

Beacon Hill Byline by Mary Rogeness

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Massachusetts Cultural Council Grants

If it is springtime, it is time for the Massachusetts Cultural Council to announce the awarding of grants to the communities of the Commonwealth. Each autumn requests for proposals go out, offering the opportunity to draw up a proposal to fund a program to enrich the lives of other townspeople. After a season to consider, rank and award those proposals, it is now time to announce the awards.

The grants are drawn from a pool of \$4 million appropriated by the legislature and distributed throughout the state to support programs and educational activities in the arts, sciences, and humanities. That appropriation funds nearly 7,000 projects.

The town of Longmeadow received 20 grants with a total value of \$6,567. Most projects serve as school enrichment programs, and each one shows how much benefit can be derived from a small expenditure. These are some of the programs and the dollar amount of each state grant.

Center School used \$325 for musical performances. Blueberry Hill School used \$950 to fund a residency program with children's author Jeff Kelly. Wolf Swamp School funded two programs for only \$335, a presentation by Susan Adle, a naturalist/storyteller and a performance of "Freedom Train" by Theatre Works USA.

The elementary schools have used a portion of the state money to subsidize admissions for cultural events, as has Glenbrook, accessing a facet of the program earmarked for student subsidies. Other schools funded a performance of the New England Percussion Ensemble and a jazz performance.

Storrs Library funded storytellers for about \$900, and Long Meadow Days funded the community concert with \$500. Classical music received stipends for Musicorda and the Old Post Regional Orchestra.

Considering the program in human terms, every child from preschool to eighth grade has benefited, and the rest of the town has an opportunity to attend general programs. If that wide reach is duplicated in other communities of the state, the program is indeed a broad achievement.

Volunteers from each of 336 local cultural councils are responsible for the success of the statewide program, and the volunteer nature of the councils make the system work. Their knowledge of each community and their commitment to disbursing money broadly throughout the arts and humanities help enrich the everyday lives of each one of us.

Longmeadow's council, chaired by Sally Johnson, has reviewed proposals, studied their requirements and decided which projects to fund. We all owe them our thanks for their efforts.

I hope you have seen one of the programs or that your children benefited from the talent display of a storyteller or musician. And if you have an idea for an innovative new program for next year, it is not too early to start working on a proposal for the next grant round. That captures the essence of such a grass roots program.

In the meantime, enjoy the performances as they take place.