

## Artists Advisory Council Gets to Work

Written by Jeff Ignatius

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Artist Les Bell has a document from September 1999 that lists artists' complaints about the Davenport Museum of Art (DMA). They include the museum not publishing its mission statement, not welcoming local artists, and not making studio visits. "It wasn't that we were begging for a one-man or one-woman show," Bell said. "It was: 'Do you even know we're here?'"

For three years, the concerns went largely unaddressed by the DMA. Then Linda Downs was hired as director last September.

"With Linda, things are really rolling," Bell said. "It's a great time. ... There's virtually nothing that we mentioned in our early meetings that hasn't been addressed, embraced, or started on."

A big sign that the DMA and the Figge Arts Center will be more in-tune with the local art community came this week, with Monday's first meeting of the Artists Advisory Council. The group – presently 25 members – still doesn't have officers, a mission statement, or a full understanding of exactly what its role is going to be. "We're really looking at the nuts and bolts" during the first few meetings, said Tracy Hayes, one of five core members of the Artists Advisory Council.

The general goal is for "the two groups to be better involved with each other," said Bill Douglas, the DMA's staff liaison to the Artists Advisory Council. "Maybe that hasn't been pursued as strongly in times past."

But at the heart of the council is the need for the Figge Arts Center to support and solicit the involvement of local artists, and for those artists to actively participate in the Figge.

"We're expecting a lot from the artist council," Downs said, "and I think they expect a lot from us. I've asked them to address plans for the very first regional exhibit at the Figge. The ball's really in their court."

"I'm depending on them to come up with the themes for the [regional] shows," said museum Curator Michelle Robinson. The Figge Arts Center's "paper gallery" will host one show of regional artists a year.

Downs added that she wants the council to participate in teaching studio classes and setting up gallery and studio visits for museum staff. She also said that she wants a "continuous" regional presence in the Figge Arts Center, particularly in the all-purpose gallery outside the library.

Members of the Artists Advisory Council will be volunteering on the handful of museum working committees, and one representative will attend board meetings.

Bell said that the eyes of the community and the art world will be on the Figge Arts Center when it opens in 2005. "It seems like a moment everybody wants to get right," Bell said. "I think everybody's nervous, but I think everybody's excited."

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While before many artists felt the DMA had its doors closed to them, now the situation might have gone to another extreme. "I think we're going to get worked to death," Bell said.