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### The Art of Community@ the Library...Making it Happen

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**5TH ANNUAL  
ERIN MCKENZIE VIRTUAL  
WELCOMING SPACE EVENT**



**THE ART OF COMMUNITY  
@ THE LIBRARY ...  
MAKING IT HAPPEN**

**COURTRIGHT MEMORIAL LIBRARY**

**APRIL 18, 2010**

# THE ART OF COMMUNITY @ THE LIBRARY ... MAKING IT HAPPEN

The Erin McKenzie Virtual Welcoming Space at Otterbein Courtright Memorial Library (<http://library.otterbein.edu/ErinMcKenzie/index.htm>) encourages conversations and facilitates discovery of cultures, experiences, struggles and how we are connected. The welcoming space celebrates the gifts and talents in each of us in hopes of creating inclusive communities where all are valued. Annual events are planned with this vision in mind.

In 2009, participants representing the areas of Women Studies; Black Studies; Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered & Queer (GLBTQ); International Education; Disability; and Diversity discussed making connections and community building at Otterbein College. This event resulted in two key findings:

1. The need to create spaces where all feel welcome to share and interact and
2. The need to engage more students, listening and hearing their voices and perspectives.



With those findings in mind, in April of 2010, a diverse group of students, staff, and community members gathered to further our knowledge about how to create community at Otterbein. We enlisted facilitator and artist, Candee Basford (<http://www.candeebasford.com/>), to guide our discussion using a process of arts-based appreciative inquiry.

*“Appreciative Inquiry is about the co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them. To inquire means to be open to seeing new possibilities and potentials. Arts based inquiry is the act of exploration and discovery through the arts.”*

<http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/intro/whatisai.cfm>

Patty, Jordan and Bill  
pick out materials to  
use for their collage.



Each member of the group was asked to remember a time in their lives when they felt most engaged, most included, most welcomed in their college and in their communities. Then, each selected various images and artifacts such as fabric scraps, buttons, tree bark, magazine cutouts, metal, etc. that resonated with his or her “story.” Participants arranged these resonating pieces into a story or pattern onto mat board. This created a visual representation or reflection of their story and the insight within. When completed, each member of the group shared his or her creative image and the story or stories that elicited the completed image.

***Art exists in the absorption in the tasks of putting existing things together in ways that have meaning; and inversely, in the engagements that make personal connections to things others have made.***

**Michael Herman**



Barbara , Petie and  
our facilitator,  
Candee Basford, join  
in the conversation at  
the end of the  
session.

### ***Connecting...***

**Kat...**I found community in a sorority – something that is not always thought of as inclusive and welcoming to all. Our small, local sorority welcomes and celebrates diversity. We are free-spirited yet connected in our support of one another and women's issues.



### ***Starting a conversation...***

**Sue...**There was a time after my parents separated that I felt alone and homeless. I found a “home” and community by accident at a little place in Powell called *Espresso Yourself Music Café*. There I sipped coffee and quietly worked on my designs. People would come up and ask me what I was creating or start a conversation. I began to see them regularly and looked forward to that. I felt welcomed.

### ***Having fun together...***

**Bill...**When I think of community, I think of the appreciation dinner we have each year for the students who work at the library. We decorate, celebrate, and have fun! We even play games like hide and seek and throwing paper airplanes off of the library balcony. It is enjoyable for all.



### ***Acting on diversity...***

**Jordan...**I'm a little more politically minded as part of the DIY (Do It Yourself) scene in Columbus. We try not to rely on corporations and focus on community activities like pot luck dinners and supporting musicians traveling through town. It is important to have a common vision, but I also feel that we each need to be an independent thinker and share our individual uniqueness to create a richly diverse community. I disagree that “patience pays off.” I think there must be a sense of urgency and that “action pays off.”







### ***Communicating in different ways...***

**Courtney...**When I participated in AmeriCorps, I learned that communication is not just in words, but in actions and feelings. We don't always match, but we are often "sewn or taped together" because of our connections to our communities. How do we become comfortable with each other and feel welcomed?

### ***Reflecting and sharing stories...***

**Steven...**I love to travel, see new places and meet new people. I also value learning and that was handed down to me by my grandfather, a run-away slave. My neighborhood community back in Youngstown has a reunion every few years and a scholarship is offered to a college student in memory of my grandparents. We support each other. It is important to reflect on the past as we move forward to the future.



### ***Love and togetherness...***

**Lois...**The sense of community is extremely important to me. As I was picking the pictures and objects to use I thought about the things that I love about my life, including friends, family, books, animals, and music. The pictures I chose represent to me togetherness, love, family, fun, laughter, and adventure - all things I feel are important in a vibrant community.

### ***Listening and figuring out how to include everyone...***

**Petie...**Thirty three ago I was teaching theatre in high school and directing a Children's Theatre production which the students would perform for various elementary schools. One of the students involved had autism. We all had to figure out how to ensure his active participation. Another student really modeled how to be open to his differences and respect his involvement. We structured the performance much differently than we would have without him. It was a wonderful learning experience for all us. We all were stars!





### ***Belonging and participating...***

**Jane...**I feel grounded and surrounded by love in my Westerville and Otterbein College community. I graduated 60 years ago and have lived here ever since. Belonging, participating, and contributing to this college community continues to enrich my life.

### ***Being open to discovery...***

**Lisa...**The door is surrounded by flowers. The flowers are opportunities, people, locations and ideas. There are a lot of flowers, most in bloom, reminding me that one should always bloom where they are planted. The flowers are different shapes, sizes and colors representing the diversity in my life. It is often difficult to identify where one flower begins and another ends, because like in any good garden the flowers are connected to each other and just seem to fit. There are a few stems with no flowers that represent both what is yet to come, and what has already passed. The door is in the center of the garden. It is closed, but can easily be opened to reveal the chaos, connections and opportunities that lay beyond it. It is a choice to open the door, beyond it are things unknown...but I believe the door may be a wormhole to other gardens – filled with new people, locations ideas, and of course of door to someplace else.



### ***Offering hospitality...***

**Dana...**When I think of community I think of eating together! I think of welcoming guests and enjoying each other's company. I think of family and friends and not forgetting the importance of our relationships.



***Learning with each other...***

**Barb...**When I think of stories about community, I always think of what our family and many others learned from our daughter. Erin was a young woman with Down syndrome and her life demonstrated the rich connections and relationships that result from an inclusive learning community. Among her passions was theatre and she met and celebrated with many friends through that love. It began at Westerville South High School and introduced her to Otterbein College and many wonderful and reciprocal relationships.



***Facilitating community...***

**Kelley...**Sometimes we are in situations that are stressful or intense and that can help a group come together in community. In my visual I wanted to represent the members of my methods class who have come together largely because of our instructor and especially because of an activity that she facilitated. We each shared stories about ourselves and then reflected back to each other what strengths we heard from those stories about each of us. It has helped to create a supportive learning community.





***Some Things to Think About...***

- ⇒ What makes me feel welcomed?
- ⇒ How do I welcome others?
- ⇒ What does hospitality mean to me?
- ⇒ How can I be more open to discovering the gifts in myself and in others?

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Remember a time in your life when you felt most engaged, most included, most welcomed in your community. Create a poem, image, or story that resonates with your experiences.

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If you would like to share your ideas and thoughts about “The Art of Community @ The Library” please share by writing or drawing on paper provided on the library bulletin board on the 1st floor or participating in our blog at:  
<http://erinmckenzievirtual.blogspot.com/>