

THE HISTORY OF ART OF PEACE TYLER

(updated 6-30-19)

The story of Art of Peace Tyler is a story of friendship. It is an inspiring narrative of creative, compassionate people coming together to celebrate the positive aspects of peace efforts in their community.

Art of Peace Tyler began several years ago when poet, speaker and peace advocate Anne McCrady, inspired by the campaign of Peace One Day to unite the world for a day of peace and nonviolence, contacted friends Mary Andrews and Rabbi Neal Katz about starting a local celebration of the United Nations International Day of Peace. Andrews was an avid peace proponent and had hosted the long-running local live music venue, Wildwood Concerts, at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Tyler. Rabbi Neal Katz was, in addition to the spiritual leader of his congregation at Temple Beth-El, a singer-songwriter and award-winning community leader and peace advocate.

McCrady had previously helped develop a Peace Day event in Belton, Texas, along with University of Mary Hardin Baylor art professor Helen Kwiatkowski and singer-songwriter Emily Kaitz. Their first peace-inspired event in September of 2009. The event included folk music, poetry readings and an art auction at a retreat center in Belton, Texas, with proceeds going to the local crisis center. They named the event The Art of Peace Festival, and for several years it featured singer-songwriters and artists celebrating the U.N. International Day of Peace. It has, in recent years, become an annual concert whose proceeds continue to support children in crisis.

Back in Tyler, McCrady and her friends began to plan an East Texas version of the Art of Peace Festival, with the idea of showcasing local artistic expression. They also hoped to begin to build a community of East Texans committed to the personal practice of peace in everyday life. With a mission of *Creativity-Compassion-Community*, it was decided that each year the Art of Peace - Tyler would benefit a Tyler social service agency, chosen as the Community Peace Honoree.

The first Art of Peace Tyler was held on a Sunday afternoon in September 2011. It included a silent art auction, poetry readings, peace information, children's art and a concert and program by David Lamotte, an internationally known peace activist and singer-songwriter. That year, the site was the UT Tyler Ornelas Center and volunteers included students from the college. The funds generated by the art auction and concert benefitted PATH, a Tyler service agency People Attempting to Help.

The next year, wanting to reach more East Texans with their message of peace, the trio decided to expand the 2012 Art of Peace Tyler. Inviting the help and enthusiasm of a circle of capable community members who had attended the first Art of Peace – Tyler celebration, the group planned a complete week of activities to celebrate September 21, the date of the U.N. International Day of Peace. Events included art projects at the Boys & Girls Club Day for Kids, a Peace Meal to celebrate diversity with Anissa Centers as guest speaker, Peace Prayer on the Square, a storytelling concert on the patio at the local grocery store FRESH, a documentary film, a worship service at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Tyler and a concert at Temple Beth-El with Tom Prasada-Rao and the Tyler Civic Chorale. Concert donations of cash and books benefitted the 2012 Peace Honoree, the Literacy Council of Tyler.

In 2013, Art of Peace Tyler continued to widen its circle of Tyler area peacemakers, spiritual leaders, volunteers, artists, art forms, venues, non-profit groups and supporters. The Art of Peace organizing committee had solidified into a close-knit group. Activities included children painting a peace mural at the Boys & Girls Club of East Texas Day for Kids, a worship service at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, a Peace Meal at the East Texas Islamic Society mosque with guest speaker farm-to-table advocate Carmen Sosa, a showcase of inspiring personal stories by directors of service organizations, a poetry and music open mic at Cork, an art show in the downtown Regions Bank lobby, a documentary film at the Tyler Public Library and as a final celebration, a concert at Liberty Hall by noted Austin singer-songwriter and Texas Official State Musician, Sarah Hickman. The 2013 Art of Peace Honoree was the East Texas Crisis Center.

In 2014, Art of Peace - Tyler expanded even further to new venues that include city parks, museums, businesses and other public spaces. The Art of Peace – Tyler committee continued to gather people from a diverse cross-section of Tyler at each event. The 2014 Peace Honoree was the East Texas Food Bank. Exciting events included a college-campus conversation on personal peace, local artist Kerian Massey’s outdoor mural, *Peace through Discovery*, painted at the Discovery Science Center, the installation of a Peace Pole at the Tyler Rose Garden, a Peace Meal in the Food Bank warehouse and a tribute concert to singer-songwriter Harry Chapin who dedicated his life to fighting hunger. The final celebration was a living candle-lit peace sign on the square in downtown Tyler.

In 2015, the 5th anniversary of Art of Peace – Tyler, the celebration was again a city-wide celebration. The 2015 Peace Honoree was St. Paul Children’s Foundation. A peace pole was installed on the foundation’s playground with a peace garden to honor Dr. Duane Andrews. The peace meal was held at Marvin United Methodist Church, and the program honored the St. Paul foundation. The photo of the Art of Peace Living Peace Sign was taken in the church’s gymnasium. The peace concert that year featured Texas singer-songwriter Ruthie Foster. Other events included the Boys & Girls Club of East Texas Day for Kids and a peace documentary at the Tyler Public Library. The peace poetry anthology, as well as the juried visual art exhibit at the Tyler Museum of Art took the title *Intertwined – Peace as a Shared Endeavor*.

The 2016 Art of Peace - Tyler theme was one inspired by the annual peace honoree, the Samaritan Counseling Center of Tyler: *Paths to Peace – Journey to Wholeness*. Sharing that theme were the Art of Peace International Peace Poetry collection and the Tyler Museum of Art exhibit, which included peacemakers from across Texas. The 2016 Peace Meal was held at University of Texas at Tyler, and the annual Peace Pole was installed at Woldert Park in North Tyler. The Peace Concert featured Peter Yarrow of the renowned folk group, Peter, Paul and Mary. Other events included a praise service, yoga, meditation, children’s activities and a peace conversation among community members and students. The annual Living Peace Sign photo was taken on the Square in downtown Tyler. A Peace Award was also bestowed on an international entry in the Downtown Tyler Film Festival.

In 2017, Art of Peace - Tyler’s theme was *Building Bridges—Making Peace*. The Community Peace Honoree was Habitat for Humanity of Smith County. Local singer-songwriters presented a night of Peace Music at Stanley’s Barbeque. The Peace Poetry Reading & Open Mic were held at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, and the Peace Art Exhibit, at the Tyler Museum of Art. Also included in the week were a Peace rally, a meditation session, and a Day for Kids booth. On Peace Day, the Peace Pole was be dedicated in beautiful renovated Bergfeld Park, with the Hogg Middle School choir singing and a ballerina from the Moscow Ballet performing the Dance of

Peace Dove. That evening, the Peace Meal was catered by TISD students at the Career & Technology Center, with the Living Peace Sign photographed afterwards. In partnership with the East Texas Symphony Orchestra, a documentary featuring Yo-Yo Ma's international work was shown at Liberty Hall. Meditation was hosted by the Tyler Public Library and boards for the next Habitat for Humanity House were decorated with messages of peace at each of our events.

The 2018 Art of Peace celebration theme was *Sowing Seeds of Peace*. The 2018 Peace Honoree was the City of Tyler's Keep Tyler Beautiful Committee. Events included a Honk for Peace rally, a Peace Art booth at the Boys & Girls Club Day for Kids, a night of Peace Music at Stanley's BBQ, a juried Peace Art Exhibit at the Tyler Museum of Art, a Community Peace Meal at the Tyler ISD Career & Technology Center, a Tyler Public Library Peace Meditation session, a Tyler Talking Together conversation led by the Tyler Together Race Relations Forum that encouraged sharing personal experiences with race, the dedication of a beautiful metal Peace Pole at Rose Rudman Park, a Peace Concert with Trout Fishing in America at Liberty Hall, a concert audience group photo that included a peace sculpture of a hand in a peace sign, and a Spoken Word at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Tyler that included peace poetry and stories. In honor of Art of Peace, InSpirity Publishers produced an international peace poetry chapbook anthology called, *Seeds of Peace*. In fact, the international anthology and news of the Tyler celebration were on the front page of the Bhutan national newspaper. The 2018 Art of Peace week was another huge success. The peace events closed with the awarding of the Art of Peace Award to a young film-maker's short film about friendship at the 2018 Downtown Tyler Film Fest.

The 2019 Art of Peace celebration theme will be *Living Peace*, with Tyler citizens living Lives of Peace as the honorees. Events will include many of those from past years, with a concentration of events on the weekend of the United Nations International Day of Peace, September 21. Art of Peace will again have a peace art booth with children's activities at the Boys & Girls Club of East Texas Day for Kids at Bergfeld Park, as well as a peace meditation session at the Tyler Public Library. Peace Weekend will begin with Honk for Peace at noon downtown on Friday and move to the Living Peace Open Mic Friday evening at the Discovery Science Center annex with spoken word poet, Mike Guinn, as emcee. On Saturday at noon, peacemakers will dedicate the 2019 Peace Pole being installed at McDonald Road Park. Saturday evening, Art of Peace will mark their 9th Peace Celebration at the Ornelas Center. The evening will include a community meal, an inspirational program called *Lives of Peace*, a concert by local singer-songwriters paying tribute to legendary peace pioneer Pete Seeger, and the group's annual Living Peace photo. Throughout the week, participants will be able to enjoy a self-guided Peace Tour of Tyler's various peace art installations and the juried visual art show, *Living Peace*, at the Tyler Museum of Art, as well as the online peace poetry anthology, also entitled *Living Peace*, at the Art of Peace website, tylerpeace.com.

The three original Art of Peace Tyler founders are still central to the annual celebration, which, now in its 9th year, is led by a committee of creative, compassionate and community-minded people. Each year Art of Peace Tyler affirms the need for Peace in answer to national and global unrest, violence and political conflict. Art of Peace Tyler organizers hope that event participants will be reminded of the importance of Creativity, Compassion and Community as the first steps to local and international conflict resolution, as well as the path to personal Peace.

#####