

Connections

On-line artists

Computer technology connects arts community

Arts Wire, a two-year-old computer network for artists, grows as more and more artists and arts groups get on-line. North Carolina arts advocates hope to fund an extension of the network.

By SUSAN GRAY

On August 5, the National Council on the Arts convened in an austere Washington, D.C., conference room to review a set of photographs and determine whether or not the artists merited grants from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Slowly, the 16 council members surveyed the glossy images before them: bodies lying comatose in a morgue, strip-tease dancers shooting up heroin behind a run-down nightclub.

Several members frowned and rubbed their foreheads, one observer noted.

Then, they took a vote. The majority held that no federal funding would go to photographers Andres Serrano, Merry Alpern or Barbara DeGenevieve, despite an earlier recommendation for funding from an NEA visual arts peer panel.

The next day, news of the funding denial appeared on more than

Our state is so spread out — artists are spread from corner to corner. Arts Wire can combat feelings of isolation and allow us to be part of a national dialogue.

Nancy Trovillian

*Assistant Director,
North Carolina Arts Council*

500 computer screens across the country, including several scattered across North Carolina. David Mendoza, the director of the National Campaign for the Freedom of Expression, had attended the council's meeting and vigorously transcribed the event onto Arts Wire, a two-year-old computer network for the arts community.

Instantly, artists and arts organizations who were connected by their computers and modems to Arts Wire could read about the vote.

"In the past, we would have had to pick up the phone," says Perry Mixter, director for cultural affairs

at Appalachian State University. "It would have been much more cumbersome to get information and discuss it - and much more expensive."

The only national newspaper that reported the news was The Washington Post, which doesn't land on Mixter's mountain-top stoop in Boone.

With Arts Wire, Mixter could read Mendoza's commentary condemning the vote. He could comb through the transcript and draw his own conclusions about council members' comments. He could even have a "conversation" with

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A delicate balance

Durham nonprofit juggles mission, finances

The Scrap Exchange is in a transition period. Overseeing a young organization with increased demand for its products and services, the nonprofit's board and staff are searching for new ways to raise funds while still fulfilling their mission

By KATE FOSTER

Durham

The idea was simple: Act as a kind of broker to obtain clean, reusable industrial materials and recycle them at low cost for use in the creative arts. Parents, teachers and kids, in particular, would be ideal customers for the tubing, packing materials and assorted junk generated by commerce.

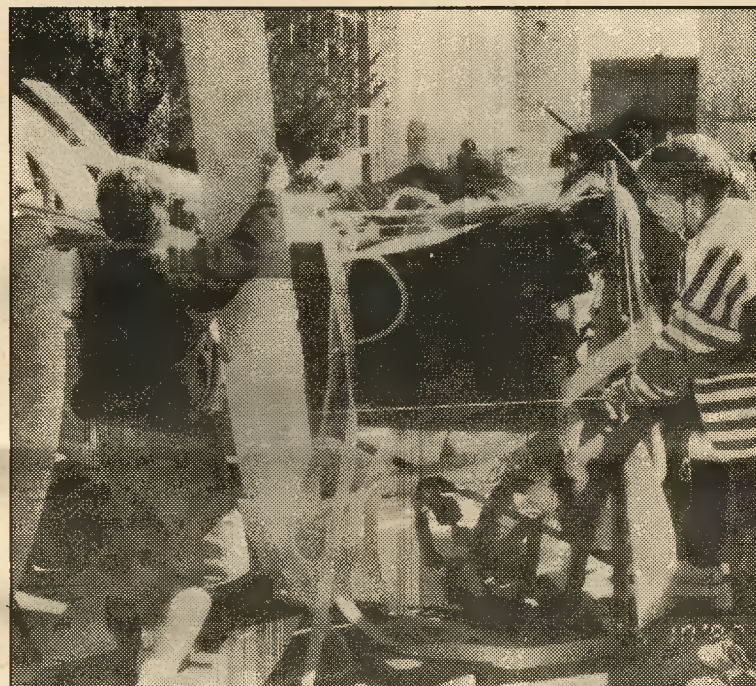
The next step was forming a

nonprofit to do the brokering. In 1991, Chris Rosenthal and Joe Appleton, both of Durham, founded the Scrap Exchange.

Two years later, Pat Hoffman stepped in as the executive director. But a growing demand for the organization's services, along with a reduction in the size of its already tiny staff, has offered Hoffman a sobering lesson in the reality of managing a nonprofit.

Tucked away in loaned space in a corner of Northgate Mall in Durham and in the New Atlantic Flea Market in Raleigh, the two Scrap Exchange stores boast an eclectic assortment of materials. For \$3.50 a bag, you can take home the likes of brightly colored foam tubes, carpet squares and wood scraps.

Collecting, sorting and displaying those materials is a huge task that requires recruiting and man-



Scenes from the Community Arts Program and Events by the Truckload.

Photos courtesy of The Scrap Exchange

aging dozens of volunteers.

But that's only part of Hoffman's job. The Scrap Exchange has generated broad demand from teachers, school groups and other organizations increasingly seeking to integrate the arts into education.

Last year, for example, the Scrap Exchange presented 150

LEADERSHIP

workshops for children and adults. In the first eight months of this year, it already has given 125.

"Many schools have become dependent on us to do that kind of programming," Hoffman says.

Simply doing its job is a big job. But as demand grows, Hoffman - like many of her peers in the non-

profit sector - finds herself increasingly preoccupied with chasing dollars just to make ends meet.

With pressure to remain financially stable, Hoffman says, it is tempting to increase the cost of products and services.

"You say to yourself, 'I know

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Regaining trust

Upheaval at NAACP holds lessons for nonprofits

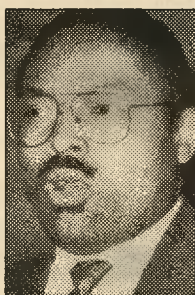
A North Carolina vice president and board member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is confident that the veteran civil rights organization will weather the storm brewing over actions of its former executive director, Benjamin Chavis Jr.

Chavis, a North Carolina native, was fired in August after board members learned that he had paid \$82,400 in NAACP funds to settle a sexual harassment lawsuit filed against him by a former employee.

Kelly Alexander Jr. of Charlotte, who has served on the NAACP's national board for 20 years and is president of the state conference, says

there is a lesson to be learned for all nonprofits: "There should be a dynamic tension between board members and staff."

"Nonprofit board people tend to spend less time focused on the internal affairs of management than would be true of a corporate board," says Alexander, who is chairman of the board of Alexander Funeral Homes Inc. of Charlotte. "As a result, you rely heavily on what your executive tells you. There needs to be adequate checks and balances to make sure something doesn't slip



Kelly Alexander Jr.

through the cracks."

While Chavis' supporters say his firing was a referendum on his policies - including dialogue with Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan - Alexander says the move was made in response to Chavis' management practices.

For example, Chavis has insisted that the bulk of an approximately \$3 million operating deficit was the fault of his predecessor, Benjamin Hooks. But a board-requested audit of NAACP finances

has failed to back that claim.

When asked about the impact Chavis' firing will have on NAACP fundraising, Alexander says that although the Ford Foundation has delayed payment of a \$500,000 grant to the national NAACP, Tar Heel foundations and corporate donors have not followed suit.

Chester Williams, senior vice president and director of Community Reinvestment at Southern National Bank in Charlotte, says his company will continue to support the state NAACP conference.

"They are going through some problems, as most organizations do from time to time," Williams says. "But the perception of the organization from my perspective is

still very good, very strong. What they stand for, I think, in North Carolina, is what we look at overall."

Alexander says NAACP board members will continue to meet with key members and contributors to assess the need for damage control.

"Ultimately, a nonprofit survives on the confidence that people in the donor community and its client community have in its ability, not only to deliver a service, but to handle money efficiently," he says. "I've been in touch with a number of our donors and the contacts have been positive. I don't think our people are going to desert us."

Barbara Solow

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