

TLHLife



Chalk Walk art from last year's event promoting arts at the Capitol. MARILYN PROCTOR; PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY KAYLA FILION/USA TODAY NETWORK; GETTY IMAGES

CHALK ONE UP *for art*

Hillary Crawford makes sure Capitol's Culture Week is eye-catching

Amanda Sieradzki Council on Culture & Arts

"I am facilitating people who are creating arts experiences," Hillary Crawford states with pride. Crawford is an arts consultant at the Florida Department of State's Division of Cultural Affairs. In the midst of gearing up for Arts and Culture Week at the Capitol on March 28, Crawford reflects on her career and time advocating for and exploring the arts.

Her fascination began with museums. As a child, Crawford's sand painting was put on display at Palm Beach's Four Arts exhibit. That visit planted a seed that was nurtured during her studies at Florida State University. Crawford spoke with her adviser about diving into the humanities and filled her schedule with art history courses. She quickly became a fan of the Pre-Raphaelites, a group of English painters from the 19th century.



Crawford

If you go

What: Arts and Culture Week at the Capitol

When: 9 a.m.-3 p.m., Thursday, March 28

Where: Florida State Capitol, 400 S Monroe St

Cost: Free

Contact: For more information, call 850-224-2500 or visit <http://dos.myflorida.com/cultural/>.

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Crawford

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"It's one of those things where someone speaks to me," explains Crawford of her aesthetic tastes. "My dad collects a lot of folk art and vernacular southern art, so I grew up with artists like Minnie Evans in the house. That raw, expressive work speaks to me."

Crawford deepened her relationship with the arts as a volunteer at the Museum of Fine Arts. After speaking with the volunteer coordinator, she decided to pursue a degree in arts administration at FSU. The opportunity to travel presented itself within the graduate program and Crawford was off to London.

While abroad, she worked at the Tate Britain. Crawford loved seeing artists at the helm of the education programs. She gave tours and watched as children filled the museum to the brim with sketches, sensory crafts and energy.

"Not only do they go through the gallery but there are all these classrooms in the back where they can make something related to what they saw," says Crawford. "We also worked with students of varying abilities. Say we were looking at [a work by sculptor Barbara Hepworth, we might have a stone they could touch so they didn't touch the work, but could see what it feels like."

Stateside once more, Crawford moved to North Carolina and was curator and gallery director for The Center for Craft, Creativity & Design. She explains how as a curator, she was mainly in charge of telling a story with the artists' work, which included organizing pieces as well as writing for museum publications and didactics.

It wasn't long before Tallahassee called her back. Crawford returned to the Division of Cultural

Affairs where she had worked part-time as a graduate student. Now as arts consultant, she is charged with coordinating approximately 26 arts agencies across the state.

Given recent funding cuts, her main focus is on advocacy and developing a network for arts leaders. She spearheaded a biannual professional development intensive devoted to giving leaders the tools they need to speak with local and state representatives.

"The hardest part sometimes is communicating that we are not the ones funding them, we are facilitating the process," says Crawford. "We do rely on our constituents to talk to their representatives and convey the importance of arts in their community. We've started encouraging local agencies to gather and work with people in their communities to make connections with local representatives at home."

Crawford enjoys participating in events



Students participate in Chalk Walk, part of the Arts and Culture Week at the Capitol event.

MARILYN PROCTOR

throughout the state when she can, especially with community development initiatives like the federal Main Street grant programs. The program seeks to preserve historic downtowns in rural communities and boost not only the local economy, but creative arts economies in those areas as well.

Crawford remarks on how artists play key roles in these projects given

the high visibility of main thoroughfares and ability for the arts to contribute to communities.

It's the same premise for events like the Chalk Walk, which will be a part of the Arts and Culture Week at the Capitol event. The Florida Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs, Leon County Schools and the Council on Culture & Arts all come together to celebrate and advocate

for the arts.

"We can talk a lot about the importance of arts education, the critical thinking skills and lower drop out rates," says Crawford. "We can give those numbers, but there's a real tangible feeling when you see 35 teams of high school students... these are our future artists of Florida."

Those students prepare for weeks, perusing the Florida Artist Hall of Fame and COCA artist registry for works of art to re-create in chalk. Alongside their teachers, they crop, resize and make a grid for the work they will reproduce in a 36x36 inch concrete square. Previous years featured paintings by Bob Ross and a creature from the black lagoon.

This year the event has grown ten-fold to include information booths with artists and state grantees as well as performances from music, theater and dance students. Even the T-shirts sported by students and organizers will

have been screen-printed by future artists from Rickards and Lincoln high schools.

In her third year organizing, Crawford says it's not only a wonderful day for local students to come together and make art, but also a chance for legislators and attendees alike to witness the life that art can breathe into a community.

"The kids are out there working straight through, and in three to four hours, they're pulling the tape back and we have this little gallery that you can come and walk through," says Crawford. "The arts have the power to transform people. It's like meditation. You're taking a break from everything and you're just in the moment."

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).



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