



ART EAST

*Kathleen
DesHotel*

Artists learn how to run a business

Being a successful artist goes beyond having talent. It also includes behind-the-scenes business and public relations work to keep the business profitable.

The East St. Tammany Chamber of Commerce and St. Tammany West Chamber of Commerce collaborated to establish the Cultural Economy Committee in 2007 with just such an understanding. They hope to promote

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artist entrepreneurs.

The committee was fostered by efforts of Lt. Gov. **Mitch Landrieu**, who has defined the cultural economy as “the people, enterprises, and communities that transform cultural skills, knowledge, and ideas into economically productive goods, services and places. It includes culinary arts, design, entertainment, literary arts and humanities, preservation, and visual arts and crafts.”

At the chamber’s recent presentation — “If you paint it, will they come?” — held at Speak Easy Too on 410 Covington St. in Madisonville, local and national concerns were addressed in the presentation by Lacombe artist **Carol Hallock** and **Ben Benson**, national storyboard and comp illustrator.

Both artists agreed that being a known commodity helps business, and Hallock said that art markets provide one of her best-selling venues because those visitors are interested.

Hallock advises that beginning artists take what she calls “baby steps.” Join local art organizations like the Slidell Art League, Bayou Lacombe Art Center, St. Tammany Art Association, as well as others in nearby locations. In these associations, she advises artists to compete in order to build confidence and recognizability, and also to volunteer in order to learn how things work. Being on e-mail lists also keeps artists aware of opportunities and competitions in the area. She recommends www.artscouncilorneworleans.com and www.stpgov.org/arts. In this way, artists stay current on activities and resources.

Getting to be known is the most important part of getting established as an artist. To do this, an artist should have a Web site and should appear with examples of work at many local venues and markets. Local markets such as the Arts Council of New Orleans Palmer Park Market, Three Rivers, Northshore Art Market, Madisonville Art Market as well as the Wooden Boat Festival in Madisonville help an artist become known. The ZAPP application is also a useful tool to help keep abreast of national events. Everything is done online, which allows artists

to submit and manage applications for art shows, festivals and fairs at www.zapplication.org.

Available grants are important to research, Hallock said. Often the criterion sounds intimidating, but in reality grants are quite lucrative, especially when very few people apply.

“Keep plugging and plugging and plugging to get established,” Hallock said. “Toot your own horn, network on places like Twitter, Facebook and MySpace, and keep a professional profile. Every little thing counts.”

Hallock has had 11 years of serious entrepreneurship. Her art has been in several publications, she was awarded a grant to create the video on her Web site <http://carolhallock.ieasysite.com>, her work appeared in heavy traffic locales, won many awards and ribbons, and she sold many of her pieces.

Ben Benson III, a member of the Society of Illustrators of Los Angeles, shared the process of his work in the second part of the presentation. Benson works in the areas of storyboards, comps, marker illustration and ad design. Originally from New Orleans and an advertising graduate of the University of Southwestern Louisiana (now the University of Louisiana at Lafayette), he has been working in visual arts for the past 30 years. He has worked with clients such as Paramount, MGM and Disney, and with Saturn, Honda, Toyota, Acura, GM, and Ford.

Nestle, Hormel, McDonald’s, T-Mobile, Sprint, Sanyo, and Sony have also used his talents in visual and conceptual art. He even created the trailer for the “Spiderman” movie, but among his favorite endeavors is his involvement in Electronic Arts’ 2003 release of the first-person shooter, set in World War II during the Pacific War. He said, “I consider ‘Medal of Honor’ one of my best efforts. It is a great story about the advertising business and because I was graced with the three final cuts on DVD, I love bringing it out ... especially for kids.”

Benson showed some of his artistic proposals, products and a video presentation of “Medal of Honor,” and offered advice for artists. He describes commercial art as sunrise-to-sunset work in that a person has to work diligently to meet deadlines.

Benson said artists should make direct contact with art directors and follow up with e-mails. Even though art directors sometimes turn down work, they generally respect a person’s professionalism and will refer an artist to another possible venue. “We have to educate a person as to why they should pay for our work. Negotiating is a fine art. A good reputation leads to referrals, and this is a most important part of the work,” he said.

Benson also suggested several publications that can help keep

an artist current on his trade, known in the art community, and current on what is available. “The Workbook for Photographers” and “Illustrators’ Portfolio” are a good investment for illustrators.

After working in California for many years, in 2001 he returned to Louisiana to work in his own studio, Graphic Gumbo, and lives in Folsom. His Web site <http://graphicgumbo.com/> shows many samples of his work, and he may be reached by e-mail at graphicgumbo@yahoo.com or phone at

985.796.0372.

Laura H. Zammit, assistant director of the Southeastern St. Tammany Center, said, “We work to support art businesses, provide opportunities for exposure and to educate the public on the enormous, and sometimes unrecognized, value that art and artists contribute to our economy.”

Zara Zeringue, business resources committee chairwoman, organized this workshop and is working on other topics. Contact her at 985.893.7550 for any pro-

gram information, or contact Brenda Alford, chamber liaison, at the St. Tammany West Chamber of Commerce <http://www.sttammany.commerce.org/> or call 985.892.3216 for information.

News about arts activities in east St. Tammany may be sent to Kathleen DesHotel, 1120 Pennsylvania Ave., Slidell, LA 70458-2008; or by e-mail to kathleenfocused@gmail.com. All submissions become the property of The Times-Picayune and will not be returned; submissions may be edited and published or otherwise reused in any medium.