

Governor's Art Show in Loveland

The Show with Heart –
The Heart of Rotary



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What has become a major cultural event in Colorado over the past three decades—the annual Governor's Art Show & Sale, in Loveland—has also become, over time, a model for how multiple local Rotary clubs can come together, along with partnering sponsors and many others, for a shared mission. It's a mission that year after year exemplifies the spirit of Rotary—enhancing the lives of all concerned while raising funds for vital causes, as well as boosting local and state economies.

At the January 2024 school board meeting, Kim Akeley-Charron of Thompson Education Foundation (TEF) was eager to tell Thompson School District (TSD) board members why she had nominated the Governor's Art Show—along with its organizers, the Thompson Valley and Loveland Rotary Clubs—for their much deserved Community Champion Award. “The Governor's Art Show,” she said, “has been a sustaining support for Thompson Education Foundation's Resiliency Fund for Unhoused Youth.”

The Governor's Art Show & Sale was the brainchild of local area Rotarians many years ago as a way to highlight the talent of local artists, as well as to generate revenue to benefit Rotary-sponsored charitable projects and causes. Since its more humble beginnings, it has steadily grown in scope and influence. It now garners statewide interest.

“This is now one of the largest fine art shows to exclusively feature Colorado artists,” Diane Lapierre stated proudly. Lapierre is a library director, Loveland Rotarian, and co-chair of the two-club Governor's Art Show Committee.



Seen above, when the Community Champion Award was presented to the two Rotary clubs by Thompson School District, are (front row, starting 2nd from left) Diane Lapierre of Loveland Rotary, Kim Akeley-Charron of TEF, and Kathi Wright, Craig Van Wechel, and John Kinkade of Thompson Valley Rotary.

Photo courtesy of Thompson School District

The Resiliency Fund to which Akeley-Charron pointed in her remarks at the school board's award presentation is the locally managed fund that TEF uses to implement the federal law known as the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1987. The law was designed to support the enrollment and education of students experiencing homelessness. As Akeley-Charron explained to the board, "One third of net proceeds from the Governor's Art Show each year is dedicated to the Resiliency Fund, which helps support these families and students experiencing food insecurity, gas and transportation needs, and emergency situations."

In truth, this fund also helps to support all *highly mobile students* in the Loveland area. That's a designation inclusive of not only *unhoused students*, but also youth in foster care and students of migrant or refugee families.

"Through [this fund]," Akeley-Charron continued, "we are also able to provide resource closets [offering shoes, clothing, and hygiene items] and scholarships. This sustained effort [by the Rotary clubs, through the art show] has allowed us to increase our annual support to families and students, and to grow new ways of providing services!"

It was actually a personal connection formed with a homeless student, some years ago, that inspired John Kinkade, an art gallerist, former Thompson Valley Rotarian, and longtime co-chair of the two-club committee, to advocate that the art show adopt TEF's Resiliency Fund as its primary charitable recipient of its net proceeds.

"One year, during our Rotary Art Scholarship interviews, I was touched by the challenging life of one of our applicants, a homeless girl living in a halfway house in Windsor," Kinkade recalled. "It spurred me to inquire about homelessness in our school district. All of this led to the show's partnership with the [TEF's] Resiliency Fund for Unhoused Youth."

Kinkade insists that the show's continued partnership with this worthy cause—"the assistance of school children who were without permanent housing," as he puts it—has really helped boost fundraising. "Understanding that part of the net proceeds from the show would support this cause gave sponsors that extra reason to become sponsors. Thus, we found our purpose and motto: *Art With Heart*," he said.



The former Monroe Early Childhood building in Loveland is soon to be the new Northern Colorado Regional Youth Shelter, a testament to the sustained efforts of Thompson Education Foundation (funded by the art show) and other partnering organizations on behalf of a vulnerable population, unhoused youth.

Photo courtesy of Loveland Reporter-Herald

This year, organizers, sponsors, and the artists of Loveland's art show are indeed able to see this charitable focus they have bearing fruit of a quite tangible kind. The Loveland City Council has just recently approved an existing 6,000 square foot education facility to be repurposed for a new youth shelter to address the immediate needs of the area's unhoused, unaccompanied youth. This project has been spearheaded by TEF (the art show's beneficiary), along with the local school districts, the county, and several nonprofits. Kinkade sees this latest milestone in social activism at the local level as yet another testimony to the art show's positive influence.

"We are now just weeks away from... opening a halfway house for homeless students. I look at this as the art show having provided me with an opportunity to assist in making a difference in young peoples lives," Kinkade reminisced. "I

will forever be grateful for that opportunity. It has given me great joy."

Since 2016, the Governor's Art Show has donated more than \$120,000 to Thompson Education Foundation.



The Governor's Art Show annually welcomes more than 3,100 visitors from more than 17 states.

Photo courtesy of Governor's Art Show

Besides the positive benefits each year coming to these youth, the Governor's Art Show funds those art scholarships to which Kinkade referred. Both clubs, out of the other two-thirds of net proceeds from the show, each allocate money for these scholarships for high school seniors planning to pursue an art degree and a professional art career. "The art scholarships have added another dimension to the good that this show does," agreed Craig Van

Wechel, another Thompson Valley Rotarian, local businessman, and longtime supporter of the art show.

"I originally got involved with the Governor's Art Show in 1993 when I was asked to produce the show's catalog for the first time, which I've been doing ever since," remembered Van Wechel. "In 2015, I joined the Thompson Valley Rotary and became more involved with the inner workings of the show," he continued. "It has been extremely interesting and thrilling to watch the show progress throughout the years to become one of the best shows in the state that features only Colorado artists. It is an honor to be a part of a show that does so much good for the community and the state."

Although some have misconstrued the show's name to refer to the Rotary District Governor (for District 5440 which includes Northern Colorado, Wyoming, and Western Nebraska), the naming of the show was really an aspirational gesture on the part of Rotarians in an effort to lure the state's governor to attend. It wasn't until 2022, when current Colorado Governor Jared Polis visited the show, that the show's long awaited namesake appeared. And he came the following year, in 2023, too! By all accounts, Governor Polis loves the show and plans to return in 2024 for the 33rd annual show which runs from May 11 through June 9.

"The Governor's Art Show encourages investment by recognizing current Colorado artists, displaying the work of Colorado students, and providing scholarships for developing young artists." Thus Polis greeted art show attendees in 2023, in the art show's catalog.

Lapierre and others on the two-club committee have definitely noted that the enthusiasm on the part of sponsors and the resultant revenue have both risen in the last two years following the pandemic. The show is now generating art sales topping \$200,000, and net proceeds from the show's sales (after the 60 percent that goes to the artists) and sponsorships has exceeded \$60,000.

Perhaps one reason this annual cultural tradition has thrived here in Loveland for so long is that the show has demonstrated its capacity to impact people well beyond the walls of the Loveland Museum—the show's venue for most of its three-decade history (after it's first few years of being hosted in a local bank building)—and long after the show closes each year.

"Being part of an art show that has such an incredible impact within the community is a wonderful thing. Even if you are not an art collector, supporting a project that supports artists, students, and businesses on so many levels is a very good thing," observed Van Wechel.

Nanci Garnand, a local realtor, Loveland Rotarian, and someone who has a long and varied history with the show, asserts very much the same thing about the show's impact.

"The show provides prestige for the artists that are selected for the show, and it brings people to Loveland, to the museum and the lodging and restaurant businesses," Garnand said. "I also love the fact that as a show sponsor, I have had the opportunity to visit and get to know some of the artists and follow their paths," she added.

One such featured artist whose work was featured in eight different Governor's Art Shows over the years, watercolorist Dick Schilling, a retired dentist and a Loveland Rotarian himself, feels privileged to have been a part of this long Loveland tradition. "It was an honor always to be selected, but in the early years it was a special thrill to show along with nationally known artists," remembered Schilling.

But Schilling also recognizes the importance of the show beyond the career-boosting benefits it brings to the artists. He sees it as cultural mainstay of this community, long known for its focus on the arts. "The Loveland Museum was the perfect place to host an important show and the staff was up to the challenge. They

have continued to this day to create a spectacular experience for art lovers," he said.

Governor Polis himself sees the big picture of the Governor's Art Show. He has been quoted as saying that such investments in the arts are "fundamental to growing and supporting the art industry, which contributes \$13.7 billion to the Colorado economy as a whole."

Not only is the Governor's Art Show a shining example of a long-running, successful Rotary project for the local community that continues to provide substantial benefits to all concerned, it's also a shining example of a local project that depends on the ongoing collaboration and support (both in donations and labor) of two different Rotary clubs—something that, as all seasoned Rotarians know, isn't always easy to pull off.

When asked how the two clubs have managed to work together effectively on the show's planning and execution, year after year, Kinkade noted that there has been a steep learning curve involved.

"I believe in the importance of clubs working together; however, it was very difficult to make it happen. The volunteer management of the show is not one of just policy making. The show requires sleeves to be rolled up," he said. "There were times when tasks that should have been shared were often left to a few."

Both Kinkade and Van Wechel agreed that the two clubs have in recent years found new footing with regard to the shared responsibilities that are vital to the show's success. The synergy between the two clubs, something that's been a long time in coming, is now finally manifesting itself.

"The secret to our success going forward," stated Van Wechel, "is staying united in what we are doing. This show is a positive project for both clubs because it benefits the artists, the community, and various other causes. Sometimes we just need to remind ourselves of that fact." 