

# ArtBridge seeks to span culture with collaboration

**Amanda Sieradzki**  
Council on Culture & Arts

Lisa Girard has the best waterfront view in all of Tallahassee. She painted it herself. During lockdown, the ArtBridge Tallahassee director turned the walls in her home into a giant canvas, dabbling in geometric designs and mixing colors to find the perfect shades for her beach scene.

"If you're stuck inside and have creative energy, you have to get it out," says Girard.

Girard channels her creativity into multifaceted events that aim to bridge communities together. She was inspired to establish a program that would involve Florida A&M University and Florida State University art students dreaming up and painting murals for local public schools.

Girard established ArtBridge in 2018. She worked to present her ideas to the colleges' art departments and drummed up support from students across both campuses. When they were ready to launch their first mural painting project, COVID-19 altered their plans.

Now, Girard is focusing on fundraising for the project so that students can get paid for their work and they will be able to purchase adequate supplies for when it's safe to start projects back up. The first fundraiser, "Rockin' Santa on a Harley," is Sunday, Dec. 6, in partnership with the Harley Davidson Dealership.

"I'm excited to be at an outdoor event," says Girard. "I think the whole community misses that. I am also looking forward to hearing feedback from the community and talking about our program."

Girard earned her bachelor's degree in humanities and says the art history classes were her favorite. She went on to work in FSU's special collection department and helped to organize exhibits for the archive.

That experience helped shape her process when it comes to creating dy-



**ArtBridge Tallahassee director Lisa Girard turned the walls in her home into a giant canvas, creating her own beach scene.** TALLAHASSEE

namic events and programs that speak to a larger group of people. One exhibit on marbled papers from the archive's antique books collection featured an artist demonstration.

"Each era that you're studying is not just one piece," says Girard. "It's not just the politics or the history of that time. It's also the music and the culture and there's something beautiful about understanding that whole package of human expression in each moment."

Girard also runs a homeschool co-op for over 50 families. Education continues to be a passion. She has taught at summer camps and children's programming for 15 years. When it comes to shaping her ideas and sharing them with the community, she always comes back to the symbol of the bridge and giving lessons through experiential learning.

"I think about what I want to do and how I can cast a wider net and make it more interesting for more people," says Girard. "What's the pull? What makes it interesting and fun? It's having people learn something by doing it first."

Girard's students recently created PSA's on how to be a better person. Through the activity and filming their responses, she noted how the act of engaging in a creative process opened their eyes on how to actualize these ideas. She feels a similar drive working with the college students and hopes ArtBridge will have the same impacts.

The students' first taste of this experience happened last summer at Roberts Elementary. ArtBridge helped the school's art teacher to sketch out a rainbow motif on the cafeteria walls. Pre-COVID, the program secured two other elementary schools for potential murals and are eager to get back on track once it is safe to do so.

"The underlying goal of Artbridge is that every child in this area grows up with one of these murals in their schools," says Girard. "That means it is tangible evidence of the campuses working together. In the future, I'm also looking to pull in more pieces to have literature, dance and music involved in the semester-long process."

In the meantime, Girard hopes

## If you go

**What:** Rockin' Santa on a Harley Fundraiser

**When:** 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 6

**Where:** Harley Davidson Dealership, 1745 Capital Circle NW

**Cost:** \$5 donation

**Contact:** For more information on ArtBridge Tallahassee, please visit <https://www.facebook.com/ArtBridge-Tallahassee-306459219845587>.

"Rockin' Santa on a Harley" will be a great opportunity to dialogue with the community and share her vision. Girard wanted a way for children to safely take their photos with Santa this holiday season. All proceeds from donations will go towards installing future murals.

Santa will wear a mask and social distancing will be required with hand sanitizer stations placed around the venue. Carly Sinnadurai, director at The Sharing Tree, will join ArtBridge in tabling at the event with "take and make" ornaments.

As for Girard, she sees this event as the first of many to come. In spite of the challenges she's already faced with launching the new program, she knows an artist can traverse any bridge, no matter the weather.

"Don't artists do their best work during the most challenging times of their lives?" says Girard. "If the arts are about people's passions and expressing themselves, it is a good way to get in touch with feeling connected again since we've been away from living our daily lives and missing a lot of human connection. The arts are a great way to bridge towards that feeling again."

*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](http://www.tallahasseearts.org)).*