

The Formation of Cedarburg's Plein Air Art Collection



Artist Steve Puttrich from Arlington Heights, IL paints in watercolor near the Cedar Creek in downtown Cedarburg in June, 2017. His "A River Runs Through Cedarburg" won the Best of Show Award that year. -Deb Kranitz photo.

CEDARBURG'S FIRST PLEIN AIR FESTIVAL. In 2021, Cedarburg celebrates the 20th anniversary of its first plein air festival, the longest-running and largest outdoor painting event in the Midwest. Cedarburg has been a destination for artists to paint outdoors or *en plein air*, for at least 130 years. Therefore, it is natural that the Midwest's first plein air painting festival should start in Cedarburg. Artists Dave Eitel and Sandra Pape were the instigators and along with volunteers from the Cedarburg Artists Guild (CAG) the first outdoor painting festival in the Midwest was quickly formed as an added attraction to the community's 2001 Strawberry Festival. After being bolstered by Strawberry Festival crowds initially, the organizers of what is now called "Paint Cedarburg" eventually chose its own separate time frame in June for attracting artists and artists' patrons to our area. Instead of having a juried entry, the CAG has allowed the first 150 entrants to be the artists to "paint the town," each in his/her own distinctive manner.

SPONSORSHIP--THE FIRST OF THREE GIFTS. Three special gifts are necessary for plein air artwork to become part of the Cedarburg Art Museum Collection. The first gift is the sponsorship for a Best of Show Award for the festival. Sandra Pape, who spearheaded Cedarburg's earliest festival, obtained sponsorship for a Best of Show Purchase Award from Ozaukee Bank in its first year. Ozaukee Bank or its later Gift to the Future Fund continues to provide the Purchase Award for the Best of Show designation to the current day. The sponsorship of the Best of Show Purchase Award was necessary to attract the quality and quantity of artists to come to the outdoor painting event and create art in Cedarburg.

THE CREATION OF AN ART MUSEUM. Secondly, the creation of an art museum in Cedarburg was another important gift to the community. In late 2012, when an opportunity arose with the historic Wittenberg-Jochem home for sale on Cedarburg's main street, the Ozaukee Bank's Gift to the Future Fund purchased the building as the potential home of an art museum as a gift to the community. An institution that would show, collect, and preserve the artwork of Cedarburg and its surrounding area was formed!

GIFTS TO THE GROWING MUSEUM COLLECTION. By June 2013, the historic building reopened as the Cedarburg Art Museum and many of the plein air Best of Show award-winning paintings from earlier years in the Ozaukee Bank Artwork Collection were part of the initial, 49-piece gift to the new museum by the Bank. Finally, having the award-winning plein air artwork donated to the Museum Collection by the Ozaukee Bank Gift to the Future Fund or other community donors is the third gift that allows the Cedarburg Plein Air Event to be an important phenomenon that keeps on giving to our community and culture in multiple ways. Today, the Cedarburg Art Museum Collection holds several hundred more artworks, and its complete collection of award-winning, plein air paintings from Cedarburg's annual outdoor painting festival is a shining jewel within it.