

TO: Appropriations Committee/ Conservation and Development

FROM: Leslee Asch, Executive Director
Silvermine Arts Center
1037 Silvermine Road
New Canaan, CT 06840

Subject: **The Importance of Arts Funding**

Dear Members of the Committee,

The Silvermine Arts Center mission states:

Grounded in the belief that art is vital to the spirit, creativity and wholeness of human beings, the mission of Silvermine Arts Center is to cultivate, promote and encourage growth through the arts; to showcase and serve artists; and to foster arts education and appreciation opportunities for the greater community.

We have been honoring that mission and taking it to heart for 90 years. In 2012 we celebrated the 90th anniversary of the Guild's founding and next year, 2014 we will celebrate the 90th anniversary of our incorporation and the founding of the Silvermine School of Art.

This year, to receive Connecticut funding through the Arts Catalyze Place-making (ACP) program of the Department of Economic Development (DECD) we were all asked to consider place-making. This is not a mere slogan. It is recognition of the reality that the arts help make a place a chosen home and help create and unite vital communities.

We received funding for an exciting project under the category Expanding Community Involvement. In August we will host our 3rd Annual ArtsFest, a free community program featuring the Brazilian Maracatu company *Estrela Brilhante*.

In 2011, the Silvermine Arts Center created a free open public sculpture walk and held the First-Annual ArtsFest to launch it on its bucolic 4 ½ acre campus. Silvermine Arts Center is in a beautiful spot, just a little over 3 miles from the center of New Canaan, but sometimes we are perceived as being a great deal farther. No one just "happens on us," so we must be an intentional destination. Our 4,500 students find us, our gallery openings and events are visited by over 12,000 people annually, but we wanted to find a way to engage the larger surrounding community and make our campus a welcoming space. Sculpture has been an integral part of the history of Silvermine Arts Center, beginning with our founding members. Solon Borglum and his brother Gutzon Borglum, of Mount Rushmore and Stone Mountain fame, were great public artists. A large collection of Solon Borglum's sculptures is on display at the New Britain Museum of Art and several large stone works grace the St. Mark's Church in New York City. We are proud to own two sculptures created by him, one large scale work and one incomplete work which is accompanied by historical signage. We launched the sculpture walk in the spirit of our roots. The walk includes a selection of key pieces in our permanent collection, including works by Harvey

Weiss and David Burt, and rotating annual pieces which currently includes work by noted 20th century sculptural pioneer, Reuben Nakian. Each sculpture is accompanied by signage, and selected works have extended text panels. The sculpture walk is free and open to the public all year long. We print thousands of self-guided tour brochures each year, and need to replenish them every Monday morning, so we know that visitorship is high. With funding from the New England Foundation for the Arts' Expeditions Program, we hosted the New York City-based Asphalt Orchestra to help us launch the walk in style. Asphalt is critically acclaimed for its reinvention of the marching band repertoire and it was thrilling to have them lead the first ArtsFest audiences around the sculpture walk. We hoped for an audience of 200 – and were excited to host over 300. It thus became a successful annual event to provide family fun for all ages. The second annual ArtsFest, held in mid-September, was a tremendous success, surpassing 2011 with 400-450 visitors.

We realized then that in order to grow this event even further, and to increase its impact throughout the year, we needed to integrate it with our successful 21 year-old Arts Partners outreach program, provide adequate transportation. And, this is exactly the purpose for which we sought and received Connecticut State support. We were able to combine the Connecticut State grant with funding we had already received from the Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation's Southern Exposures program to present one of Brazil's oldest and most respected music groups, Estrela Brilhante. ("Bright Star") We were one of only 2 Connecticut organizations to receive that competitive funding.

As part of our third annual Artsfest, we will host two free Maracatu parades, one with outreach partners, workshop participants and audience members being led around our Sculpture Walk; and one leading the way to the full performance. The day will also feature a School Open House, with key faculty conducting hands-on art activities for all ages. Workshops will be conducted to build elements that can augment the performances and provide an enhanced participation level.

We invite you all to join us for this wonderful event and all of our other exciting activities and respectfully ask that you restore the latest proposed \$200,000 cut to the "Culture, Tourism and Arts Grants" , restoring the funding to at least last year's \$2 million funding level.

Respectfully submitted
February 20, 2013

Leslee Asch
Executive Director
Silvermine Arts Center