

How the Printmaking Center of New Jersey Evolved in 50 years

By Linda Berghoff

One of the ways in which a non-profit arts organization measures success is through its development and accomplishments. The Printmaking Center of N.J., presently known as Frontline Arts, has over the past five decades attained prominence in the visual arts. Especially in the graphic arts. This distinguished art organization has continued to fashion itself with practicing professionals and educators. Fifty years ago the seeds of such art professionals and educators were planted.

To quote from a letter written by one of its founders, Zelda Burdick, commemorating the official opening of the Printmaking Center of N.J. “This facility will fulfill a need of the community and N.J. printmakers to study, teach, exhibit, and inform the community about the ‘fine print’. It will be dedicated to traditional and innovative printmaking methods. Its facilities will be available to artists, educators, and students.”

The Printmaking Center of N.J.’s original mission laid out by its founders continues today as it provides a community for a new generation of artists. Since the beginning, the Printmaking Center of N.J. has exhibited thought provoking art. As such the transition in 2018 to merge as Frontline Arts, focusing on social awareness and veteran-created programs has evolved into a stronger organization growing with the changing global environment.

As with Frontline Arts and the addition of supporting veterans, the origin of the Printmaking Center of N.J. sprang from conversations concerning the need for a community-based art organization serving present day artists. Community involvement was integral and significant, and the true mission of the founders was to erase the awe of art and make everyone a part of it through education.

An early example of its evolution was when the founders, concerned about environmental safety and the use of various chemicals in printmaking, created an educational video in cooperation with the bio-chem department of the Pratt Institute of Graphics. This one example continues to exhibit the forward movement with Frontline Arts and their commitment with the use of non-toxic materials in the arts.

One of the memorable moments that founder Lois Berghoff had about the “early days” was the founding of the two-story framed building that the Printmaking Center of N.J. called

home. In 1974 the Printmaking Center of N.J. was incorporated, and many facilities were made available for the center to use for classes, lectures and special projects. A local newspaper wrote an article about the need for a building and soon after the center received a call from the Somerset County Park Commission, who offered to re-construct a building on land generously donated by philanthropist Ralph Reeve.

And so it began, with the support of the Parks Commission and County Freeholders. There was much work ahead, but with the help of many artists, donors, and with state funding, the Printmaking Center of N.J. opened in 1979.

Now it is 50 years later and as they say, “we are still standing.” The founders dream more than ever has been fulfilled with so many years of accomplishments. What a history!

To be continued...