

Arte's Hispanic Heritage Month offers a Fiesta of events

By Donna Doherty
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Arte Inc.'s Executive Director Daniel Diaz has a lot to smile about as his organization kicks off its second annual Hispanic Heritage Month. Peter Casolino/Register

NEW HAVEN — A few years ago Daniel Diaz and David Greco, city arts colleagues who often attended arts events together, noticed something missing among the audiences: minorities.

Diaz, an Arts Council board member, and Greco, a marketing consultant and arts patron, were used to buying their own tickets or accepting complimentary tickets from fellow arts supporters. But they soon realized that process was foreign to many people, whether for lack of exposure, the means to get there or whatever reason.

"We talked about how we could change this, how we could expose them to all the riches in New Haven, or vice versa," says Greco.

They started bringing people to events, and were surprised to see how appreciative and often overwhelmed they were by the experience. Eventually, they saw many of them start attending on their own. "It was a matter of exposure, and perhaps they were a little intimidated," says Greco.

Little did they know that the experience would be the genesis for starting Arte Inc., a nonprofit organization dedicated to "promoting Latino art and culture throughout the state." It was a timely birth, coming just as the city's Hispanic population boomed and became the country's largest ethnic minority.

Wednesday Arte begins celebration of its second annual Hispanic Heritage Month, which runs through Oct. 15 and includes art exhibits and events, dance performances and lessons, family events, a New York City museum day trip, scholarship awards and much more.

"Every time we do an event, we try to kick it up a notch," says Greco, revealing a few of the surprises in store for a couple of the events, and asking that they remain just that, surprises.

Greco, the executive director, and Diaz, the chairman of the board, are proud of the impact their two-year-old

organization has already made on the Hispanic arts scene. They are profuse in their thanks to those who have made it possible, notably the Yale Law School, whose students did all their incorporation and nonprofit paperwork for them pro bono.

One of the more anticipated events is Wednesday's kick-off Latino cooking demo and benefit party at Roomba restaurant, where owners Franco and Suzette Camacho wowed guests last year. The event is sold out for this year.

"Franco (who is from Mexico) made this soup last year that his grandmother made, and told the story of it and how it made him feel," says Greco. "It was a wonderful cultural event. Everyone said it was one of the best fund-raisers they ever went to." And the mojitos didn't hurt either.

In addition to Arte's events, the Arts Council of Greater New Haven is embracing the month with its "Latin Currents" mixed-media exhibit, featuring contemporary Latino artists, running Thursday through Sept. 14 at the JPMorganChase Small Space Gallery at the Council, 70 Audubon St. An artists' reception will be held Friday from 5-7 p.m.

That event, along with the Knights of Columbus' long-running exhibit of 16th- and 20th-century Mexican religious masterpieces, are separate events, says Greco, but all have the same goal: to promote Latino heritage, and each is helping to support the other's endeavors to that end.

The official opening of the month is Saturday when Arte hosts a free reception for its exhibit, "Our History: Here I Stay/Nuestra Historia: Aqui Me Quedo," at its office at 19 Grand Ave. It includes a smaller version of last year's New Haven Colony Historical Society collection of native artwork as well as artifacts detailing the immigration from the islands.

Arte's work is year-long and varied. It holds several Bohemian Happy Hour benefits at various Latino establishments in the city. Its exhibit during the International Festival of Arts & Ideas featuring local and international Latino artists sold a very successful 14 paintings, all but one by local artists.

It fosters relationships within the corporate community, such as with Webster Bank, which exhibits the work of a different local Latino artist every month, and Wachovia, which is supporting Arte's Oct. 8 trip to New York's El Museo de Barrio.

Arte has offered seminars in careers in the arts at free theater days for students, and hired local artists to teach classes in Danbury, New Haven, Madison and Bridgeport, which gives the artists a work opportunity and the students a chance to be exposed to successful arts role models of their own heritage.

One of the programs of which they are most proud is the scholarship program. The 2005 awards will be announced at a reception on Sept. 22.

"They are open to any Latino of any age who has lived in Connecticut for a year and has an interest in pursuing the arts as a career," says Greco. Last year's winners ranged

from nine to 57 years old, and included two professional artists and an architecture student.

Greco says their events now attract about half Hispanic and half other ethnicities, which is exactly what they set out to do: exposing one rich culture to another.

Schedule Saturday-Oct. 15

Wednesday: Latino Cooking Demo & Party, 5-8 p.m., Roomba restaurant patio, 1044 Chapel St., New Haven, \$125 per person (advanced ticket purchase). Prepared by Franco Camacho. Sold out.

Saturday: Opening reception for "Our History: Here I Stay" exhibit 5-8 p.m. Features traditional folk-art masks, saints, costumes, instruments, photographs and art by contemporary Puerto Rican artists, details about the migration from the island and contributions to the community, Arte Inc., 19 Grand Ave., New Haven, free. RSVP: (203) 787-2783. Exhibit hours: noon-5 p.m. Thursday-Sunday or by appointment.

Thursday-Oct. 14: "Latin Currents" multi-media exhibit of contemporary Latino artists, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday, Small Space Gallery, 70 Audubon St., 2nd floor, New Haven, free. Reception 5-7 p.m. Sept. 23.

Sept. 14: Salsa Lessons 5:30-6:30 p.m., Alisa's House of Salsa, 817 Chapel St., New Haven, free, but pre-registration required: (203) 787-2783.

Sept. 17: Mask Making Workshops, 10 a.m. and 1 p.m., Creative Arts Workshop, 80 Audubon St, free. Learn the history and heritage of this Puerto Rican folk art and create and paint your own mask. Limited seating, call: (203) 787-2783.

Sept. 22: Second Annual Scholarship Awards Reception, 6-9 p.m., Knights of Columbus Museum, 1 State St., \$65 advance ticket purchase. An evening of wine, hors d'oeuvres and entertainment with scholarship winners.

Sept. 23-25: Wood Carving Workshops, 3-6 p.m. Sept. 23, Creative Arts Workshop, 80 Audubon St.; 1-4 p.m. Sept. 24, 25, Knights of Columbus Museum, 1 State St., free, with master artisan/woodcarver Hector Burgos of Puerto Rico. Participants will carve and take home their own Three Kings. Pre-registration required: (203) 787-2783.

Oct. 8: El Museo del Barrio day trip to New York City: 9:30 a.m.-6 p.m., \$35. An arts road trip with Arte to this New York museum dedicated to Puerto Rican and Latino Art. Includes transportation, guided museum tour, lunch and time for shopping. Advance purchase required: (203) 787-2783.

Through Oct. 9: "Images of Faith and Art from Mexico," Knights of Columbus Museum, 1 State St., free. Exhibit of 16th-20th century religious works of art never before exhibited in the U.S., 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Mondays-Saturdays.

Oct. 15: Tango presentation and lessons, 1-3 p.m., ECA, 55 Audubon St., free. Watch the masters perform and then