

COUNCIL CONNECTIONS

DECEMBER 11, 2023

SPECIAL EDITION

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Recollections of Early Council Members

In late October we visited three ladies who were “original” members of The Council. They ranged in age from 87 – 97 and all reside at Westminster Canterbury. Caroline Brandt (joined in 1955), Isabella Witt (joined in 1962) and Helga Boyan (joined in 1971) shared with us their recollections of the earliest days of The Council. We gathered at the apartment of Caroline Brandt and enjoyed an hour of smiles, laughter, and happy memories.

Caroline Brandt, originally from Philadelphia, worked for Muriel Christison, the Associate Director. Mrs. Christison, VMFA Associate Director, who was aware of volunteer organizations at other museums, introduced the idea which was greeted with enthusiasm by Leslie Cheek, then VMFA CEO, and the VMFA Board. Volunteer duties for Caroline involved working in the VMFA shop and with the Artmobile. She remembers many elegant galas and balls held as fundraisers during the early years of The Council. Caroline also served as Council Treasurer for a while.



Helga Boyan, Caroline Brandt, and Isabella Witt

Isabella Witt, a native Richmonder, was invited to join The Council by a friend and became a member shortly after her college graduation. She loved being around the theater and worked backstage in Cheek Theater. Both Caroline and Isabella recall having demitasse coffees during performance intermissions and recalled that Leslie Cheek decided that Council membership should not exceed 500 so that all members could be guaranteed a seat in Cheek Theater. Additionally, we learned that Isabella's brother, Jack Witt, is a local sculptor, and we were able to see two of his sculptures gracing tables in Caroline's apartment.



1959 – The first Viennese Ball was held in May, attended by 475 people.

Helga, originally from Germany, worked in the gift shop which was then located just inside the door of the original 1936 entrance. Helga moved to Richmond from Manhattan when her husband accepted a position at VCU. She shared that the cost of the original lecture/luncheons was \$5.50!

These ladies are proud of the organization that The Council has become and enjoyed being interviewed to share their stories. Physical limitations prevent them from visiting VMFA as often as they would like, but they always enjoy visiting for Fine Arts & Flowers. They are also eager to see the current exhibit of the works of Willie Anne Wright.

- Mimi Ryland, Diane Barbour, and Linda Gill -



The Council Shop opened in 1960. Director Leslie Cheek designed and The Council paid for three movable "art carts" which were filled with art objects to sell and could be moved wherever needed.

Behind the Scenes with Michael Taylor

I interviewed Michael in his office to get his perspective, during his 8 year tenure with the museum, of the value and service of The Council to VMFA. I also asked how The Council compares to other museum volunteer organizations that he has worked with in the past. Finally, I asked Michael to share some of VMFA's future plans including some exciting new exhibitions planned for 2024 and 2025.

Dr. Michael Taylor, a native of London, England, came to VMFA in 2015 after serving for four years as Director of the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College. Prior to the Hood, he was the Muriel and Phillip Berman Curator of Modern Art, as well as the Head of the Department of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, where he worked for 15 years. Dr. Taylor has given many lectures for The Council's Lecture Luncheon series and he has been supportive of The Council in many other ways. According to Michael, Council members are "the front line troops whose contributions are invaluable to the museum's success."

Michael thinks that The Council is more organized than other volunteer organizations that he has worked with. Unlike other museum volunteer organizations that tend to be comprised primarily of museum tour guides, The Council is an organization of volunteers with assignments across the museum. "What the Council members share is a deep love of art and the common goal of supporting the mission and goals of VMFA." Michael is



Photo by Sandra Sellars © Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

also a big fan of the Council's quarterly Lecture Luncheon series "as these events bring the Council members together and expose them to new ideas." Michael observed that The Council has changed and evolved as the museum has changed and evolved. This is necessary to keep The Council aligned with VMFA's mission and core values, as embodied in the strategic plan.

Michael is excited about the future expansion plans of VMFA. Just as the 2010 expansion was a "game changer" for the museum, he expects that the new wing will again enable the museum to rise to new heights. "The expansion will allow art that has been in storage for years to be on display, provide for a new event space, and support VMFA's goal to always have a major exhibition on display 365 days a year." Michael also envisions a better connection between the main museum and the Sculpture Garden. "We need to entice those visitors who enjoy spending time in the Sculpture Garden to come inside the museum and enjoy everything we have to offer."

Council members can look forward to some exciting exhibitions in 2024 and 2025. In the Spring-Summer of 2024 look for the Japanese *Samurai Armor* exhibition (curated by Li Jian, VMFA's Curator of East Asian Art). The show will be similar to the Terracotta Army exhibition of 2017 and Michael expects that it will be very popular with the public. In the Fall-Winter of 2024, there will be two photography exhibitions: *American Born Hungary* (curated by VMFA's director, Alex Nyerges) and *A Long Arc: Photography and the American South since 1845* (curated by Sarah Kennel, VMFA's Curator of Photography). Finally, in the Spring-Summer of 2025 a full-scale retrospective of Jean Schlumberger's jewels (curated by Sylvain Cordier, VMFA's Curator of European Art). So there is much to look forward to.

The Council thanks Michael for his continued support of Council activities, events, and strategic initiatives.

- Diane Barbour -

Spotlight on Volunteers

Betsy Stevenson



Betsy Stevenson joined The Council of VMFA in 1997. Her first volunteer assignment was in the VMFA Shop. She also noticed what other Council volunteers were doing. A couple of them were organizing Council trips, often train trips to Washington, D.C., or New York.

“I had a love of travel,” she said. She began helping with Council travel, then became chair of that committee for five or six years. She especially recalled one trip to New York. She had asked VMFA curator John Ravenal, then curator of contemporary art, to be facilitator for the trip. “We pulled up in front of Chuck Close’s studio, and he was sitting in his wheelchair at the front door.”

Betsy worked in several Council posts before becoming Council president in 2003-2005. In that role, she had a year of training under then-president Sally Bagley. As president, Betsy created a role for the immediate past president as head of the nominating committee. Sally was the first in that role.

In 2007, VMFA’s staff liaison to The Council, David Bradley, asked her to join the VMFA staff as coordinator of member travel. She worked for the museum for seven years, then trained current travel coordinator Adele “Hutch” Livingston to take over that role.

Betsy then rejoined Council as an associate member, which requires no volunteer hours. But that didn’t seem to be enough for her. “I was truly missing having VMFA in my life,” she recalled. She became an active Council member again and has been a Museum Ambassador since 2020.

What has she enjoyed most about her years with Council? “Opportunities,” she said. “Lifelong learning, lasting friendships, and volunteering at a world-class museum.” Betsy finds special satisfaction in helping to make memorable experiences for all visitors. “It gives me so much pleasure to walk in and greet staff and visitors.”

Jim Schuyler

Jim Schuyler joined The Council of VMFA in 2020 “anticipating retirement.” When he retired in April 2022, he became a volunteer Museum Ambassador.

He retired after sixteen years as president of the Virginia Community Action Partnership, a nonprofit organization that coordinates efforts among more than 30 nonprofit and local government agencies working to reduce poverty across the commonwealth.

“As a Museum Ambassador at VMFA, my goal is to treat people as they want to be treated. Each visitor I welcome to the museum is the most important visitor at the museum. In a year and a half, I’ve met a remarkable number of people from all over the world.”

Jim shares his enthusiasm for the museum with first-time and repeat visitors and learns something about why they are here and what they’re interested in. He works regularly from 10 a.m. to noon Wednesdays and Sundays. “We are often the first person visitors see when they come to VMFA,” he noted. “We stand next to the beautiful Hirschler flowers, make visitors feel wanted and welcome, and help our guests have the best museum experience possible.”

But that is only one of several commitments Jim has made to The Council and VMFA. He also co-chairs the Member Recruitment Committee and is co-chair of the Marketing Committee for Fine Arts & Flowers 2024.

Jim has other outside interests as well. He attends classes at the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University of Richmond and is taking piano instruction at U of R to improve his skills. He has played piano since he was five years old.

He believes that The Council provides the best opportunity to share his love for VMFA with guests, who say that their VMFA experience “way exceeded their expectations.”

- Gail Gilmore -



Alicia Vidal



Alicia Vidal has always been outgoing and enjoys meeting new people. In 2019, Celeste Johnston, a friend of Alicia's, a docent, and an art educator at VMFA, suggested that since Alicia had recently retired from the Postal Service, The Council would be an excellent opportunity to meet new people while providing volunteer services to VMFA. She gladly accepted! Knowing that Alicia is an artist, Celeste suggested she begin volunteering by serving as an assistant in the Education Department during a botanical art class! Alicia thoroughly enjoyed every minute!

It wasn't long after that Alicia saw Alex McGrath at a VMFA Council Opportunity Fair and knew immediately it was her friend Alex from high school. After reminiscing, Alex was delighted to share information with Alicia about the role of the Membership Assistants and invited her to join the committee. Alicia enjoys making calls to VMFA members and is delighted to pass on positive comments and to also direct members' ideas and suggestions to the appropriate staff members. Alicia said that often someone will ask her about volunteering at VMFA and she gladly tells them about the many

available opportunities and directs them to the Council website to learn more. She said that what is missing is a way to follow up with these members about volunteering. Alicia shared several good ideas that have already been passed on to the Council Recruitment team!

"The Council Opportunity Fair was an excellent way to meet the chairs of the committees and to learn more about the variety of ways to volunteer," she recalled. She met Mauna Mullins there and now, in addition to serving as a Membership Assistant, Alicia also volunteers on the Fleurs de Loo committee. Alicia works with other committee members whose job involves meeting someone from Strange's Florist at VMFA and then placing the floral arrangements in designated restroom locations.

Since she first joined The Council, Alicia knew that working on a committee would be the best way to meet new people, learn more about The Council and VMFA, and to get to know others with common interests in new opportunities to learn. She is eager to make sure each new Council member has the same positive experiences.

When Alicia is not volunteering at VMFA, she enjoys working with Caring Canines and has been a member for over 10 years!

Sara Crump

Originally from Mississippi, Sara moved from Nashville, TN, to Richmond, so she could be closer to her family. While her true passion is art, she holds a BS in Interior Design from the University of Maryland, a craft she has practiced for the past four decades. In recent years, she has enjoyed buying, renovating, and reselling homes. Her latest venture was an 1889-built house in The Fan that demanded extensive restoration, a challenge she embraced and now proudly calls home.

Sara joined the VMFA Council in 2022, and currently serves as an Ask Me Ambassador and a Hirschler Flower Designer. She loves arranging flowers and is looking forward to becoming involved with Fine Arts and Flowers in 2024. Sara thoroughly enjoys each opportunity to meet new people and uncover the rich offerings the museum provides. On Wednesday nights, you can often find her at VMFA Jazz Cafe, surrounded by a cherished group of friends.

It didn't take Sara long to discover VMFA's Studio School. She has immersed herself in acrylics, realism, and abstract. One memorable highlight was her class's ability to simply stroll across the street to the museum and admire a John Singer Sargent painting they had discussed in class. "It's such a pleasure to be in the VMFA environment!" Sara is also an active member of VPAP (Virginia Plein Air Painters).

The Council's number one strategic initiative is to "Grow The Council," and Sara is a great advocate for adding new members to our community. She emphasizes the importance of making Council brochures readily accessible throughout the museum, including The Studio School, recognizing this location as a prime opportunity to engage prospective members.

Sara's enthusiasm for the VMFA is contagious! She has thoroughly enjoyed volunteering, further developing her artistic talents through classes at The Studio School, and attending Lecture Luncheons and other Council events. She is eager to share her experience and what she has learned with others and has recently volunteered to serve on the New Member Orientation team.



floris

at VMFA



floris at VMFA, the new tea room, opened December 10 and is now booked for the next 5 weeks! Call (804) 340-5785 for a reservation or go to OpenTable.

Click [here](#) to learn more.

Hours:
Sun–Wed: 11:30 am – 4:30 pm

The last seating of the day is at 2:30 pm.
A seasonal holiday menu is available
December 24–27, 2023.

MEMBERSHIP ENRICHMENT PROGRAMS

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Thursday, January 11 - Branch Museum Visit - 10AM - Noon

- Participants will split into two groups of 15 to both explore the monumental Branch Museum with an expert guide and go on a self-guided tour of the exhibit *Women's Rights are Human Rights: International Posters on Gender-Based Inequality, Violence and Discrimination*.
- Cost: \$12, Maximum Participants: 30. Registration opens December 12 and closes January 4.

Wednesday, January 17 - Wine Dinner - 5:30 - 8:30PM

- Four-course meal, crafted by Amuse Executive Chef Will Burgess and his team, in the Birch Douglass Private Dining Room.
- Glass of sparkling wine will be available upon arrival.
- Each course paired with a wine, selected by the front-of-house team.
- Five different wines will be poured.
- Cost: \$135. Maximum Participants: 30. Registration opens December 12 and closes January 8. French Inspired Menu.

First

Roasted Butternut Squash Soup. Aged Balsamic. Pumpkin Seeds

Second

Chicories Salad. Pickled Kumquat. Fennel. Pistachio. Apple Dijon Vinaigrette.

Third (Choice of)

Chicken Chasseur. Roast Chicken Breast. Tomato, Mushroom & Bacon Ragoût. Whipped Yukon Gold Potatoes.

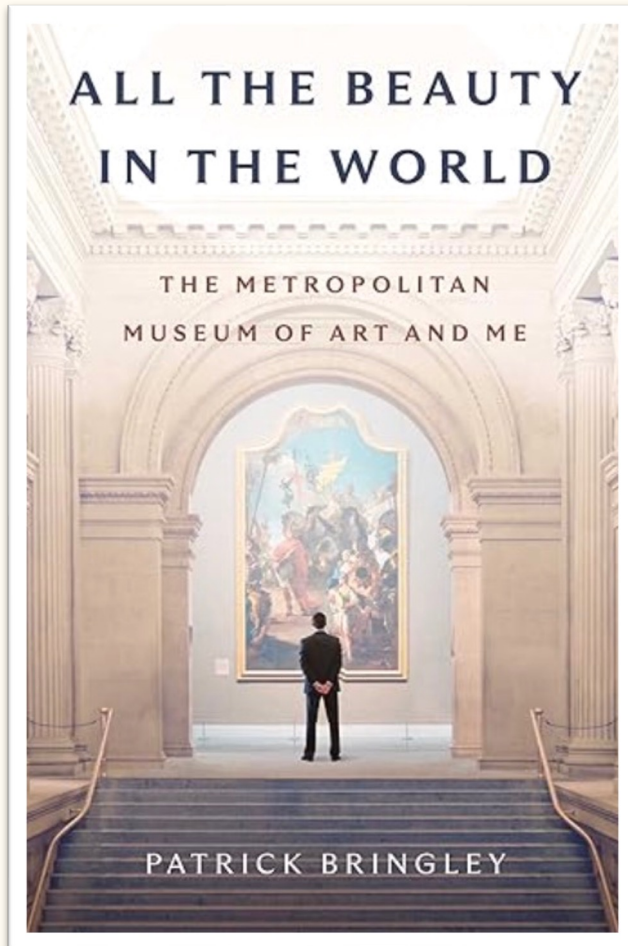
Beef Bourguignon. Roasted Carrots. Pearl Onions. Mushrooms. Creamy Polenta.

Fourth

Chocolate Pâté. Apricot Jam. Brown Butter Crumble. Toasted Almonds.



Monday, January 22, Book Club – Noon Founder's Room, Across from Cheek Theatre



- *All the Beauty in the World* by Patrick Bringley
- Learn more about art and museums. This wonderful work memoir tells the story of the author who worked for ten years as a guard at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. If you have ever walked into or dreamed of walking into the Met, this book will delight you.
- Post-chat docent tour will include insight from some of our own gallery guards and pieces from the VMFA collections.
- Click [here](#) to see pictures of all of the artwork that is discussed in the book.
- Cost: No Fee, Maximum Participants: 30. Registration opens December 19 and closes January 17.

Wednesday, January 31 BRING A FRIEND EVENT

Lecture by Dr. Donald Schrader, PhD

"Faking it - A Look at the History of Art Forgery"

3:00 PM Claiborne Robertson Room

- Spend a day at VMFA! Dr. Schrader's lecture will begin at 3:00 PM in the Claiborne Robertson Room and will be followed by tours organized by Cheryl Ragsdale and Danna Johnson, Tour Services Liaisons.
- Invite a friend or two who may be interested in becoming a Council member.
- Come early to visit VMFA's special exhibits.
- Have lunch at Best Cafe or Amuse before attending the lecture.
- Conclude the day with happy hour at Best Cafe.
- Lecture Cost: \$15. Maximum Participants 70. Registration opens January 2 and closes January 24.



Dr. Donald Schrader
Adjunct Professor of Art History
Mary Washington University

Monday, February 5 - Council Lecture Luncheon

- 9:30 AM - Tours of Curator's Picks: The Jewels in the Crown of the VMFA Collection.
- 10:30 AM Council Business Meeting followed by Lecture: **The Fine Art of Photography - Looking Through the Lens with Alex and Sarah** given by Dr. Alex Nyerges, Director and CEO and Dr. Sarah Kennell, Aaron Siskind Curator of Photography and Director of the Raysor Center for Works on Paper at Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.
- Noon - Luncheon. More details to follow.

Cheek Theater Renovations and World Premier Ballet for Fine Arts & Flowers



VMFA Director Alex Nyerges has announced that the renovations for the Cheek Theater will begin in January 2024 and are scheduled to be completed for the first Richmond Ballet performance in mid-September 2024. The Cheek Theater renovations project has been separated from the major expansion project so that the Cheek Theater project can begin at once.

Ma Cong, Richmond Ballet Associate Artistic Director and Brett Bonda, Richmond Ballet Managing Director met with the FA&F Marketing Co-chairs to discuss the renovations. Based on those conversations, Ma Cong will be developing a “world premier” ballet – “Unfolding Elegance” – to be performed for FA&F2024! This is great news from the FA&F2024 Marketing Team! We will have the totally renovated Cheek Theater available for FA&F2024 and the Richmond Ballet will be presenting a specially commissioned ballet for the event!

Thanks and appreciation goes to committee members Scott Finn and Charlie Caldwell for all of their work to provide the introductions that helped to bring FA&F2024 awareness to the Richmond Ballet leadership!

Jim Schuyler and Frank Dellinger

Bringing You Glad Tidings of Great Joy!

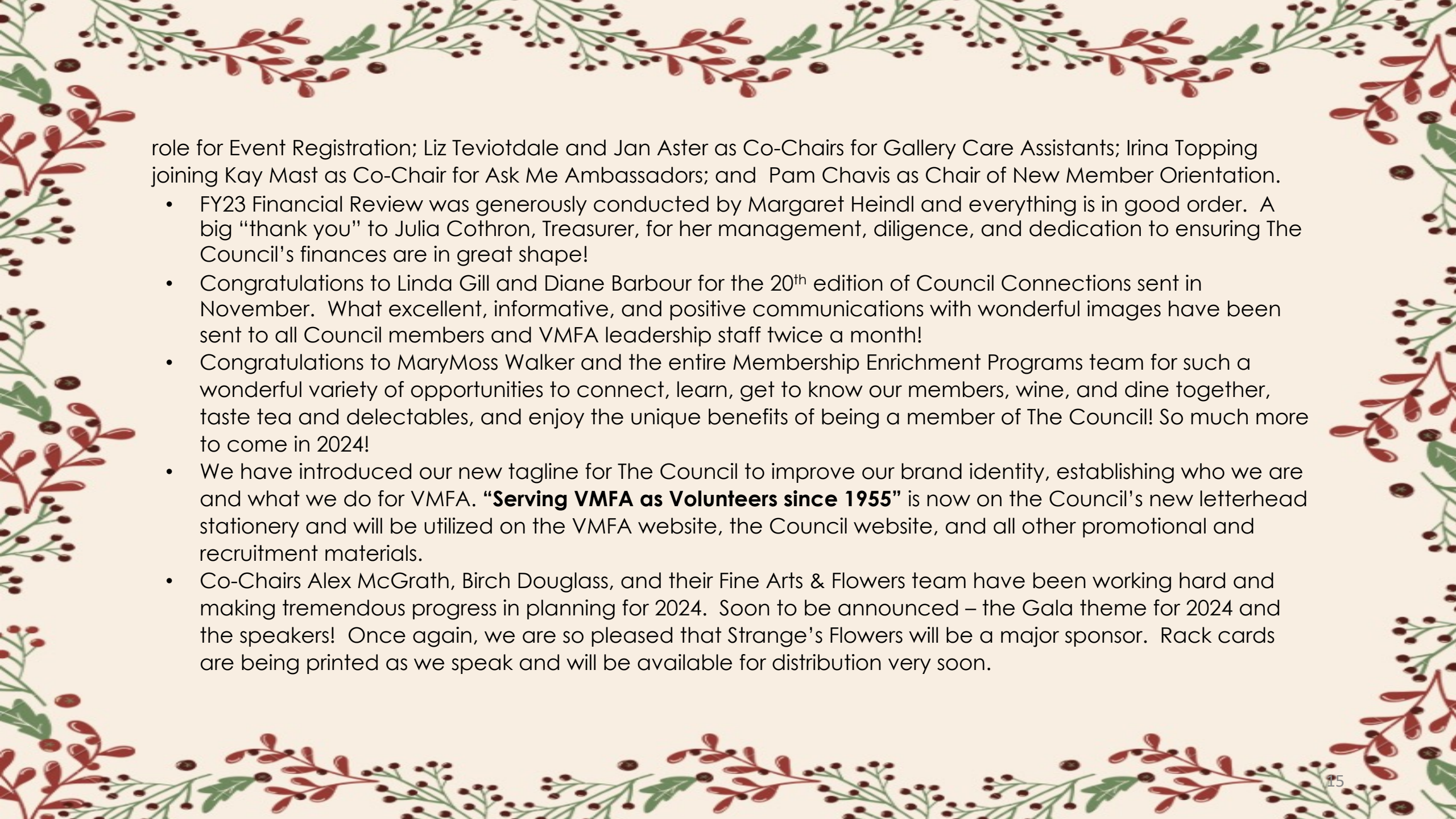


Holiday greetings to all! I am pleased and honored to share so many “glad tidings” about The Council with you in this Special Edition of Council Connections!

Council Membership has increased to a total of 385 members! - 231 Active members, 13 Honorary members, 142 Associate members, and 1 non-resident member. Our Member Recruitment Team has developed a very exciting and comprehensive plan for continuing to increase our membership. Let’s all take the opportunity to introduce The Council to friends and associates in the new campaign **“See Yourself at VMFA! Where Volunteers Make a Difference!”**

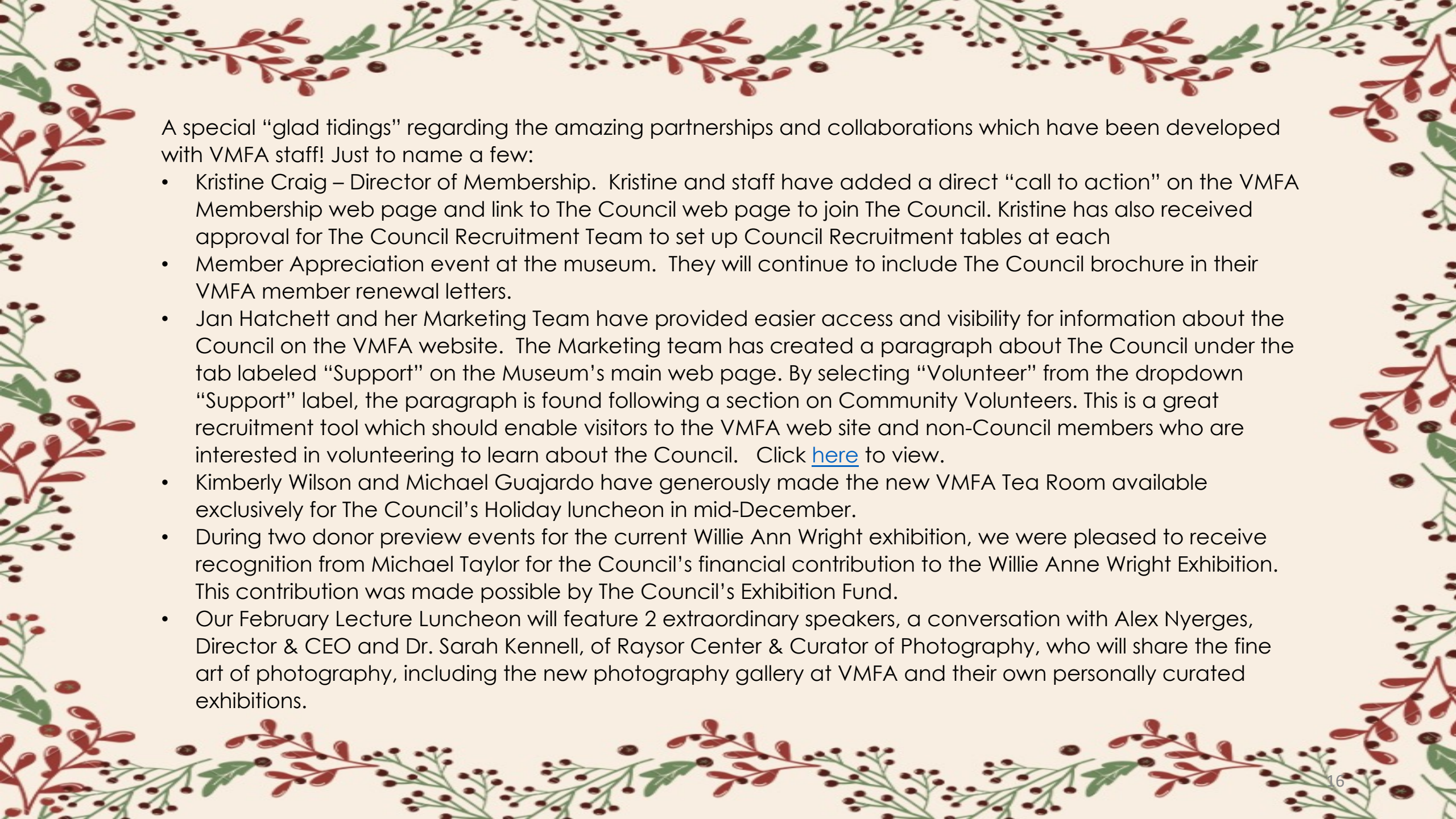
We have welcomed 20 new (3 reinstated) Active Members since our May Board of Governors meeting. Two informal and interactive New Member Orientations have been held and were well received by all new members. The 2nd one was held in the Claiborne Robertson Room, overlooking the stunning VMFA campus. Many thanks to Alex Nyerges and Michael Guajardo for making this lovely room available and for offering coffee and tea service to us for these important orientations for our new members. We hope to utilize this lovely, impressive space for all future orientations.

- Congratulations to many Council members stepping up into new leadership roles: Frank Dellinger as Chair of Council Operations; Jim Schuyler joining Uma Basavaraj as Co-Chairs of Membership Recruitment Team; Suzanne Battaglia and Joe Nartowicz – Co-Chairs for Technology Management, with Patti Chappell taking on the lead




role for Event Registration; Liz Teviotdale and Jan Aster as Co-Chairs for Gallery Care Assistants; Irina Topping joining Kay Mast as Co-Chair for Ask Me Ambassadors; and Pam Chavis as Chair of New Member Orientation.

- FY23 Financial Review was generously conducted by Margaret Heindl and everything is in good order. A big “thank you” to Julia Cothron, Treasurer, for her management, diligence, and dedication to ensuring The Council’s finances are in great shape!
- Congratulations to Linda Gill and Diane Barbour for the 20th edition of Council Connections sent in November. What excellent, informative, and positive communications with wonderful images have been sent to all Council members and VMFA leadership staff twice a month!
- Congratulations to MaryMoss Walker and the entire Membership Enrichment Programs team for such a wonderful variety of opportunities to connect, learn, get to know our members, wine, and dine together, taste tea and delectables, and enjoy the unique benefits of being a member of The Council! So much more to come in 2024!
- We have introduced our new tagline for The Council to improve our brand identity, establishing who we are and what we do for VMFA. **“Serving VMFA as Volunteers since 1955”** is now on the Council’s new letterhead stationery and will be utilized on the VMFA website, the Council website, and all other promotional and recruitment materials.
- Co-Chairs Alex McGrath, Birch Douglass, and their Fine Arts & Flowers team have been working hard and making tremendous progress in planning for 2024. Soon to be announced – the Gala theme for 2024 and the speakers! Once again, we are so pleased that Strange’s Flowers will be a major sponsor. Rack cards are being printed as we speak and will be available for distribution very soon.



A special “glad tidings” regarding the amazing partnerships and collaborations which have been developed with VMFA staff! Just to name a few:

- Kristine Craig – Director of Membership. Kristine and staff have added a direct “call to action” on the VMFA Membership web page and link to The Council web page to join The Council. Kristine has also received approval for The Council Recruitment Team to set up Council Recruitment tables at each
- Member Appreciation event at the museum. They will continue to include The Council brochure in their VMFA member renewal letters.
- Jan Hatchett and her Marketing Team have provided easier access and visibility for information about the Council on the VMFA website. The Marketing team has created a paragraph about The Council under the tab labeled “Support” on the Museum’s main web page. By selecting “Volunteer” from the dropdown “Support” label, the paragraph is found following a section on Community Volunteers. This is a great recruitment tool which should enable visitors to the VMFA web site and non-Council members who are interested in volunteering to learn about the Council. Click [here](#) to view.
- Kimberly Wilson and Michael Guajardo have generously made the new VMFA Tea Room available exclusively for The Council’s Holiday luncheon in mid-December.
- During two donor preview events for the current Willie Ann Wright exhibition, we were pleased to receive recognition from Michael Taylor for the Council’s financial contribution to the Willie Anne Wright Exhibition. This contribution was made possible by The Council’s Exhibition Fund.
- Our February Lecture Luncheon will feature 2 extraordinary speakers, a conversation with Alex Nyerges, Director & CEO and Dr. Sarah Kennell, of Raysor Center & Curator of Photography, who will share the fine art of photography, including the new photography gallery at VMFA and their own personally curated exhibitions.

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- In a recent meeting with Michael Taylor, possible themes, and speakers for lectures in May of 2024 and ongoing into 24-25 FY were discussed. At Michael's suggestion, he posed the unique opportunity to align with 3 blockbuster special exhibitions coming to VMFA. We decided with him to first align in May with the **Samurai Armor from the Collection of Ann and Gabriel Barbier-Meuller** which opens April 20, 2024. Michael has discussed speaker possibilities with Celeste Fetta and we will soon announce once confirmed. **The Smith Group** presentation on the museum's expansion project, previously set for May 2024, will move to the September 2024 Lecture/Luncheon. Again, with Michael's suggestions, we are considering two additional opportunities to align with large special exhibitions in February and May 2025: the new **Schlumberger/Tiffany** exhibit and **Frida Kahlo**. We are very excited to offer these stellar lecture experiences for our members. We are so pleased to have the opportunity to collaborate with Michael Taylor and his Education Team and greatly appreciate their wonderful support for The Council.

There are so many more items of "good news and glad tidings" to be shared. Therefore, I encourage you to stay engaged, stay involved, participate, and commit to your volunteer service for VMFA! It's a great time to be a member of The Council!

Wishing each of you and your families a holiday season full of happiness, good health, joy, peace, and gratitude for our many blessings!

Nan Boyd, President



***Please log in to Volgistics here
and enter your volunteer hours today!***

Thank you!

If you have an article to include in the next issue of VMFA Council Connections, please contact Linda Gill (lagill@verizon.net) or Diane Barbour (dbarb9214@aol.com) by noon on Wednesday, January 10, 2024.

