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In Our Words

Pennsylvania Guild of Craftsmen develops new approach to community outreach [editorial]

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THE ISSUE

In a Sept. 23 Sunday LNP [profile by Chad Umble](#), Karen Peiffer, the new executive director of the Pennsylvania Guild of Craftsmen, discussed her goal of promoting the guild's work while increasing its presence and partnerships in the community. The nonprofit

organization, formed in 1944, has had its headquarters in Lancaster city for the past 10 years.

We're glad the Pennsylvania Guild of Craftsmen makes its home in Lancaster County — and we believe there's no better place for it to be.

Both the city and surrounding county are bursting with talented artists, artisans and craftspeople who display their wares in shops, galleries, fairs and shows year-round.

Lancaster was recognized in 2016 as a “mini Brooklyn” by New York Post lifestyle reporter Raquel Lanieri, who wrote that the city is “teeming with art galleries, indie boutiques and restaurants, without the pretensions of the Big Apple.”

And in February of this year, [Forbes.com](https://www.forbes.com) featured Lancaster in its list of “coolest U.S. cities to visit in 2018,” dubbing it “a newly hip Victorian city” and a “cultural hotbed.”

So there's a lot going on in the city, and county, and we're proud that Lancaster is being recognized nationally for that more and more.

Still, many people are probably unaware that the Pennsylvania Guild of Craftsmen is even located in our beautiful county, and Peiffer is determined to fix that.

She told Umble that getting the public “to know about us” will be a priority of hers.

A potter who has been a guild member for 15 years, Peiffer also has more than 30 years' experience in business.

“In a way for me, I saw it as the perfect fit,” Peiffer, a Lititz resident, said of her new job.

Peiffer told LNP she is focused on continuing the work of the nonprofit organization while trying to make more connections.

“We're always looking for an opportunity to get out into the community,” she said.

Though the guild has been promoting craftspeople and their work for nearly 75 years, Peiffer said she frequently runs into people who don't understand what the organization does or how it can be a resource for all kinds of artists and artisans.

So changing this is a top priority for her.

“We're at a place where we need to constantly stay in front of everybody. They need to know about us,” she told LNP.

The Pennsylvania guild, along with those in other states, was established in 1944 at the recommendation of first lady Eleanor Roosevelt, “who wanted craftsmen to help everyday citizens learn how to become more self-sufficient so that factories could concentrate on manufacturing goods for World War II,” Umble reported.

In 2008, the guild’s state offices moved to Lancaster city, at Prince and Walnut streets; in 2012, it moved to its current location at 335 N. Queen St., where it has a retail store as well as space for classes and workshops.

And while we realize this phrase tends to be overused, the guild’s workshops really do seem to have something for everyone.

According to the guild’s website, these are just some of the offerings over the next few months:

- “Glass flowers.”
- “Nature journaling with native fall plants.”
- “Flameworking glass beads.”
- “Botanical jewelry in precious metal clay.”
- “Metalsmith basics: charm necklaces.”
- “Make a leather clutch.”
- “Fraktur calligraphy.”
- “Beginning stained glass.”
- “Wheel-throwing pottery.”
- “Glass paperweights.”
- “Weave a scarf.”
- “Glass icicles.”
- “Beginning glassblowing.”
- “Rings for beginners.”
- “Figure-carving Santas.”

In addition to the workshops, the guild sponsors fine arts fairs and operates the retail store, which boasts handmade work from more than 150 artists. It also operates a master artisan certification program and an emerging artists program, and it supports 11 chapters across Pennsylvania, including the local branch, Lancaster Designer Craftsmen.

The guild has about 1,300 members, including potters, jewelry makers, fiber artists, furniture makers, glassware creators and others. Members don't have to be serious craftspeople; they may just want to support the organization's mission, or get discounts on workshop tuition or retail store items.

Peiffer told LNP the guild mission is striking a chord with a new generation.

"People are becoming more interested in making and doing and using their hands again," she said. "This is a great place for people who like to make gifts, to come in and do it."

The challenge is translating the popularity of events into more members.

"The younger generation, they're not typically joiners, at least long-term joiners. So they're not really membership-driven," Peiffer told Umble.

But any effort to create more interest and increase membership will not interfere with the guild's role as a critical resource for local artists and craftsmen, she said. "We really are an organization that supports practicing craftsmen and the community around craft."

We support Peiffer's efforts. The organization has much to offer, and in a county with a growing national reputation for artisanry and craftsmanship, there's no better time for the guild to raise its public profile.

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