

Grand Rapids LEGAL NEWS

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Dan Carter

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by **Cynthia Price**

Legal News

It is not every day that an organization's leaders can come to the conclusion that their mission is accomplished and they can step back.

And it is not every organization that is willing to do so.

But the Humanities Council of Greater Grand Rapids board has decided to disband the organization, and to celebrate both its successes and its overall success.

The Humanities Council has been around since 1976 to promote culture in Grand Rapids, founded during the U.S. Bicentennial.

According to Dan Carter, CPA, shareholder of Hungerford, Aldrin, Nichols and Carter, P.C., and treasurer of the organization for the past seven years, the council had been struggling with financial survival as well as relevance, as cultural offerings increased to the point that it is now hard to decide between competing events. "If you go back 35 years ago and consider what it was like in the humanities, and look at

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what's happening today – that was part of the analysis, we started thinking, maybe the Humanities Council has fulfilled its mission.”

The Humanities Council started Festival of the Arts, which takes place the first weekend in June each year, and which has taken on a life, and board, of its own. The council played a large role in promoting the cultural scene during the Michigan Sesquicentennial, and its programs and projects over the years are numerous and notable.

They include germinating book discussion groups, publishing art-book-quality local histories, holding seminars on creating organizational history, co-publishing poetry and other books, and holding lectures by well-known creatives, including documentarian Ken Burns and philosopher Mortimer Adler.

Most recently, the Humanities Council, in partnership with Calvin College, produced the well-received film about the potential of local food systems, Eating in Place.

Carter, who says his high school and college English teachers would be amazed to see him anywhere near literature, sees work in the arts and humanities as an economic development tool. “It's important for us to have a vibrant arts and humanities community here – specially talented people ...say this is the kind of community they look for. They want a diverse community and one that's very culturally sound.”

Fortunately, Carter is also the board president of the Arts Council of Greater Grand Rapids, which has agreed to take over some of the more successful programs of the Humanities Council and serve as a clearinghouse for cultural events.

The Poet Laureate of Grand Rapids is a significant program started over a decade ago by the Humanities Council which will be continued by the Arts Council. David Cope was recently designated the fourth Poet Laureate.

The Arts Council has launched the web site www.whatsyourartgr.com, which already lists many humanities events.

A number of well-known lecture series — including the Calvin January Series, the World Affairs Council, the Duncan Littlefair lectures, and the Gerald R. Ford presidential Museum talks — were not in existence in 1976. Though Carter acknowledges it is difficult to know how much impact the Humanities Council has had, he states, “I really think in 35 years we've done a tremendous job in this community.”

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