

# Anderson Center for the Arts to celebrate its 50th anniversary

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By Kelly Dickey | The Herald Bulletin  
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ANDERSON — Looking back at all the old photographs, newspaper clippings and art has inspired Deborah Stapleton to reflect.

“I think about how many thousands of people have been involved in helping us stay open and provide things for the community, but also how many thousands and thousands of people have participated from the general community,” she said.

There have been years of struggle when Stapleton wonders if the Anderson Center for the Arts would survive, but the organization has blazed on to reach a major milestone this year.

The arts center is celebrating its 50th anniversary with a gala Thursday and honorary exhibition, as well as special programming throughout the year.

The center has added about 800 visual pieces to its permanent collection over the last five decades. A portion of the collection will be featured in the anniversary exhibition, which opens Thursday.

A celebration gala and exhibition reception 6 to 9 p.m. Thursday will commemorate the landmark. Champagne, hors d'oeuvres, a dessert bar and a cash bar will be provided as guests explore the collection, listen to music, record their favorite memories of the

organization, learn about the history and hear a special announcement about the arts center.

The exhibition follows a timeline of the organization's history and features about one piece the gallery purchased each year.

"In many instances it's reflective of those time periods, as a lot of collections are," said Stapleton, Anderson Center for the Arts executive director.

The center was first formed by Geneva Stewart and Nellie Alford Hill when they opened the Alford House of the Anderson Fine Arts Center on West Eighth Street in the 1960s.

The community enjoyed art classes, exhibitions, concerts and community events at the location for 30 years, before the center relocated to its current location – the former public library – for more space.

"I think one of the things that's been a constant for 50 years is the arts center," Stapleton said. "So you have to think what is it, what things set us apart from other people? And there are things that make us similar."

Workshops, programs and getting people into the gallery when they're young has helped people stay connected with the arts center throughout their lives, Stapleton said. When kids are excited about the organization, their families become interested, and it spreads into adulthood.

Stapleton frequently hears visitors said they first came to the arts center on a field trip, or adults will bring their grandchildren as a special trip together.

"I think overall, it's that overriding joy and belief in the arts being important in a community," Stapleton said.

Moving forward, the arts center wants to continue having that influence with fall arts clubs for kids, as well as new workshops for adults.

Anniversary celebrations will continue throughout the year with more exhibitions and partnering with other organizations for events, including the Anderson Public Library. And in the near future, Stapleton wants to make the full permanent accessible to the public online.

“You have to be ever-evolving as an organization, as a director,” Stapleton said. “Fortunately we’ve had great people on the board, on staff and volunteers that have cared about this organization and the community.”

The anniversary exhibition opens Thursday and will run through mid-October. Gallery hours are noon to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturdays and 2 to 5 p.m. Sundays.

Tickets for the gala are \$50 and can be purchased at [andersonart.org](http://andersonart.org) or 765-649-1248.

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