

# Opera Volunteers

## I N T E R N A T I O N A L

*Expanding the future of Opera through development, mentoring and advancement of volunteer service.*

Volume 33, Number 3

website: [www.operavolunteers.org](http://www.operavolunteers.org)

Fall 2009

*New Mexico, "The Land of Enchantment", lived up to its motto when the Guilds of Santa Fe Opera hosted the OVI Conference in July. From start to finish it was well planned to entertain, enlighten and stimulate the participants. We were truly enchanted by Santa Fe Opera's General Director, John MacKay, who delivered the keynote address (see below) which spoke so directly to volunteers.*

*The Faith and Power of Volunteerism: Making opera 'gardens' grow.*

### WELCOME & THANKS

*T*hank you so much Ann, for your exceptionally kind introduction!

It's a real honor to welcome you and all of you, our OVI conference participants to Santa Fe for what promises to be a terrific conference.

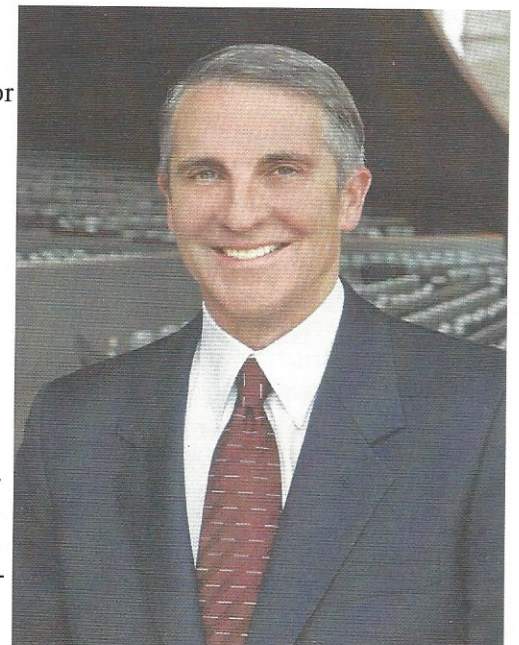
One of the great pleasures of my career has been working with extraordinary volunteers like Ann and Ellen Fusz who were co-presidents of the Opera Theatre of St. Louis Guild, among many, many other duties. Their enthusiasm, organization, and energy were truly inspiring - and their ability to introduce new people to the art form of opera and to Opera Theatre of St. Louis was quite remarkable. I especially love the stories about how Ann and Ellen will go to any lengths necessary to find the best supers for every production (or at least the supers with the best possible measurements for the available costumes), even recruiting unsuspecting folks at the grocery store or at the gym, and hooking many of those first-timers on opera for life!

The fact that so many of you made the effort to participate in this conference during these challenging times is a testament to the faith and power of volunteerism. But honestly, it's really not surprising to me, since I have witnessed the incredible dedication of volunteers again and again, in Santa Fe, in Charleston, when I was with Spoleto USA, and in St. Louis.

I know I speak for all of my professional colleagues when I express huge thanks for your vast contributions to our companies - contributions which are even more important given the current economic situation. Even in the best of times, we could never begin to hire enough staff to cover all of the volunteer functions at our companies, and now your help is more invaluable than ever before.

I must say I feel a particular connection to all of you because my first experience working in opera was actually as a volunteer, right here at the Santa Fe Opera. As a teenager, I was one of the Boy Scouts who volunteered to help park cars, and was so energized by my initial experience, I later volunteered in almost every department.

When I joined the annual staff of SFO, after playing in the orchestra for four summers, one of my responsibilities was to serve as the volunteer coordinator and Guild liaison, as well as being box office and annual fund manager, and later the business manager - needless to say, the staff was a bit smaller then! I had the privilege of working with volunteers who covered a wide range of responsibilities, including the opera shop, fundraising, ushering, and mailings. And during that time I forged friendships which I cherish to this day. *continued on page 3*



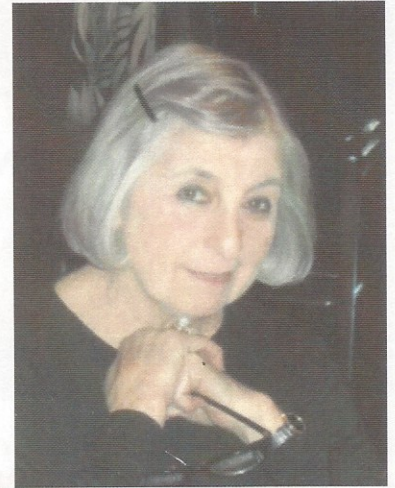
## FROM THE PRESEIDENT

Dear Members, Friends and Music Lovers All,

I'm very proud of what we have achieved together these past few years and am very confident that these accomplishments provide a firm base for further successes in these next years. Julie Benson, our new President, and a dedicated, enthusiastic new Board have already picked up the baton and started to sprint.

My term as President has been a wonderful run. I want to tell you how much I value your intelligence, your ideas, your dedication and your friendship - and how I look forward to working with you towards our future.

Fondly,  
Fern



## FROM THE NEW PRESIDENT

Dear Group and Individual Members:

As Opera Volunteers International celebrates its 35th anniversary, I could not be more honored to serve as president of the organization. My term does not begin until October 1st but I have already been busy learning from one of the best, Fern Grauer. I will do everything I can to serve OVI well and I look forward to meeting each of you, but in the meantime, on behalf of all members of OVI a huge thank you to Fern for her attention to detail, her dedication to OVI and for helping to make the organization so successful. I am hopeful that with her years of knowledge in the organization, Fern will be available to help guide us for many more years.

Best regards, Julie

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Julie", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

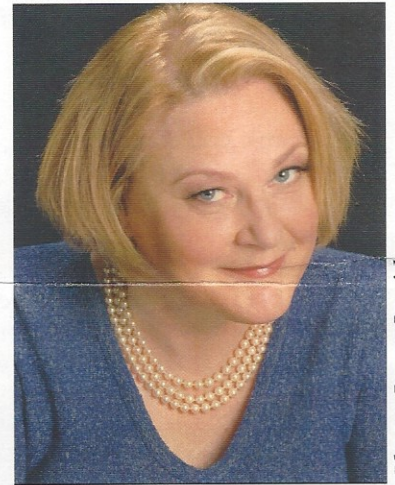


Photo: Larry Lapidus

## VP - OUTREACH by Gerald Elijah

Glorious sunsets, music, fabulous dinners, and stimulating conversations - if you think this is an ad for a luxury cruise or resort, it isn't. These are but a few descriptive phrases recounting the OVI Conference in Santa Fe. For the delegates and friends, the three day conference was more than an occasion to learn about volunteerism. It was an opportunity to meet with colleagues, form new friendships, and share an evening or two at the Santa Fe Opera.

Charles MacKay, the keynote speaker, set the stage by thinking volunteers and reassuring them that their roles are more important than ever in these turbulent financial times. Membership meetings, great speakers, such as Susan Berk, Andrea Fellows Walter and John Webber, supported the theme, "Volunteerism in Today's World".

But it was not all business. There was plenty of time to explore the city known for the arts. Hotel Santa Fe, the conference hotel, was conveniently located near the plaza, and with its shuttle service, the conference attendees could be seen all over town. For those who wanted to spend their money at the hotel, the OVI Silent Auction was a big hit.

As any one who has ever taken a cruise knows, nothing would happen without the cruise director. In this case OVI was fortunate to have two very talented "directors" for the conference, Nancie Dominic and John Webber. Their precision planning was exceeded only by their southwestern hospitality. Stayed tuned for news of future meetings and conferences - you don't want to miss the boat!

## WELCOME & THANKS CONTINUED



In my subsequent positions at the Spoleto Festival, Opera Theatre of St. Louis, and now Santa Fe Opera, my appreciation for and admiration of volunteers has continued to grow. I have witnessed again and again how crucial you are to the success of non-profit organizations, particularly opera companies, because putting on a season of opera is such a labor-intensive endeavor, requiring a huge range of skills and an incredible number of hours and people to make everything function properly.

Not only can volunteers assist paid staff members with their regular duties, but they often then can bring a particular skill set or personality that complements existing resources at a company. Once in St. Louis we were coping with an influx of over 100 important Japanese visitors during the busiest week of our season, and just in time a valiant volunteer came to our rescue to lead a wonderful bus tour of historic neighborhoods of St. Louis, drawing

upon her wealth of knowledge as an architectural historian. Another time we had a high strung soprano singing with us who tended to get a little worked up before each performance but nothing calmed her nerves like knowing that a faithful volunteer dresser was waiting outside her dressing room, ready to help with anything she needed and even providing a slice of her favorite carrot cake each night. And believe it or not, two of our most effective fundraising volunteers were my two cats, Pushkin and Glinka, who used their considerable feline charms to secure a substantial gift every year from a donor who insisted that they be invited to her annual solicitation lunch where the general director very definitely played a secondary role!

Creating effective volunteer opportunities requires constantly reevaluating the needs of an organization in the context of the current environment. Both in St. Louis and Santa Fe, there is a place reserved on the board for our Guild president, which is an excellent way to ensure that the volunteers have firsthand knowledge of the current activities of the company and are able to take the initiative to develop projects to complement and support current staff activities.

Maintaining an active dialogue between the staff and volunteer leadership is especially important given today's economic climate, which creates challenges but also a growing number of opportunities for volunteers, as companies are trying to figure out how to reallocate responsibilities in the face of limited resources.

Staff reductions and budget limitations can create new needs for volunteers. I know of one company that is planning to control backstage expenses next season by utilizing more volunteer dressers in place of paid seasonal staff members.

Here in Santa Fe we have been able to use volunteers very effectively as when volunteers were designated as "animal wranglers" for a huge community production of Noah's Flood undertaken by our education department which involved literally hundreds of kids as the animals in Noah's Ark and the recorder orchestra.



Volunteers with specific professional expertise, e.g. attorneys, accountants, and financial advisors, can help alleviate the need for expensive consultants. I have been very fortunate in St. Louis and in Santa Fe to be able to draw upon the knowledge of volunteers on a regular basis to assist with situations ranging from government advocacy, to HR issues to endowment fund policy issues.

Even in the face of the most dire news about companies closing, we have to remember that these changes can create opportunities for new, grass-roots companies to grow; e.g. after the

*continued on page 4*

Baltimore Opera ended operations recently, a movement to create a smaller, more adaptable festival company has surfaced. Smaller, volunteer opera troupes are cropping up all over the country.

Also, young people are becoming increasingly oriented towards service and volunteerism. Not only are these ways to give back to the community, but they are also ways for young people to gain tremendously valuable hands-on work experience during this time when paid internships are becoming increasingly hard to secure. Like me, many of my professional colleagues got their start in the field as volunteers.



Of course, there are corresponding challenges and realities that must be acknowledged: As some people are now planning on working longer before retirement, time for volunteerism will be impacted. We need to find opportunities that work well for those working full-time, e.g. providing transportation to artists during evenings or weekends, helping with targeted one-day projects, or serving as greeters at performances. There are many opportunities unique to festival companies like Santa Fe and St. Louis, which need a great number of people during a short period of time.

As companies grow and evolve, some functions are transferred from volunteers to paid staff members so we must work hard to identify new possibilities for engagement.

Growing awareness of major issues relating to health, social service, hunger, and housing may steer volunteers towards other areas of involvement, but we can also take advantage of this increased involvement to find new opportunities for collaboration with other organizations; e.g. promoting a night at the opera for food bank volunteers.



I really do believe that companies should be careful not to pigeon-hole volunteers into pre-defined roles, and should think creatively about how best to utilize everyone's time and skills, from board members to supernumeraries to gardeners to archivists. Having served as a volunteer board member for a number of organizations, I know firsthand how frustrating it can be to have your time or skills underused or misunderstood, and often the most effective strategy can be just to ask volunteers directly for their ideas.

by a fleet of editors on the staff, and she manages to catch additional mistakes every year!), or an art collection ( I know another volunteer who supplies collectible opera posters for the theater lobby).

Sometimes finding new volunteers is as simple as asking someone directly for help with the right task. When I was starting out as an orchestra assistant and librarian here in Santa Fe, I was given the overwhelming project of marking all of the bowings for the string parts to *Così fan tutte* overnight - an extremely challenging task for a brass player, as any of you who are musicians will understand! I ended up recruiting my entire family to help - to this day my sister still talks about the "all hands on deck" call which led to us all spending a very enjoyable evening together with the parts spread out at the dining room table.



We must also take full advantage of the fact that volunteers are the very best spokespeople and advocates for a company. When we opened our new theater in Santa Fe, volunteers served as guides

who introduced the facility to the public - they learned every detail about the construction, design, equipment and financing for the building, and they were extremely successful in explaining the benefits and new features to our patrons and the greater community. Special badges were created for that day and many of those participating still choose to use these badges all these years later! Those are real badges of honor for volunteers who played a tremendously important part in opening our new facility.



Many of you may have seen the recent NEA research about declining arts participation, which I believe is a real call to action for all of us to do everything we can to spread our own enthusiasm about the companies we work and volunteer for, whether that's by bringing friends to the opera, contacting our legislators, recruiting new volunteers, and perhaps, most important of all, introducing the next generation of audience members to the art form we love so much.

Educational programs, of course, provide us with the best opportunities to reach future audiences. One of the many volunteer programs I have been very impressed with at Santa Fe Opera is the docent program, which is responsible for reaching a huge number of students each year. The training program is extremely rigorous and, as a result, the participants are extremely knowledgeable and enthusiastic about all facets of the company.

In addition, volunteers are absolutely crucial to making our Youth Nights possible - and as some of you already know, I was actually introduced to opera through one of the first Santa Fe Opera Youth Nights - so not only are we reaching future audiences this way but also future artists and administrators. The Youth Opera Chaperones welcome our guests and make sure everyone understands what is expected at the opera - i.e. it is not OK to make paper airplanes out of your programs, light them on fire, and launch them from the balcony, a real incident which hasn't been repeated thanks to the vigilance of our volunteers!



There are also ways to tailor volunteer opportunities to the interests and schedules of young people - when Ann and Ellen were Guild Presidents in St. Louis they set up a program called the Teen Tempos, which matched up short-term projects with groups of teenagers who were available to help for limited time periods.

So if any of you are looking for new ways to become more involved with your companies at home, I urge you to think about what you can do to reach the next generation. I truly believe that taking the time to introduce new and younger audiences to opera

is the most important thing we can do to ensure that opera continues to thrive, and I think that volunteers are uniquely qualified to do this, given their deep community roots and their unparalleled Every day in my job, I ask myself, "How can I do better?" I'm inspired by our volunteers who are constantly honing their skills and figuring out ways to do more for the companies they love so much.

I've spoken of my experience with volunteers in Santa Fe and St. Louis, but I know there are wonderful stories of your contributions to companies all around the country. What a huge honor it has been for me to have worked with such devoted and dedicated people as all of you.

In closing, on behalf of all of my colleagues, here and around the country, I want to take this opportunity to say thank you to all of you for your incredible dedication and hard work. In Santa Fe, as in many other companies, we have a wonderful group of volunteers that literally help our garden grow, with hours of weeding and watering assistance in areas around the office and theater. In a metaphorical sense, that is what all of you do so beautifully - to quote from *Candide*, "to make our garden grow"! I truly cannot think of any higher compliment to a company than to know that volunteers like you are willing to contribute their time, energy, and talent and we are very, very grateful.



Invite you to join them at the Noah Liff Opera Center  
in Nashville, Tennessee on November 14, 2009

FOR

## A FOCUS ON

### OPERA FANS IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY AND BEYOND

Don't miss the opportunity to interact with three outstanding experts and fellow volunteers on the topic of the opportunities and challenges of securing Opera's place in the 21st Century "Wired World". For further information please contact either Shelley Page 615-665-1957 or Felicia Gates 615-221-1001.



## MATCHING GRANTS

The purpose of the Opera Volunteers International Matching Grants program is to encourage the expansion and development of programs that recruit, develop and train volunteers for service and participation in all phases of opera company support.

Awards up to and including \$2000.00 are available to opera support groups, organizations, and opera companies which create and/or support such programs. Recipients of the cash award must match each grant award with funds which may be held currently in the organization's treasury or raised as new money.

Recipients of awards may not receive subsequent awards for similar projects. Special consideration is given to programs directed toward and involving disadvantaged or under-served groups, multi-cultural communities and/or those who have not been traditionally associated with opera.

Please contact Mary Earl, Matching Grants Chair at [Maryopera1@aol.com](mailto:Maryopera1@aol.com) for an application. The next deadline is March 1, 2010.

## FOCUS MEETING SCHEDULE

Thursday, November 12	6:30 p.m.	Welcome Reception
Friday, November 13	8:00 a.m.	OVI Board Meeting
	12:00 p.m.	OVI Lunch
Saturday, November 14	8:00 a.m.	Depart hotel for the Liff Center
	8:30 a.m.	Breakfast
	9:00 a.m.	Focus on Children's Opera
	10:30 a.m.	Focus on Website Support
	12:00 p.m.	Lunch followed by tour of the Liff Center
	1:00 p.m.	Focus on Wired Marketing
	2:30 p.m.	Depart Liff Center for hotel
	5:30 p.m.	Private dinner
	7:00 p.m.	Opera talk by John Hoopes, Nashville Opera's Artistic Director
	8:00 p.m.	Performance: Philip Glass's "The Fall of the House of Usher"

Brochures with more detailed information, including supplemental activities, will be in the mail to all OVI members after Labor Day.

*As a part of the General Meeting in Santa Fe the following were nominated and unanimously elected to the respective positions.*

**OPERA VOLUNTEERS INTERNATIONAL  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS, COMMITTEE CHAIRS  
and REGIONAL COORDINATORS**

**President** ..... *Julie Benson*  
**Vice President Administration** ..... *Roy Fisher*  
**Vice President Member Services** ..... *Barbara Eckel*  
**Vice President Membership** ..... *Rhonda Sweeney*  
**Vice President Outreach** ..... *Gerald Elijah*  
**Vice President Marketing** ..... *Walter Briggs*  
**Secretary** ..... *Melody Schubert*  
**Treasurer** ..... *Evelyn Troughton*

**Chairs:**

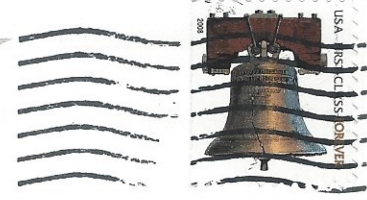
**Conference/Meeting** ..... *Ann and Ellen Fusz*  
**Grants** ..... *Mary Earl*  
**Partners in Excellence** ..... *Vernie Jones*  
**Technical** ..... *David Yuen*  
**Website** ..... *David Yuen*  
**Consultant Services** ..... *Rose Betty Williams*  
**Education** ..... *Marilyn Strange*  
**Newsletter** ..... *Warren Schubert*

**Regional Coordinators:**

**Central** ..... *Wilma Wilcox*  
**Great Lakes** ..... *Mary Ellen Clancy*  
**Mountain/Old West** ..... *Rosemary Schroeder/Shirley Litchfield-Bird*  
**Northeast** ..... *Walter Briggs*  
**Pacific Rim** ..... *Harold Scott/Mary Scott*  
**Southeast** ..... *Shelley Page*  
**Canada** ..... *Heather Clarke*



# Opera Volunteers INTERNATIONAL



## NEWSLETTER

Official Quarterly Publication  
Editor, Warren Schubert

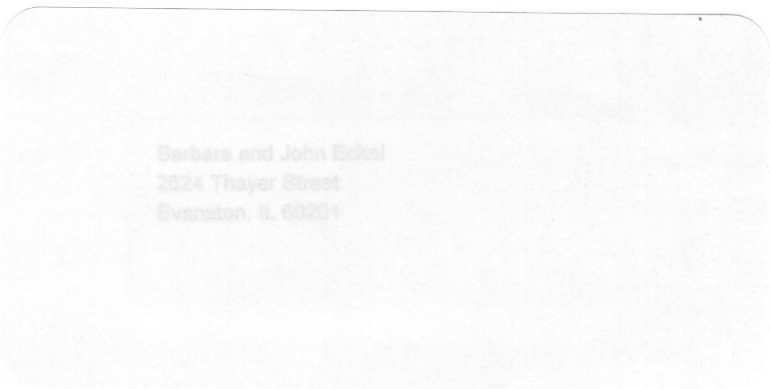
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Please send Support Group & Volunteer news,  
articles, comments and suggestions to:

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Telephone: 207-236-2162  
E-mail: wschubert4@aol.com

All other correspondence  
should be sent to the website:

website: [www.operavolunteers.org](http://www.operavolunteers.org)



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