



Dublin Arts Council steps into new home

By JONATHAN ATHENS

Suburban News Reporter

Construction crews are working overtime to get the new home of the Dublin Arts Council ready for its grand opening to the public in March 17.

And while staff moved in to their second-story offices in December, there is one other member, unseen, but whose presence is felt and known, said Jennifer Ralph, spokeswoman for the arts council.

"A lot of people who have come through here get that feeling," Ralph said, referring to a certain indescribable sensation about the late Eleanor Gelpi, who owned the mansion at 7125 Riverside Drive.

Best known as the founder of Swan Cleaners, Gelpi earned another reputation — one as a pioneer for

building the art community in Central Ohio and as a pioneer for women.

Gelpi was the first woman to become president and chairwoman of the Columbus Symphony Orchestra, and was founding member of the Greater Columbus Arts Council.

"I hope she's pleased with what we're doing," Ralph said, referring to the massive renovations and upgrades to the Gelpi Mansion.

Son Paul Gelpi, now chief executive officer of Swan Cleaners, said: "She would be ecstatic."

"I believe in the work of the Dublin Arts Council and I believe we are fortunate to have such a council," he said.

Gelpi pledged \$50,000 to the arts council for its work and said he hopes others will contribute to the council.

The council hosted a fund-raiser

in late April, and in mid-June, Dublin City Council appropriated \$832,046 for renovations.

Thus far, the arts council has raised 60 percent of the \$100,000 goal, Ralph said, adding: "The Dublin community has been extremely generous ... every tiny bit helps. We cherish everything people do. We're just grateful people are supportive of us."

Much of the construction work is needed to comply with city codes and with codes set forth by the Americans with Disabilities Act, Ralph said.

The additions and improvements include adding an elevator, fire sprinklers, a second ornamental staircase, reinforcing floors, updating the electrical and plumbing systems as well as adding a second heating, ventilation and cooling system.

Other improvements include glazing, installing new windows, carpet, wallcoverings and wood-working.

"I felt very moved with what they were doing with the house, and couldn't think of a better way to honor her than to name the gallery after her," Gelpi said.

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Gelpi house was built in 1941 by Charles Krumm and is fashioned in an "eclectic French style," popular in the years

between the two world wars.

Unique aspects of the mansion include the number of kitchens, kitchenettes and cooking areas, Ralph said.

In the area that was once a basement will be a ceramic studio complete with a kiln, ready for classes beginning mid-March, Ralph said.

When completed, the mansion will feature three classrooms, a photographic darkroom, a multi-purpose room, two libraries, exhibit space and accommodations for visiting artists.

The back yard, which overlooks the Scioto River, will become an outdoor classroom, complete with thematic gardens, Ralph said.

Aside of serving as the new cen-

ter for the arts, space in the mansion will be rented for private parties, corporate meetings and receptions, she said.

In his recollections growing up in the mansion along with brother, Peter, Gelpi said: "I remember a lot of the fund-raisers and parties" thrown to raise money for the arts.

The daughter of Italian immigrants from Naples, Eleanor Gelpi's life was the classic American story of success through hard work and perseverance, Gelpi said.

Gelpi lived in the house from 1946 until her death in 1985.

She is buried in St. Joseph's Catholic cemetery.

Upon her tombstone reads the epitaph: "First Lady of the Arts."



News photos by Tim Norman (2)

Described as French eclectic style, the historic house at 7125 Riverside Drive will be opening March 17 as the new Dublin Arts Center. Work is still progressing both inside and outside of the house to get ready for its opening.

TOP: Inside the Dublin Arts Center the front stairway leads from the reception area on the first floor into an office area on the second floor. The historic house was once owned by Eleanor Gelpi.

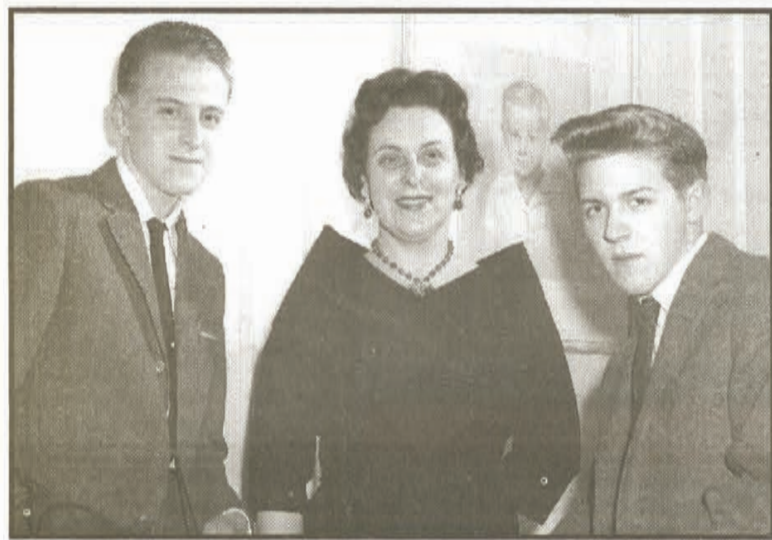


Photo courtesy of Dublin Arts Council

Eleanor Gelpi (center) with sons Paul (left) and Peter, circa 1962.