

PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW

Pam & Ken McCrory: A Love of Culture

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Contributor

Monday, November 9, 2009

Dancers from the Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre perform in front of both the tuxedo-clad and those in blue jean.

A group of stroller-toting moms enjoy a live magic show alongside a crew of Cultural District regulars taking salsa dancing lessons.

The ball drops — scratch that, the ball *rises* — as an energetic crowd counts down from 10, bidding farewell to an old year and welcoming a new one with a hug.

The arts mingle with the masses. It's celebration without intoxication.

It's First Night Pittsburgh.

And, for Pam and Ken McCrory, it's perfect.

The McCrorys, area natives who live atop Mt. Washington, are as involved in the Pittsburgh arts scene as anyone.

Ken is the chair of the First Night Pittsburgh Advisory Board, one of his numerous volunteer cultural positions in the city. Pam also helps out with First Night, and like her husband, she too is heavily involved in the bustling cultural scene in the Steel City.

Ken — a principal with a local CPA and consulting firm — has been a theatergoer most of his life. Stage performances invigorated him so much that, in 1987, he joined the board of directors of the Pittsburgh Public Theater where he could do his part to help the theater flourish.

"The reason I got on the board was because they were putting on some great plays and bringing life to a lot of things. I wanted to be a part of that."

He pauses, then playfully explains another reason.

"Also, I was looking for a date. I thought I could meet a girl at the Public, and I did."

Pam began working in the Public's development office in 1989. Motivated by a burning love of the arts, she took a position where she could help the local theater, but also one that not-so-coincidentally gave her access to free tickets

to nearly every cultural event in town.

"Working at the Public, I could go see all the shows as many times as I wanted," she says. "You didn't have to have a lot of money, but you could still go to everything."

As a board member, Ken went behind the curtain for meetings and planning purposes, met Pam, and the two began dating.

Not surprisingly, most of their dates were to shows.

The courtship evolved into a romance, and the two got married on the stage at the Public in 1995. The marriage brought a new art lover to the world in Marguerite, their now-12-year-old daughter, and it nourished each other's love of all things cultural.

"I was more of a play person, and Pam was more of a music and theater person," Ken says. "Pam introduced me to things like dance. We broadened each other's interests."

In addition to his role with First Night, Ken is currently an officer or board member at the Pittsburgh Zoo and PPG Aquarium, Pittsburgh Three Rivers Regatta, City Theatre, The Birmingham Foundation, The Pittsburgh Cultural Trust, Pittsburgh Wine Festival and the Duquesne Club Wine Society. These posts come in addition to previous positions at numerous institutions ranging from the Public to the Pittsburgh Marathon.

Pam is now a full-time volunteer. Among her numerous volunteer pursuits are the Pittsburgh Dance Council, Pittsburgh International Children's Festival, Beginning with Books, Attack Theatre, City Theatre and Quantum Theatre.

Both explained that, even though each may hold individual positions in various organizations, these pursuits are almost always "couples' things" and both help out with all the organizations that they're involved with. Together, Pam and Ken frequently host fundraising parties to support the organizations they love.

Given their affinity for the arts, getting involved with First Night was a natural fit.

First Night in Pittsburgh began in 1994 as a family-friendly alternative to getting blasted at the bars. The Pittsburgh Cultural Trust took over the event in 2004 and injected a heaping dose of the arts.

Ken was approached about becoming the chair in 2006.

"The fact that it's a Trust event made me interested because the Trust has done so much to revitalize downtown Pittsburgh," Ken says.

By design, First Night exposes the general public — not just the regular Cultural District crowd — to the wide array of artistic entertainment available Downtown.

"People roam Downtown and . . . maybe experience art that they otherwise would not be exposed to," he says.

It's easy to sense that the optimistic passion — which echoes in the voices of this cultural couple — is genuine.

"We both love the arts," he says. "And we both love this city."

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