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MY EXPERIENCE

A SHORT HISTORY OF TOM TRESSER'S WORK IN ARTS, POLITICS, CREATIVITY AND PUBLIC POLICY

1990

Summer 1990 - As Managing Director of Pegasus Players, I urged the League of Chicago Theatres to respond to the threat to the National Endowment for the Arts. The Culture Wars were under way and we were losing - we weren't even suited up for battle! The League is the trade association for Chicago's theater industry.

Fall 1990 - The League creates its first action/policy effort, The Advocacy Task Force and Roche Schuller, Executive Director of The Goodman Theater, becomes its chairman. I resigned from Pegasus Players to become the staff person for the League's Advocacy Task Force. The Task Force organized a wide range of activities: voter registration in theater lobbies, getting program inserts printed and distributed with house managers giving curtain speeches, a rally in Daley Plaza and an unprecedented 10,000 piece political mailing using the mailing lists of 10 theaters. For a look at the materials we produced and distributed, [click here](#).

At the same time, I approached the MacArthur Foundation for funding to start organizing a proactive response to the attack on the arts. I received funding to travel to six cities to examine what artists are doing to empower themselves and what the city and business community is doing to support the arts.

I visited New York, Boston, Washington DC, Seattle, Los Angeles and San Francisco to learn what artists were doing for themselves in terms of innovative support and what was being done for them by business and government. I found a wide range of exciting programs - in Boston, artists had financed and built a number of fabulous live-work spaces in converted warehouses, in Milwaukee I found a United Way type of funding drive for the arts that raised millions annually, in San Francisco I learned that the city arts granting program was funded by their hotel tax and was several times larger than the comparable program run by Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs. Read the [summary of the types of programs I encountered](#) (PDF document).

The idea behind this research was to compile models and exemplary programs and present them to Chicago's cultural community and see what types of programs we might want to adopt for ourselves. What types of creative arts support existed in other cities? Our goal was to then help facilitate a process to learn and move the requisite civic action forward to enact programs for Chicago. This sort of proactive research would be part of an ongoing strategic planning effort for Chicago's cultural community.

The MacArthur grant also covered community organizing training for a dozen arts leaders from The Midwest Academy. This training was led by Jackie Kendall and Steve Max. Participants included Alton Miller, Mayor Washington's Press Secretary, Peter Taub, then Artistic Director of The Randolph Street Gallery and Matthew Brockmeier, then Executive Director of the Chicago Music Alliance. Alton now teaches at Columbia College and is a consultant for The Illinois Arts Alliance. Peter is Director of Performance

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NEA Petitions, League of Chicago Theatres



September 2003 forum in San Francisco where six candidates for Mayor came to a forum co-sponsored by the Arts Democratic Club. Over 500 people attended.

Museum of Contemporary Arts here and Matthew> went on to direct the expanded **Chicago Dance and Music Alliance**.

The most startling experience I had on the research trip was at a women's arts space in San Francisco. During one of my interviews I learned of an organization called the **San Francisco Arts Democratic Club**. Apparently political clubs are the way that local Democratic politics gets done in San Francisco - where candidates for local office cut their teeth on grassroots efforts and whose support all area candidates seek for funds, endorsements and campaign workers. The Arts Democratic Club was meeting that night at a local arts space to hear from candidates running for City Council (in Chicago, we call them Aldermen).

I went to this meeting with a great sense of curiosity and excitement. The space was on the upper floor of the arts space which I recall as being fairly open and had an exhibit up. There were a number of chairs put out and about 20 people in attendance. This was 12 years ago so my memory is a bit fuzzy - but I distinctly remember three candidates present, two men and one women, one being African-American and one being Asian-American. Each candidate was given about five minutes to speak and hand out literature. The candidates were very serious in seeking the organization's endorsement and each offered to work with the Club on policy and related matters and to meet with them regularly. I was astonished. Here were office seekers coming hat-in-hand to a group of artists to ask for their help in return for promises of future cooperation and mutual advantage. I tried to imagine such a meeting in Chicago with Aldermanic candidates coming before a group of Chicago artists and asking for their support. At that time, Chicago's City Council was still reeking from the racist odors of the infamous Council Wars that marred Mayor Harold Washington's early years in office. In addition, a number Alderman had been jailed for assorted crimes. The group politely heard from the candidates and the coordinator discussed the follow-up actions with the attendees, with a formal endorsement session scheduled for the near future. [The image to the right is from a September 2003 forum in San Francisco where six candidates for Mayor came to a forum co-sponsored by the Arts Democratic Club. Over 500 people attended].

When I got home I was resolved to try to duplicate this organization for Chicago. After all, politics is a participatory sport here, we have a long history of community organizing and people-powered institutions and there were hundreds of arts organizations in the city. It seemed like a natural.

SEPT 1990 MAILING

In order to activate our patrons and involve them in a "Save-the-NEA" campaign, the **League of Chicago Theatres'** Advocacy Committee organized an unprecedented mailing in mid-September of 1990. A number of prominent theaters pooled their mailing lists for a one-time mailing of a political piece from the League. We worked with a fund raising consultant and a data base expert to create the piece and the system to merge the lists and imprint the pieces. We mailed out about 10,000 pieces and asked folks to sign enclosed post cards and mail the items back to us and to give us a non-tax-deductible contribution.

Over 780 people replied -- an 8% response -- and they contributed \$9,460, which covered the cost of the mailing.

Here are the components of the mailing (click on the image to see a larger version of the item):

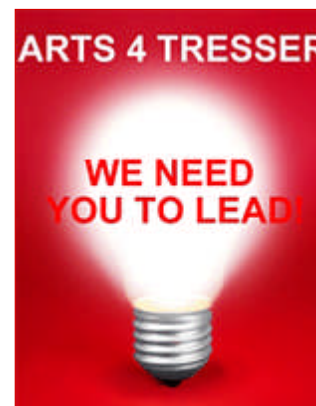
Outer envelope



Letter



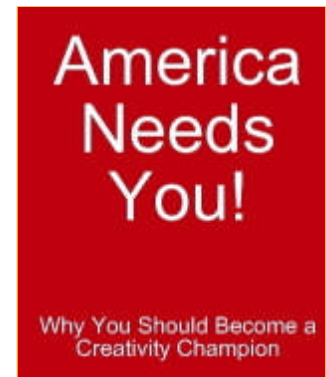
Calling all artists, cultural workers and creative professionals! Tom has worked to bring resources, respect and opportunity to the arts and cultural sectors for decades. Now he asks YOUR support for his election. **Please join the Facebook "Arts for Tresser" Group here.**



Read the book
**"America Needs You!
Why You Should Become
a Creativity Champion"**

America needs her artists, cultural workers and creative professionals to lead in the public sector! This book makes the case for creativity as a national value and the basis for a winning politics and explains why creative professionals have what it takes to lead and run for local public

office. You're already a leader!
Believe it.



Purchase the book from
Lulu.com

Download the text for free!

Insert message from Frank
Galati



Petition piece w. tear-off
cards.

Folks signed them and
returned them to us in a
postage-paid envelope. We
bundled them and delivered
them to
Senators Dixon and Simon
and President Bush.





Thank You letter to petition
signers/contributors

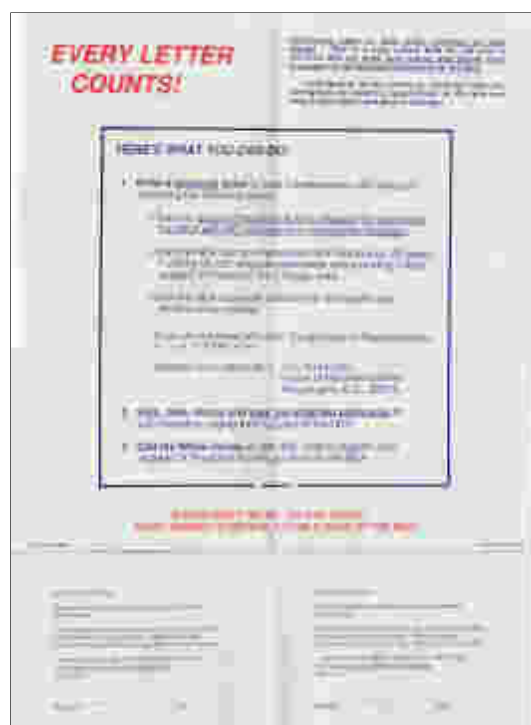


Letter to the League from
the White House



FALL 1990 PROGRAM STUFFERS

During the Fall of 1990 theaters through-out Chicago stuffed these flyers in their programs and house managers gave curtain speeches calling attention to the "Save The NEA" campaign. Patrons were urged to sign the tear-off post cards and leave them in the theater lobby for mailing by the theater. The Playboy Foundation donated the printing.



OTHER ACTIONS

League of Chicago Theatres
newsletter

Read Frank Galati's remarks
at the League's press
conference and Tom's op-ed
piece.



September 4th Rally at
Daley Plaza



Galati Reflects on Art and Obscenity

What follows are Frank Galati's remarks from the June 11, 1990, League of Chicago Theatres' press conference.

In 1938 John Steinbeck's publishers read the manuscript of *The Grapes of Wrath* for the first time. They were stunned by the majesty of the book but also shocked and deeply offended by the ending in which the young girl, Rose of Sharon, having lost her baby in childbirth, gives the milk from her breast to a starving stranger in order to save his life. That act, that gesture of compassion, has thundering, disturbing dimensions -- containing within it mythic resonances -- taboos, erotic overtones, collective associations of fundamental relationships between mothers and children, the flow of life from one human being to another, the rite of passage that transforms the female breast from a locus of need to one of desire, from the nourishing figure of the mother to the erogenous landscape of the lover. All of these layers of feeling and meaning are bodied forth in the gesture that closes the novel -- and that *action* was considered so shocking in 1939, so obscene, that the screenplay for the film of *The Grapes of Wrath* turned the closing moment of the story from one of awesome catharsis and profound ambiguity to one of sentimental optimism.

The artist in society, the *great* artist, has never made it easy for the public, has always challenged and disturbed the equilibrium in the cultural life of the community. In Italy, for centuries, there were fig leaves on the genitals of the great cultural artifacts of the Renaissance, and certainly the most conservative spectator would agree that there are deeply homoerotic dimensions in the masterworks of Michelangelo and Caravaggio. Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring" caused a riot in performance in 1913 because the public heard the old harmonies of the 19th century crack and give birth to the new, and the new included the primordial and the sexual. The violent cadence of animal mating evoked in the opening passages of Stravinsky's masterpiece was considered obscene, but wound up as the soundtrack for Walt Disney's arty "Fantasia."

We don't now and never have had a clear consensus about the nature of obscenity. Certainly war is obscene, murder is and rape -- child abuse, prejudice, racism, discrimination, poverty, certainly the Holocaust was obscene, but is Joyce's *Ulysses*? The legal definition of the word "obscene" used in 1933 by Judge John M. Woolsey in his landmark decision to admit Joyce's masterpiece into the United States was "...tending to stir the sex impulses or to lead to sexually impure and lustful thoughts."

So -- if Steinbeck's madonna was considered obscene in 1939, is our own post-modern Madonna when she appropriates Christian icons and hangs a studded crucifix between her war-like breasts and asks the public to *think* about the nature of worship? Is it obscene to be provoked by an artist to reflect on the nature of the flag, or patriotism, or public office or the sacred *and* the profane? We are grown-ups! We must recognize that society is created by art and lives through art. The young women and men courageous enough to embark on the difficult way of the artist *must be honored* by society, celebrated, cherished and *certainly*, at the very least, *funded*. If the NEA dies or is injured, a portion of our liberty will be taken away and the nourishment, however small, that young artists need

Calling all artists, cultural workers and creative professionals! Tom has worked to bring resources, respect and opportunity to the arts and cultural sectors for decades. Now he asks YOUR support for his election. Please join the Facebook "Arts for Tresser" Group here.



Read the book
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will be cut off. (The two most important works of my own creative life, *The Grapes of Wrath* at Steppenwolf and the Goodman's *She Always Said, Pablo*, would not have happened without the NEA.) Like the stranger in the barn at the end of *The Grapes of Wrath*, we, as a nation, are starving for spiritual food -- that is the nourishment great art can provide.

Could it be, at the end of the most catastrophic century in human history, when a vision of world peace has appeared on the horizon, that our country will *not* dedicate itself to the elimination of the *true obscenity* in our culture and pour our resources into the education of our young and the encouragement of a life in the arts? It would be tragic, after a century of artistic creation against a backdrop of death, to turn away from the young and break a promise to the poet in our midst.

Frank Galati is associate director of the Goodman Theatre, a member of the Steppenwolf Theatre ensemble, and professor of performance studies at Northwestern University.

Arts Advocacy: A New Movement is Born

by Thomas Tresser – League of Chicago Theatres Biz Buzz, July 1990

A patron encounters a voter registration booth in a theatre lobby.

Artists conduct a press conference on support for the arts.

Ten thousand theatregoers receive a direct mail piece urging them to sign petitions and support the arts loudly and continuously.

Full page newspaper ads urge readers to call a "900" telephone number which sends telegrams Congress demanding support for the NEA.

These events all occurred in Chicago during the past few months.

All over America, arts groups are reaching out to their decade and to the public. They are reaching out to their patrons and to the public. They are forming coalitions, engaging in policy analysis, raising money, and speaking powerfully about basic issues of freedom of expression, support for the arts, and the place of the artist in society.

The mean spirited, poisonous, homophobic attack led on the arts by certain extremist politicians and religious leaders has galvanized the arts community from coast to coast.

As if waking from a long sleep, we are entering the public arena angrily to do battle with those officials who would eliminate federal support for the arts or establish veiled or overt censorship.

We are realizing that while millions of people attend arts and cultural events, we cannot claim their support automatically.

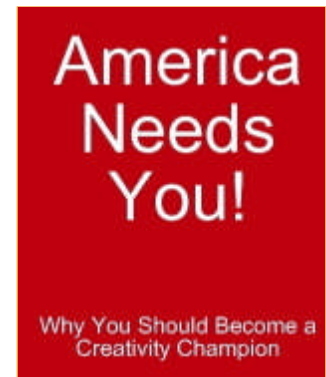
We have begun a new conversation with our public as a result of the attacks on our community which has the potential of creating a new national movement based on support for the arts and strengthening America's creative spirit.

In the short run, we must continue to develop our and deploy our arsenal to ensure the NEA is reauthorized without restrictions.

In the long run, we can maintain our association with our colleagues leagues in other arts disciplines and start to forge alliances with our brothers and sisters beyond the arts who are involved in any activity related to fostering creativity, including the education, science, publishing, software, literacy, and media communities.

Together we can affirm our position with other groups who are trying to remove

office. You're already a leader! Believe it.



Purchase the book from
Lulu.com

Download the text for free!

oppressive barriers, fight prejudices, and seek empowerment.

Let's make the '90's the of creativity.

Thomas Tresser is a consultant or the League's Advocacy Task Force.

A SHORT HISTORY OF TOM TRESSER'S WORK IN ARTS, POLITICS, CREATIVITY AND PUBLIC POLICY

1991

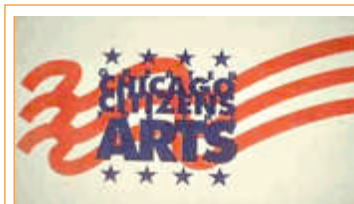
This was the year I spent organizing two huge projects around arts and public life. The first was Greater Chicago Citizens for the Arts, which was our incarnation of the San Francisco Arts Democratic Club. I was the founding president and lead organizer. This was a volunteer effort and no one was paid for their time or services. We were very creative in our blending cultural events and venues and political education. We endorsed candidates, raised money for them, organized committees (e.g. Arts for Braun), wrote cultural policy platform statements, curated and produced events in arts spaces. Our biggest effort was Arts for Braun which raised over \$25,000 for Carol's first Senate race. We also co-wrote her official campaign platform on arts and culture. We organized "Re-Imagining America" at the Randolph Street Gallery and trained 60 artists to be Deputy Registrars who then registered some 1,200 people to vote. We also organized on behalf of Luis Gutierrez's first campaign for Congress. After his election, we organized an arts town hall meeting for him at the Chopin Theater and organized the 4th Congressional District Arts & Culture Advisory Committee.

The other project was an attempt to organize a center for cultural policy at Roosevelt University. I approached Dr. Richard Krieg, the founder and director of the Institute for Metropolitan Affairs. Dr. Krieg had been Mayor Daley's Health Commissioner and he had established the IMA to serve as a bridge between the academic community and the civic arena. He had recently completed a transition plan for the incoming president of the Cook County Board of Commissioners. I spent most of 1991 at Roosevelt organizing a board and developing a two-year research agenda. Fred Fine, Mayor Washington's Commissioner of Cultural Affairs, was my mentor and helped me conceptualize the program and strategize tactics for its organization. Read the case for the center, the mission statement, a proposed list of research projects, and an essay, "The Arts Need to Get Into Political Action." Dr. Krieg and I worked closely with grant officers at the MacArthur Foundation on a two-year, \$200,000 operating grant. Unfortunately, the board of the foundation declined to fund the proposal and my year at Roosevelt ended in disappointment. I think I earned something like \$4,000 that year. I ended up teaching "Arts and Public Policy" at Roosevelt for two years, with a great mix of theater students and public policy and public administration majors in the class.

Curated a special issue of "One City," the magazine of the Chicago Council on Urban Affairs, the first to deal with cultural policy issues. I was on the Editorial Board and advocated for this special issue. Click here to read the article I contributed, "25 Things We Can Do To Boost the Art Eco-System." Other contributors were Joan Gray, President of Muntu Dance Theatre of Chicago; Lois Weisberg, Commissioner of the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs; Natalie Van Straaten, Executive Director of the Chicago Art Dealers Association; and Helen Valdez, President of the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum.

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Greater Chicago Citizens for the Arts logo



Center for Cultural Policy & Advocacy - Institute for Metropolitan Affairs



This article, "[25 Things We Can Do To Boost the Art](#)"

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1993

From April 1993 to December 1995 I was Director of Cultural Development at Peoples Housing, a community development organization located in the Rogers Park neighborhood in northeast Chicago. I organized a community arts program that combined elements of culture, education and micro-enterprise. [Learn more.](#)

Read an article I wrote in 1994, "[Artists & Community Organizers: Possibilities for Partnerships](#)"

Read a summary article written in 1997, "[The Artistic Side of Sustainable Communities](#)"

Meanwhile I organized the first Chicago City Council Arts Caucus. On April 26, in my capacity as President of Greater Chicago Citizens for the Arts, I chaired a meeting in the Press Room of City Hall. As I recall it, some 15 aldermen attended, including Ted Mazolla, Burt Natarus, Allan Streeter, Edwin Eisendrath, Joe Moore and Mary Ann Smith.

I presented an overview of the economic impact of the arts in the city. Alderman Joe Moore was the convener. Pat Johnson, of the MacArthur Foundation sponsored Arts and Community Development Project, presented a slide show on community-based arts programs. Sandra Furey, the Executive Director of Urban Gateways, presented the role of arts in the lives of young people, and Sandy Boyd, the President of the Field Museum, presented on the role of museums and major cultural institutions in the life of the city.

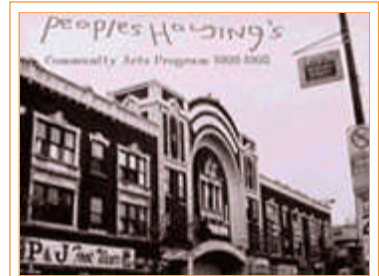
[Click here to see the agenda.](#) The aldermen were interested in keeping the group together and a second meeting was held later in the office of the Commissioner of Cultural Affairs, Lois Weisberg.

Fast forward ten years. Political circumstances in America has called me back to this work

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[Eco-System.](#)" (PDF) appeared in the March-April 1991 issue of One City, published by the Chicago Council on Urban Affairs.

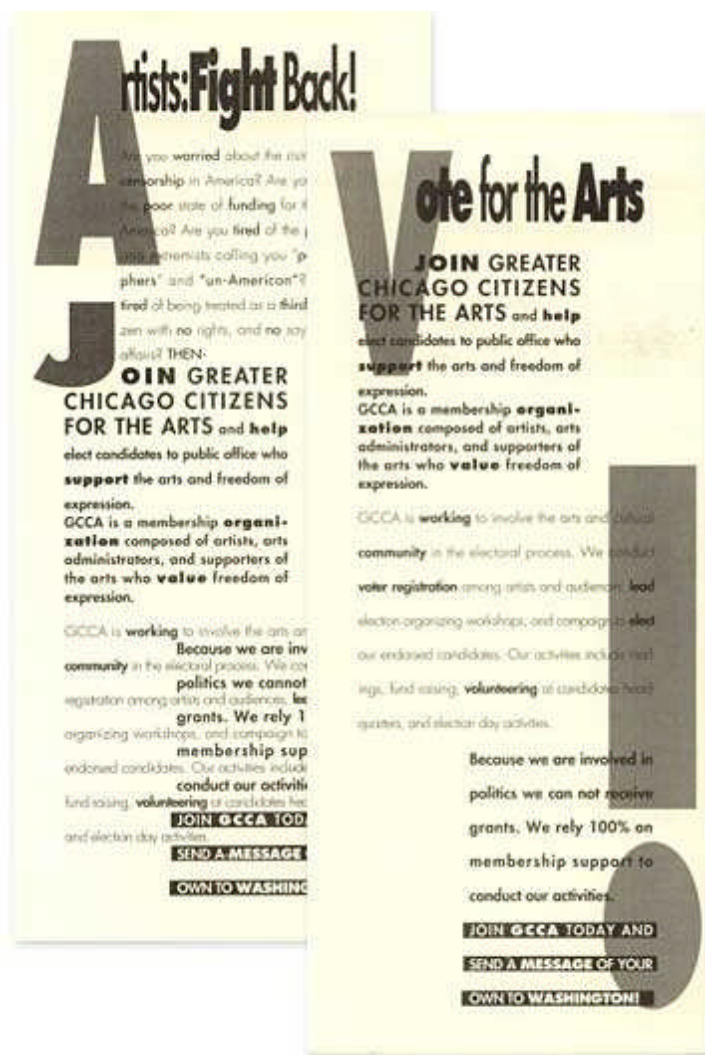


[The Howard Theater, Rogers Park, Chicago](#)



Arts & Politics

TOM TRESSER'S WORK IN ARTS ORGANIZING & POLITICS



Read a [detailed history](#) of Tom's work in creativity and civic engagement.

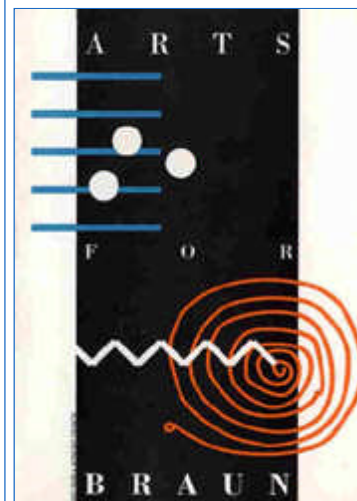
In 1990 I organized Greater Chicago Citizens for The Arts, a membership organization dedicated to electing candidates who supported the arts and freedom of expression. GCCA was a political action organization and we worked to get arts workers involved in the electoral process.

We were very active for three years...

We actively recruited members in the arts and creative community. Dues were \$30.00 and were not tax deductible. We eventually had some 400 dues-paying



We trained over 60 artists to register people to vote.



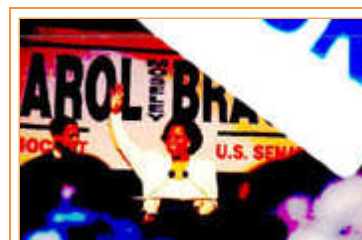
Everyone in the campaign wanted one of our cool "Arts for Braun" buttons! The designer was Shira Honore

members.

We trained over 60 artists to register people to vote.

GCCA deputy registrars registered over 1,200 people to vote. We did this in theater lobbies, at arts festivals, in front of post offices and at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

We worked with candidates for Alderman, State Representative, U.S. Congress and the U.S. Senate to draft arts and culture policy statements. These statements contained both background statements about the impact of the arts in society as well as specific policy



points that the candidate would pursue in the areas of arts support, arts in education and arts in the broad agenda of urban renewal.

We wrote the **arts policy statements** for candidates for local and federal office. We created a policy statement for Judy Erwin's first campaign for State Representative from Chicago's 11th District, which includes the Loop. She won that race and has been re-elected four times. We co-authored the **arts policy statement** from the campaign of Carol Mosley Braun for the U.S. Senate. Read the essay, "**The Arts Need to Get Into Political Action.**" (WORD doc)

We endorsed candidates for office (22 candidates in the 1992 election cycle) and worked to get them elected. We helped to raise money (over \$25,000 for the Braun campaign), we collected signatures for our candidates at arts fairs, we sent volunteers to campaign offices, we printed and distributed over 12,000 pro-arts slate cards urging arts patrons to vote for our ticket and we held several public events to spotlight our candidates.



Tom served as a connector to the Braun campaign to the Illinois arts and culture community, volunteering one day a week at the campaign HQ for six months.

We endorsed and passed endorsement literature for then Alderman Luis Gutierrez, who was running for Congress. We hosted a reception at a local gallery and the candidate spoke at our rally at the Royal George Theater and was a keynote speaker at our Politics 101 Conference and Exhibition at the Randolph Street Gallery. After his election, GCCA organized a town hall meeting for the arts at The Chopin Theater on Division Street, attended by over 150 people. We

then went on to organize the 4th Congressional District Arts & Culture Advisory Council.

I spoke out at meetings and arts conferences in Chicago and across the country on the need for the arts community and progressives in general to organize politically and create a unified vision for civic action. I tracked the progress of the Radical Right, including the Christian Coalition, which I felt was becoming alarmingly effective in organizing its base, mobilizing resources and getting people elected.

We produced **events in arts spaces and theaters** that combined elements of performance, education and political action. We printed and distributed literature, **newsletters**, **candidate endorsement cards** and curated publications and exhibits.

The Christian Coalition was founded following fundamentalist evangelical Pat Robertson's failed 1988 bid for the Republican nomination for President. By 1991 it had a well organized and publicly announced political strategy for grassroots organizing at the county level in every state. It distributed tens of million voter's guides in the 1992 election cycle. The power of the Religious Right has grown since then and has successfully inoculated the entire American political system with its values and agenda. **Read more...**

I wrote a bi-weekly column on arts and politics for Performink, a Chicago-based newspaper serving the entertainment industry here. **Here's a column from 1993** reporting on the defeat of pro-arts Illinois Congressman John Cox by Ron Manzullo with the help of the Christian Coalition.



GCCA disbanded in 1994 as I turned my attention to a new full-time job. My efforts in



Tom with Harvey Gantt, who ran unsuccessfully against arch-conservative and frequent attacker of the arts, Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC).



GCCA organized a packed Arts Town Meeting for newly elected Congressman Gutierrez in 1993 at The Chopin Theater.



Michael Warr reads his poetry at the Gutierrez town hall meeting.



Aaron Freeman speaks out at a GCCA rally at Club Lower Links

organizing creative people to participate in civic and political work were rewarding and productive. But I think we only scratched the surface of the resources and power that can be unleashed from the creative community on behalf of progressive candidates for public office.

2004-2007. Ten years later circumstances have called me back to this work. I am frustrated by the success of the Far Right in mobilizing their constituents, electing officials at all levels of government and steering this country to a place of intolerance, ignorance and fear-mongering. All, sadly, as I had predicted in 1991. I attempted to organize a nonpartisan, but progressive and creative response. I called it **The Creative America Project**. Its purpose was to help establish creativity as a national value for policy and political engagement by encouraging and training creative professionals to run for local office. By creative professionals, I mean anyone who makes their living from their creative work – artists, performers, designers, educators, scientists, researchers, nonprofit managers, community organizers and activists. This was to be a non-profit, tax-exempt organization. I recruited an impressive list of board members and an advisory council and applied for nonprofit status in July of 2004. As of Spring 2007, despite responding to six different sets of questions from two different IRS examiners and repeated calls from my Congressman's office, no determination has been rendered and the organization has dissolved. Over the three years I spend organizing this effort, I was invited to **speak to a number of arts service organizations about the idea of artists and cultural workers as leaders**. The responses of attendees were thrilling. People seemed to be genuinely surprised and inspired by my message that – basically, they were already leaders and that America desperately needs their creative values and skills in the public sector. Unfortunately, these offers to speak were the only encouragement I got from America's arts service industry. I did publish op-eds in the official magazines of the nonprofit theater community **and America's nonprofit performing arts organizations**. So, in early 2007, with no official tax status rendered, no funding possible, and no encouragement from any national arts or creative organization, the Creative America Project has folded.



Here is a flyer we produced.

I produced events at The University of Oregon, the Louisville Arts Council, The Guild Complex, Victory Gardens, the Opt-In Artists Exhibit on social change and Around the Coyote.

March 2004 -- I attended **Camp Wellstone**, a 2 1/2 day training session for progressive, grassroots activists and candidates.

April 2004 -- I was elected to the Local School Council of the **Abraham Lincoln Elementary School** in Lincoln Park.



April 2006 - I started teaching **"How To Be A Cultural Activist"** at **DePaul University's School for New Learning**. Other classes I've since developed and taught include "Who's Lying To You Now?" for DePaul. Coming up: "The Politics of Creativity / Creativity in Politic" for DePaul's Political Science Department and **"The Artist as Activist"** for **Loyola**

A SHORT HISTORY OF TOM TRESSER'S WORK IN ARTS, POLITICS, CREATIVITY AND PUBLIC POLICY

2004

March - Attended [Camp Wellstone](#), a 2 1/2 day training session for grassroots activists and candidates (present and future).

April - Elected to the Local School Council of the [Abraham Lincoln Elementary School](#).

August - After seven months of organizing work, incorporated and registered the [Creative America Project](#) as a nonprofit, nonpartisan group to inspire and train artists and creative professionals to run for local office. Created events at several local venues, including the [Guild Complex](#) and [Victory Gardens Theatre](#) to mix performance with speaking about the need to defend creativity and for creatives to run for local office. Spoke at a [National Performing Arts Convention](#), [Louisville Summit on Community Arts](#) and the [League of Chicago Theatres](#) annual conference. Read coverage in the [Chicago Sun-Times](#) and the [Chicago Reader](#).

November - The Creative America Project is taking off, with invitations from arts leaders in Boston, New York, Pittsburgh, Champaign, St. Louis, Madison, Phoenix, Cheyenne and San Francisco to bring our 2 1/2 training program to their cities in 2005. We've pulled together an impressive national Board of Directors and Advisory Council that includes: [William Cleveland](#) , [Kevin Colon](#), [Dr. John Eger](#), [Sandra Myers](#) , [Dr. Margaret Wyszomirski](#) , [Douglas Blandy](#), [Kathie deNobriga](#), [Joey Coleman](#) , [Michael Dorf](#), [Mayor Richard Howorth](#), [Jeff Jones](#), [Kitty Kurth & Kevin Lampe](#), [Rosemarie Mincey](#), [Daniel Bretton Tisdale](#), and [Your Plan B Company](#)

2005

Tom does presentations in Illinois, Wisconsin, Indiana, Michigan, New Jersey and New York on "[The Politics of Creativity - A Call to Service](#)," which lays out the case for creativity as a basis for a positive, winning politics and for the leadership qualities of creative professionals. You can book this presentation for your city! However, the Creative America Project is in limbo as the IRS objects to our application for nonprofit status and eventually kicks the application to IRS HQ and we are notified 16 months after first submitting the application that no one has been assigned to the case and no word can be given if and when the application will be decided upon. Read the articles on Creative America from [UTNE Magazine](#), the [Chicago Sun-Times](#), [New City](#) and the [Chicago Reader](#)

Read my op-ed piece in the September 2004 issue of [American Theater](#) urging artists and creative leaders to run for local office. [Download it here...](#)

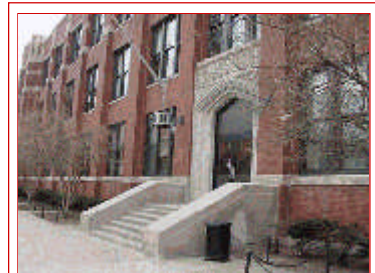
2006 - 2007

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[Candidate Tom](#)



[Abraham Lincoln Elementary School](#)



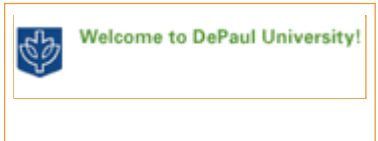


I started teaching "How To Be a Cultural Activist" at the **DePaul**

University School for New Learning. The student newspaper, The DePaulia, ran **an article on the class in their April 28 issue**. I'm continuing to teach



at DePaul, offering "Who's Lying To You Now?" (critical thinking and media literacy), "The Politics of Creativity" for the Political Science Department. New courses include **"Creative Tools for Social Change"** for the **Peace and Social Justice Program** and "International Creativity Policy" for the **Masters Program in Public Service**. At the **Loyola University Theater Department**, I'm teaching **"The Artist as Activist."**. Read an **article from the Loyola Phoenix on this class**.



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Creative America

I spent four years working on the Creative America Project which was about making creativity a national value and trigger for public policy and political engagement. I wanted (and still want) artists and creative professionals to lead in the public sector, including running for local office. Hundreds of people around the country thought this was a good idea. We ran three pilot all-day organizer/candidate training programs. About one hundred people attended those sessions and many were profoundly moved by the experience. I tried to make the project a tax exempt 501(c)3 organization – the kind where your contributions are tax-deductible. But after four years, our application to the IRS has not been acted on and so the organization dissolved. I believe the idea is sound and the activities contemplated perfectly acceptable for a nonprofit (if you're curious, check out the work of the [conservative Leadership Institute](#)). My profound thanks to all Board, Advisory Council and dozens of volunteers and contributors. A special shout out to the folks at [YourPlanB](#) who designed the CAP logo and web site.

Homepage

Who We Are

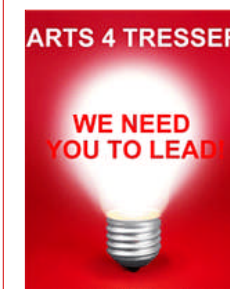
What We Believe

What is Creativity?

Creativity At Risk

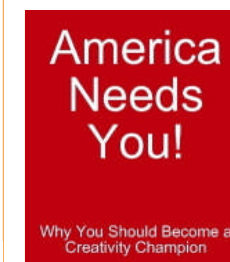
Press

Calling all artists, cultural workers and creative professionals! Tom has worked to bring resources, respect and opportunity to the arts and cultural sectors for decades. Now he asks YOUR support for his election. [Please join the Facebook "Arts for Tresser" Group here.](#)



Read the book
**"America Needs You!
Why You Should Become
a Creativity Champion"**

America needs her artists, cultural workers and creative professionals to lead in the public sector! This book makes the case for creativity as a national value and the basis for a winning politics and explains why creative professionals have what it takes to lead and run for local public office. You're already a leader! Believe it.



[Purchase the book from Lulu.com](#)

[Download the text for free!](#)

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CREATIVITY AT RISK

Bill of Rights Needs Defending

The [Bill of Rights Defense Committee](#) promotes and organizes a diverse, effective, national grassroots movement to restore and protect civil rights and liberties guaranteed to all U.S. residents by the Bill of Rights. Our purpose is to educate people about the significance of those rights in our lives; to encourage widespread participation; and to cultivate and share the organizing tools and strategies needed for people to convert their concern, outrage, and fear into debate and action to restore Bill of Rights protections.

Big City Students Suck at Science

A least half of eighth graders tested in science failed to demonstrate even a basic understanding of the subject in 9 of 10 major cities, and fourth graders, the only other group tested, fared little better, according to results released Wednesday. The outcome of those tests, part of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, often called the nation's report card, showed that student performance in urban public schools was not only poor but also far short of science scores in the nation as a whole. Read the full sad story online at [the New York Times](#).

Religious Tolerance + Politics

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Creative America Project Seeks to Make Artists Heard

CHICAGO ARTISTS' COALITION

-Anna Poplawska, [CAC Newsletter](#) - July 2005

The day concluded with small groups forming campaign teams for a city council race. Participants took on roles of campaign manager, finance director, field organizer and candidate. They fashioned campaigns and had to include the subject of creativity in their campaigns as well as creative elements. Here Sonia Marissa Goldstein, a musician and filmmaker, makes her stump speech on education and local economic development.

Creativity is merely the ability to look at the same thing as everybody else, but to see something different. It's something that everybody has, but it also needs to be nurtured by a society, in order to reach its full potential as a social and economic asset. This is the message of Thomas, head

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We Do Presentations and Training Sessions

Can you help bring the Creative America Project to your city? We're looking for allies who can help us set up a residency at a university, do a speech at an arts or civic organization, do a workshop at a conference or retreat, or offer our full-day training program. Email Tom Tresser at tom@creativeamerica.us.

"The Politics of Creativity - A Call to Service"

This is a 90-minute presentation that blends lecture with elements of performance, audience participation and leadership development.

- Opening performance of jazz/land or spoken word
- Shared reading of Declaration of Independence
- Role of creativity in the life of America - its heritage, economy and future
- The numbers behind the political case for creativity as a winning issue
- Case study of one organization that has succeeded in policy and politics by attacking public funding of the arts
- Recap of threats to American creativity - including erosion of church-state barrier, attacks on public education, religious screening of scientific education and research, low literacy rates, lack of access to higher education and engineering careers, freedom of expression restrictions
- Why creative professionals make excellent public leaders
- "Are You A Leader?" asset inventory exercise with member of audience
- Audience open mike - "What does a Creative America Means to Me" (optional)
- Call to service
- Creativity fight song

Comments from attendees

Upcoming Programs

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Upcoming Programs

Be the First to Read New Book - "Win With Creativity!"

Creative America lead organizer, Tom Tresser has written a book based on his work for the project - ["Win With Creativity! Why and How Creative Professionals Should Run for Local Office"](#)

You can have an advance copy transmitted directly to your local Kinko's copy Center. Just use the PayPal service and make a (non tax-deductable) donation of at least \$15.00 and tell us what is the street address of your local Kinko's.

The Creative America Project is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization seeking to inspire and equip creative leaders to take active roles in civic life. We do not support, endorse or oppose candidates or proposed legislation. The Creative America Project does not discriminate with respect to race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, or partisan affiliation. The Creative America Project has an open admission policy and all programs are open to the public.

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Past Programs

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Past Programs

"The Politics of Creativity - A Call to Service"

Tom was at the [College for Creative Studies](#) in Detroit on February 1. "I would like to commend Mr. Tresser for his work with the Creative America Project. Mr. Tresser shows an uncommon dedication to civil service, public policy and political leadership. His presentation was well thought out and extremely educational. He was able to not only engage the student body at the College for Creative Studies but provided new and meaningful information on civic responsibility and engagement. On a very practical basis, Mr. Tresser shows students how politics affects them as citizens and as artists and he demonstrates an immense amount of knowledge regarding U.S. history and contemporary politics and public policy...I encourage any organization that wishes to become more civically engaged in their community or would like to learn more about the realm of contemporary politics and civic engagement to host the Creative America Project and Tom Tresser." - Daniel Long, Student Programming Coordinator

Tom was in New Jersey on Wednesday, December 7th at the annual meeting of [Arthride New Jersey](#). "Thank you for motivating this group of arts advocates who need to move to the next level of civic involvement. Your presentation is a 'wake up call' for those who believe they are already doing all they can to make a difference, and helped them realize that with not too much additional effort they can assume leadership positions in the public sector and be even more effective agents for change!" - Ann Marie Miller, Executive Director, Arthride

New Jersey

Web Links

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Web Links

Here are links to organizations and online resources that deal with creativity and civic action.

If there is a link you want to share, please email tom@creativeamerica.us.

Our Allies

[Center for Smart Communities](#) www.smartcommunities.org
The World Foundation for Smart Communities is a nonprofit educational organization founded to promote the concept and facilitate the implementation of "smart communities" -- communities using information technology as a catalyst for transforming life and work to meet the challenge of the new millennium.

[Center for the Study of Art & Community](#)
www.artandcommunity.com
The Center for the Study of Art & Community believes the time is ripe for creative pioneers. The building of learning communities and organizations must be undertaken by citizens and institutions with enormous energy and imagination.

[New York Magazine](#) www.newyorkmagazine.net
Online magazine of the Creative Economy - including a column on the Creative Economy, links to Creative Economy initiatives around the U.S.

[Smart City Radio](#) www.smartcityradio.com/smartcityradio
Smart CityRadio is a weekly, hour-long public radio talk show that takes an in-depth look at urban life, the people, places, ideas and trends shaping cities. Host Carol Coletta talks with national and

Our Allies

[The Creative Class and the Creative Economy](#)
[Arts and Social Change](#)
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[Major Political Parties](#)
[Major Issues](#)
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4 registered members

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Welcome to the Creative America Project online community! We're about inspiring and training creative professionals to run for local office in 2006 and beyond.

[Make a Contribution](#) [View Contributions](#) [7](#)

We currently have \$0.00 in our chest.

You can use this space for a personal message about Community Chest. Just go to the My Community tab in your Control Center, click the Manage Community Chest button, and you will see the message space at the bottom of the page (in the Optional Custom Message box). Enter your text, click Apply Display Options, and you are done.

[Team Building](#)
Find Corporate Team Building Solutions Now. Start Here.
[www.CorporateTeamBuildingguide.net](#)

[Corporate Team Building](#)
Team, leadership, ropes course Thompson Island, Boston Harbor
[www.culver@brown.edu.org](#)

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JOIN OUR MAILING LIST
Our current newsletter tool is at Yahoo Groups ([groups.yahoo.com/group/creativeamerica](#)).
Please join by signing up with **YAHOO! Groups** to receive periodic updates and more information about the Creative America project.

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Women's Campaign School at Yale



THE WOMEN'S CAMPAIGN SCHOOL AT YALE UNIVERSITY

The **Women's Campaign School at Yale University** is a non-partisan, non-issues based political training program for women candidates and campaign staff, women already holding elective office, or in political jobs who want to take the next step. WCS Yale is one of the few places left on earth where women from across the U.S. and around the world can gather to become completely immersed in the political leadership process, regardless of political or cultural differences. Learn about their [July 2007 training seminar](#)...

Environmental Film Festival - Green Popcorn?



15th Annual Environmental Film Festival
Thursday March 15th - Sunday March 25th, 2007

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Homepage:

E-Mail: [jarevino@hotmail.com](#)

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City/Country: Mexico

Comments: Nice Web, congratulations. Just one comment: most of the links mention

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Contact Us
It takes a village to create a better village -- we need YOUR help!

☐ I'd like to contribute to the Creative America Project using a check.

☐ I'd like to help organize and spread the word - please contact me.

☐ I'd like to organize an event to support the Creative America Project.

☐ I'd like to contribute graphics arts or other services

☐ I'm interested in being a deputy registrar to register people to vote

Name

Title

Organization

Phone Number

Vision Statements

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Vision Statements
Here are links to Vision Statements Submitted to us:

Creativity and Civics

[A Creative Vision for America, by Sondra Myers \(CODE 25\)](#)
File Type: Word
File Size: 30KB
Summary: Creative citizenship is our day job! Whatever else we do professionally and personally, we must be active, proactive and reactive as citizens of a democracy.

[Three Numbers for a Creative America", by Tom Tresser \(CODE 11\)](#)
File Type: Text (includes images for illustration)
File Size: 165KB
Summary: We measure what matters. If you want to know what we value - follow the money. Allocating \$1 billion for the National Endowment for the Arts, targeting a 100% adult literacy rate for 2010, and mandating a Living Minimum Wage of \$8.20/hour would lift us all up and set us on a path to a Creative America.



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Amazon - Books

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The Rise of the Creative Class
Richard Florida
Best Price \$5.29
or Buy New \$10.95
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[Product Information](#)



Defining a Nation
Russell Baker, Ed.
Best Price \$0.00
or Buy New \$45.00
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Cities Innovations in Chicago
Carmen Sirianni, L...
Best Price \$0.00
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Creative Minds
Howard Gardner



Soul of Our Music
Van Robinson



Harvard Business Review on Creativity
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Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What makes Creative America different from existing arts service organizations, such as Americans for the Arts?
A: AFA does not do politics. They have traditionally only engaged in advocacy and research - plus other services to the field. We are focused on getting creatives to run for office. We are incorporating as a 501(c)(3) - a traditional nonprofit legal status in order to raise the money to subsidize our training sessions. These sessions will be advertised to the creative community, but we will not turn people away. We'll charge a low price \$50 - \$100, to make the sessions affordable. We'll incorporate a separate entity, most likely a 527, which will be able to directly support candidates who come out of our training sessions. On the way to these goals we'll produce nontraditional political events that mix entertainment, education and training.

Q: What is unique about Creative America's mission that will give it a distinctive voice in national/state/city dialogue?
A: We want to inject creativity into the national public policy debate. When candidates run for office in the future, we want them to have a platform on creativity just as they now have on crime, the environment and education. We want creative professionals to support such candidates and to hold them accountable - just as environmental groups demand candidates to take progressive, thoughtful positions on the environment and then support them for delivering on their positions or work to defeat them when they do not. Most importantly, we will be developing a political training capacity to motivate and equip creative professionals to run for public office.

Q: When you use the word CREATIVITY is it synonymous with ARTISTIC?
A: Creativity is broader than the arts - see Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences - [http://www.howardgarden.com/creativity.html](#). Artistic ability touches on several of these.

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