

Wheaton's Renaissance

BY DALE ROGERS MARSHALL

Just when we need them most, the arts appear to be in some peril. In recent weeks, New Jersey Governor James McGreevey proposed eliminating all funding for the arts, and that is only one example. Other states from Massachusetts and Missouri to California and Arizona are contemplating dramatic reductions in their support for the arts as well.

As a society, we cannot afford to think of the arts as expendable. Music, theater, creative writing and the visual arts transport us, opening minds to new ideas, celebrating the beauty of the world, calling injustice to attention and providing enduring connections to other cultures.

The Wheaton community appreciates the arts and acts on that understanding. The investments we have made in the arts position the college well to grow in quality and academic prestige. In October, we formally dedicated Watson Fine Arts and Mars Arts and Humanities, a \$20 million project funded entirely by gifts from alumnae/i and friends. That same weekend, Wheaton—not the Berklee College of Music or the New England Conservatory—was formally recognized as the first all-Steinway college in Massachusetts, a partnership we have entered thanks to the support of alumnae/i.

These new facilities and programs are inspiring a renaissance in the arts at Wheaton. Record numbers of high school students interested in the arts are submitting portfolios for review as they seek admission. Wheaton arts events, featuring accomplished artists from campus and around the world, are winning wider audiences and greater regional notice. The acclaim will only grow louder.

Leveraging this momentum, the college established an exciting new program this spring, the Evelyn Danzig Haas '39 Visiting Artists Program & Arts in the City. This initiative will bring distinguished artists, actors and musicians to campus for extended visits to teach master classes, give public lectures, guest lecture in related courses outside the arts, collaborate on works with faculty and students and exhibit in the Beard or Weil galleries or perform on the stage of the Weber Theatre



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or Kresge Experimental Theatre. The program also enables more students to experience the world of the arts in Boston, Providence and other locales, arranging transportation and tickets to the myriad cultural resources of the region. (You can read more about this new program on page 4.)

Trustee Deborah Dluhy '65, who serves as dean of the Museum School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and helped faculty plan for this program, said "It is so important to recognize that Wheaton's new facilities, as beautiful as they may be, are but the 'vessels' for the creative work. Having funding to support the programming is crucial."

Fortunately, the Wheaton community cares about the arts and includes individuals who will act to preserve and enhance these programs. In fact, well-known arts philanthropist Evelyn Danzig Haas '39 through the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund inspired this effort. The Fund provided support to complete the facilities expansion and plan the initiative, has awarded a grant to fund the program's operations for the first five years and offered a \$1 million challenge grant to encourage others to show their support. The excitement is spreading. A long-time supporter of the arts and culture, Celeste Gottesman Bartos '35 rose immediately to the Haas Jr. Fund's challenge, pledging \$1 million to the visiting artists program. Before leaving Wheaton in June 2004, I intend to complete the fundraising for this program, ensuring that it continues to enrich students' educational experience.

In the semesters to come, we can look forward to hosting musicians and dancers, painters and sculptors, photographers and printmakers, writers and directors for intensive, short-term engagements to work with students and faculty on a variety of projects. Professor of Art Andrew Howard, who is serving as the program's first director, says the visiting artists' initiative will transform the arts at Wheaton. I heartily agree.

[Details on President Marshall's June 2004 departure and the search for a new president will follow in the summer issue of the Wheaton Quarterly. —Ed.]