.:** We haven't had grants revoked, which is the good  
222 | news because many artists and organizations have. However,  
223 | grants I'd expected we would get a year ago when all of this went  
224 | down, [have not come through].

225 | I've also had the experience, though, with one of our  
226 | funders, the local Thomas Thompson Trust, which stepped up  
227 | beyond measure and specifically funded our refugee arts program  
228 | this past year.

229 | **A.L.:** So will you be holding classes at the new  
230 | Multicultural Community Center?

231 | **K.C.:** We do have an art space set up there, so in some  
232 | cases, yes. ~~Then, for instance, with camps, we~~ also have about  
233 | a list of about 12 refugee children who're going to come at full  
234 | scholarship to our February vacation camp. ~~But we~~ will most  
235 | likely do that here in an interest of giving everyone the  
236 | opportunity to get to know one another rather than have things  
237 | feel segregated.

238 | **A.L.:** Got it.

239 |           -Donna, your perspective as a sort of unretired retired  
240 | administrator here\_\_\_\_\_

241 |           **K.C.:** That's the perfect description of Donna.

242 |           **A.L.:** How do you feel about how things are progressing?

243 |           **D.H.:** I couldn't be happier. So three years ago, when I  
244 | was ready to pass the torch, we got word that Kimberly was  
245 | interested, and then the whole thing just blossomed into this  
246 | perfect scenario. So I am extremely pleased.

247 |           **K.C.:** [---] She's an ongoing consultant on a million  
248 | topics.

249 |           **A.L.:** Why reinvent the wheel if you have such a  
250 | resource? Thank you for your time.

251 |           **K.C.:** Honestly, I would just love to say this also: **F**or the  
252 | school to have the opportunity to mount an exhibition honoring  
253 | the founding family, it just feels remarkable, it feels extraordinary.  
254 | You know, the whole **Campman** family has such deep inroads in  
255 | the community with so many people and so many organizations.

256 |           — I couldn't be more honored and grateful to be  
257 | facilitating this.

258 |           \* \* \*

259 |           For more information, visit: [rivergalleryschool.org](http://rivergalleryschool.org).

260 |           \* \* \*

261 |           *Editor's note: Stories presented as interviews in this*  
262 | *format are edited for clarity, readability, and space. Words not*  
263 | *spoken by interview subjects appear in brackets, as do editorial*  
264 | *clarifications.*

265 |           **AL:** I value that you are among the most enduring arts-  
266 | establishments in the area. And I admire your capacity to garner  
267 | such support— volunteer and otherwise— and your eagerness  
268 | to collaborate and cooperate, to reach out and to serve.

269 |           ===

270 |           The 50th anniversary year will also include several  
271 | signature events, including the Golden Anniversary Gala and Off-  
272 | the Wall event on Nov. 7 at the North Barn at Retreat Farm, and

273 | an RGS documentary film screening and discussion in December  
274 | at the Latchis Theatre.

275 | Gallery 34 will host a curated series of exhibitions  
276 | throughout 2026, celebrating the people and stories that define  
277 | RGS.

278 | Upcoming exhibits include:

279 | • May: "RGS Teaching Artists, Past and Present," Gallery  
280 | Walk: Friday, May 1.

281 | • July: "Bob George: A Shared History." Photographs of  
282 | Brattleboro and RGSchool, Gallery Walk: Friday, July 3.

283 | • October: "Off the Wall" exhibition, Gallery Walk:  
284 | Friday, Oct. 2.

285 | • December: "Seeds of the Future: A Youth Art  
286 | Exhibition," Gallery Walk: Friday, Dec. 4.

287 | As the press release expresses, "at the heart of River  
288 | Gallery School's work is the belief that everyone benefits from  
289 | creative expression. The school is committed to fostering an  
290 | inclusive art-making community, with programs intentionally  
291 | designed to support equity, access, and belonging. Looking  
292 | ahead, River Gallery School views this milestone not only as a  
293 | celebration of its history, but also as a commitment to the next  
294 | generation of artists, learners, and creative thinkers."

295 | For more information, visit: [rivergalleryschool.org](http://rivergalleryschool.org).

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

####BEGIN BIO/COATTAIL####

296 | **ANNIE LANDENBERGER** is an arts writer and columnist  
297 | for *The Commons*. She also is one half of the musical duo Bard  
298 | Owl, with partner T. Breeze Verdant.

####END BIO/COATTAIL####

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