

Subject: Highlands, a Creative Community
July 4, 2023

This past Saturday, Sallie and I had the honor of attending the Benefactors Breakfast that kicked off Community Day at the Bascom Visual Arts Center. It was good to be with friends and realize that the Bascom has been thriving since the facility's opening in May 2009.

The director of the Bascom, Karin Peterson, spoke to this group of supporters about the Bascom being a part of a creative community in Highlands and Cashiers. The center has a vision concept where they invite people to think, see and create. I like that concept because I see it manifested throughout this mountain community.

To me, Highlands has always been a retreat community for reflection, restoration, and resetting one's goals and priorities. Just being here with creative folks in this spectacular setting is restorative and re-invigorating. I like to think we live in a university kind of town. Many of our residents bring so much professional expertise and creative experiences to our community.

The Bascom is just one place where this creative energy can be found, as the Performing Arts Center (PAC) captures the same exciting energy. During this time of the year, creative and restorative experiences abound with the Chamber Music Festival, Bell Canto, and the Mountain Theatre productions. But this energy is not limited to the arts; we have the Highlands Biological Station in full operation this summer, with research students from several universities working from the station out into unique areas of Western Carolina.

These science students will also be thinking, seeing, and creating new experiments and studies that are vital to understanding the ecology of the Highlands-Cashiers Plateau. The art of seeing and the thinking involved in the arts and sciences are not mutually exclusive.

Creative thinking, whether in basic research or artistic exploration, can sometimes be viewed as wild, crazy, wasteful, and irrelevant. I remember years ago reading Nicholas Negroponte's book *Being Digital*. Negroponte made some very farfetched predictions in the late 1990s that are now standard operating procedures.

I recall at that time seeing a news piece featuring a goofy MIT graduate student who was developing a digital photo archive of his daily experiences. This young man did look a little goofy in that he had long hair and was wearing cutoff blue jean shorts and brogan shoes. He was actually a musing oddity on the MIT campus. He carried a backpack with a computer everywhere he went. The computer system had a small antenna projecting from the backpack. One cable coming from the backpack was connected to a trigger device that the student held in his hand. Another cable was connected to a small camera lens mounted on his large, strange-looking glasses.

He told the news person interviewing him that his computer system allowed him to photograph everything he did during the day. When he clicked the handheld device, a digital photographic image was transmitted from this backpack computer to a computer in his dormitory room. Well, we all know where this story ended up. Literally, billions of people do the same thing today with their cell phones. And what about that young student? He probably now wears a white lab coat or charcoal gray suit to work, or maybe, he has a house in Highlands now.

We never know where creative thinking and experimentation will lead us. Let's embrace being a creative community in the arts and sciences. Whether they be major societal breakthroughs or just personal discoveries, our community is a fertile ground for thinking, seeing, and creating.