

A CELEBRATION OF ART AND EDUCATION

AAUW's Art Fair on the Green benefits artists, art lovers and students.

BY DOREEN PFOST
Contributed photos



Fiber artist Katherine McMahon



Painter Karri Jamison



Stained-glass artist Laurel Gray

The annual AAUW Art Fair on the Green is a must-attend event for artists and art lovers alike. Best of all, proceeds provide scholarships for area students.

Picture a summer day, if you can. Surrounded by artwork and natural beauty, people stroll about, listening to music, talking with artists and celebrating creativity. It's a pretty scene, one that will come to life in La Crosse once again this year July 29-30.

Held each July on the lawns of the UW-La Crosse campus, the Art Fair on the Green is a 59-year-old tradition that brings art lovers and artists together in a pleasant outdoor setting. You could say it's all about art ... but it's also about community and education.

"There's such a feeling of camaraderie," says Carol Robertson, chair of the art fair's organizing committee. The grassy, tree-shaded grounds lend themselves to a friendly, relaxed atmosphere, she says. "You get the feeling from people that we're all in this together."

More than an art fair

Part of that feeling undoubtedly comes from knowing that artists and fairgoers, through their participation, are helping others. Since 1967, the La Crosse branch of AAUW (formerly the American Association of University Women) has sponsored the art fair and used its proceeds to fund scholarships and change lives in the La Crosse area. Last

year's event provided more than \$25,000 for local students.

But most of us attend art fairs for the art, and in that regard visitors to the Art Fair on the Green won't be disappointed. Fairgoers are drawn, says Robertson, by the quality of work that the juried show offers and by the variety. With offerings in diverse—and sometimes unusual—media, it's possible to find something you might not see anywhere else. Upwards of 80 artists display work in categories ranging from painting, sculpture and glass to metalwork, fiber art and jewelry.

A community effort

Producing an event of this scale is almost a work of art in itself—and a learning experience. Nearly all of the AAUW branch's active members—more than 60 volunteers—give their time and energy to the fair. Furthermore, Robertson notes that the chairs of all 11 subcommittees routinely groom new volunteers for leadership positions to ensure that the Art Fair on the Green will be here in the future. Add in assistance from UW-La Crosse staff and promotional help from Explore La Crosse, and you have a real community effort. And the volunteers, even though they are working, have fun. That

mood, says Robertson, "permeates its way through the grounds."

Artists enjoy the atmosphere as well, and many return year after year. La Crosse artist Phyllis Martino, whose paintings feature scenes of the Coulee Region, has attended for nearly 30 years. She says, "It's a beautiful setting and a comfortable show for an artist to be in." Robertson concurs, noting that the well-spaced 10-by-10 booths provide flexibility for displays and room for artists to chat with fairgoers or even set up an easel or other demonstration.

And what's the best part of it all? Seeing the faces of students who receive scholarships and share their stories at AAUW's May banquet, Robertson says without hesitation. "When we know that our volunteer effort has contributed to someone being able to complete their education and pursue their dreams, that's what makes it all worthwhile."

That sounds like something we can all celebrate. [@crw](#)

Doreen Pfoist is the author of This River Beneath the Sky: A Year on the Platte. She lives in Elroy.