

# A Community of Art Conceived by Imagination



Mary White, WCA board president, and Jim Willis, The Bowery Stage director, stand in front of a colorful mosaic recently featured at a WCA exhibit.



**ART CAN BE VISUAL, LITERARY, MUSICAL OR A MIX THEREOF.** It can take the form of theater, painting, knitting, writing, sculpture, photography, mosaic, dancing, singing and more. Art is diverse, and its beauty is in the eye of the beholder. In that light, the board of directors of the Winnsboro Center for the Arts is working hard to ensure that community members of varied artistic tastes find something that engages, intrigues and satisfies them.

“Historically, there was a group of artists that were interested in having an arts center,” said Mary White, board president of the WCA, which was founded in 2001. “There was a study done that showed there was a lack of programming for both senior adults and children in cultural activity, and that was the basis and the reason for trying to establish an arts center.”

The WCA began primarily as a building for visual artists to use. In 2014, renovations to the early-1900s building included the addition of the Bowery Stage, a “listening room” that allowed the center to host concerts featuring world-class talent, which in turn generated funds for the center.

Jim Willis was instrumental in the design and setup of the Bowery Stage and remains the volunteer stage director. He is

in charge of booking artists and securing sponsorships for various shows. These sponsorships allow the center to attract renowned artists while keeping ticket prices affordable.

“We try to create an environment where people can come and listen to quality music,” Willis said. “We have been very fortunate to bring some very good people to our stage.” Those include well-known acts such as Michael Martin Murphey, Judy Collins, Tom Paxton, Peter Yarrow and the Dallas String Quartet, to name a few.

“Our claim to fame is the Bowery Stage and the musical entertainment,” White said. And the programming is only growing. There’s now a regular Sunday afternoon classical music series. WCA is also home to a newly formed barbershop quartet that’s trying to build a men’s chorus. To further support the performing arts scene, the stage hosts frequent theater productions and poetry readings.

“But what we really want to do is have a performance center that is also an education center,” White said. That goal has led to a summer drama camp for school-aged children that culminates with a musical written and performed by the children. There are also drama, music and art classes for younger children. For adult and teenage visual artists, the WCA holds

**RIGHT: Efton Edwards, WCA board member and art instructor, gives pointers to student Linda Newman.**

**BELOW: Mary Geisler and Marilyn Arnaud, members and volunteers at the WCA gift shop, show off the wares.**



weekly oil, acrylic and pastel painting classes. Other specialty and craft workshops include calligraphy, crochet and mosaic classes. The center also offers ukulele, guitar and keyboard classes for children and adults, as well as voice coaching sessions and songwriting consultations.

The WCA also has become a vibrant gallery space, hosting rotating exhibits of visual art from individuals and groups. Themed exhibits have included *Beyond the Mask*, *From the Earth and Generations*, *Women in the Arts*, *Men in the Arts* and works made by students of WCA classes. These exhibits attract not only art enthusiasts but also concertgoers who roam before and after stage productions. The exhibits lead beautifully into the center's curated gift shop.

Mary Geisler and Marilyn Arnaud, two active WCA volunteers, have worked hard to broaden the range of merchandise in the shop, all of which is sourced from local artists. Wares include pottery, handmade jewelry, paintings, mosaics, books from local authors, felted items and textiles such as hand-painted scarves and hand-knitted and crocheted items. The store also has a selection of art supplies related to the classes offered at the center.

The WCA's mission—"to engage people in the arts through

educational programming, cultural experiences and entertainment"—is being fulfilled with vigor, one class and one concert at a time. As the center's scope of projects has grown, it can feel like the WCA is "bursting at the seams," White said. The many concerts, theater productions and other activities often compete for space and time. But thanks to a collaboration with the city of Winnsboro, some of the classes and workshops take place at The Depot, a nearby property owned by the city.

Because of the stepped-up activity, the center has hired a part-time program coordinator, Sherry Dugan, and in the fall they will be adding another part-time position for a center director.

As it looks toward the future, the WCA, with the help of the Winnsboro Economic Development Corporation, has taken the first steps toward expanding its footprint beyond its current downtown building. In this first expansion phase, the WEDC is funding a design feasibility study, along with architectural plans, for a new Center for Arts Education.

"The general plan is, if we have this new Center for Arts Education, it would have a big multifunctional space for theater, exhibit space and for expanded art classes," White said.



Michael Martin Murphey, a multiple Grammy nominee, has graced the WCA stage on two sold-out occasions.

The WCA is getting noticed on a regular basis for quality entertainment and educational programming. A theater production directed by Becky and Bob Hibbard, *One Toe in the Grave*, was voted by *County Line Magazine* readers as the Best Play in the Upper East Side, and the WCA was voted Best Live Music Venue. The Texas Downtown Association also awarded the Bowery Stage the Downtown Partner Award.

The fuel behind the vibrancy of the WCA is its 200-plus members and many volunteers. Membership levels range from \$10 to \$1,000 and include students under 18, individuals, families, corporations, supporters, ambassadors, patrons and benefactors. And while all members grow more culturally rich through their participation, White subscribes to the notion that the community becomes richer, too, by having arts in its midst.

She likes to cite a study from the early 2000s by Richard Florida on the creative economy. "He looked at a number of large cities in the United States, and some of them are just obviously more interesting culturally, and he tried to figure out why," she said. Florida found that arts were a very important attribute for developing entrepreneurship. That's why, she said, the center's goal is "to work with the city to integrate the arts collaboratively in all aspects of the community."

"Everyone appreciates that if you take art, music, drama classes, you may learn to play an instrument or paint something. But more importantly, you are learning a creative process. Some observers take the view that creativity is the defining characteristic of developed 21st-century economies, just as manufacturing typified 19th and early 20th centuries."

The Winnsboro Center for the Arts is located at 200 Main St. in Winnsboro and can be reached at (903) 342-0686. The center and its gift shop are open Wednesday–Thursday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Visit [winnsborocenterforthearts.com](http://winnsborocenterforthearts.com) for details on classes and concerts.



## Quick Tips for Safety

### WORKING OUTDOORS? PLAY IT SAFE!

- ▶ Use a wooden or fiberglass ladder. Remember to keep a minimum of 10 feet between the ladder and power lines.

- ▶ Never touch anyone or anything that's in contact with a downed power line! Power lines may be live, so it's best to stay a safe distance away.

- ▶ Smoke detectors should be installed in every bedroom, outside of each sleeping area and on every level of your home. Test them every month to ensure they are properly working.

- ▶ Frayed or damaged extension cords are dangerous and should never be used. Damage to the cord can expose wires and cause fire and shock hazards.

- ▶ Do you have a wobbling ceiling fan? This can wear out the fan's motor over time. Turn off the fan and tighten the screws to correct the problem.

- ▶ For outdoor equipment, use lighting and power tools that are made for outdoor use.

- ▶ DIY project for the home? Always turn off the power to the circuit that you plan to work on by switching off the circuit breaker in the main service panel.

- ▶ Flying a kite is great for outdoor fun! But remember to always stay away from overhead power lines.

# Do-It-Yourself Savings

HOME IMPROVEMENT SHOWS INSPIRE A LOT OF US TO REDECORATE, AND IF YOU ARE A DIYer, you could put those same skills to work saving energy—and money.

## Insulate Your Water Heater Tank

Unless you have a new model, your water heater tank is probably not insulated. All you'll need is an insulation blanket and a friend to help you hold it in place. First, turn off your water heater and then measure it carefully. Cut the insulation blanket to fit the tank, and then wrap it around, temporarily taping it into place. Once it's secure, cut out holes where the control panels are, then tape the blanket permanently in place. This project can reduce heat loss by 25–45 percent.

## Seal Air Leaks

When you have tiny air leaks around your windows and doors, hot air can make its way into your house during summer and cold air can come in during winter. This forces your heating and cooling system to work harder to maintain a comfortable temperature. Clean the area thoroughly, removing any old, cracked caulking. Hold a caulking gun at a 45-degree angle and apply caulk while moving the gun smoothly from one side of the door or window to the other. If the caulk does not make it all the way into the crack, use a craft stick or spoon to push it in before it dries.

## Install Window Film

If you have a bigger budget for home improvement projects, you should consider replacing windows with Energy Star models. If you don't, installing a window film is a great alternative. Window films block the sun's heat from coming into the house so your air conditioner does not have to consume as much energy to cool down the space. Materials are inexpensive, and installation is relatively quick and easy.

## Build a Rain Barrel

Instead of letting rainwater fall to the ground, capture this valuable resource with a rain barrel. Place the barrel under your gutter's downspout to collect rainwater, which you can use to water plants or your lawn or to wash the dog.



## Memorial Day |

**"A hero is someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself."**  
—Joseph Campbell, author



## Wood County Electric Cooperative

501 S. Main St. • P.O. Box 1827  
Quitman, TX 75783

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## Contact Us

### CALL US

**(903) 763-2203**

### EMAIL

**info@wcec.org**

### OUTAGE HOTLINE

**1-866-415-2951**

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### MOBILE CONVENIENCE CENTER

- Monday**, First Methodist Church, *Van*
- Tuesday**, Family Dollar, *Mount Vernon*
- Wednesday**, City National Bank, *Hawkins*
- Thursday**, Brookshire's, *Winnboro*
- Friday**, Economy Drug, *Grand Saline*