



IN THE LIMELIGHT WITH

Cathy Stephen

DIRECTOR, MILLER CENTER FOR THE ARTS

by ALI BECHTEL

photo by JOHN A. SECOGES, SECOGES PHOTOGRAPHICS

The Miller Center for the Arts has become a cultural education center Berks County, and Director Cathy Stephen has been helping from behind the curtain since the beginning.

Global Arts Network. The Miller Center has been recognized by the Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation, part of the National Endowment for the Arts, and has become part of both on-screen independent film and more traditional touring arts networks featuring artists from around the world.

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Q Are you originally from Berks County? No, I'm from Norway, Maine. But I've spent half of my life here!

Q How did you get involved with RACC and the Miller Center? My background is in music and the arts. I took some time off to raise my children — I have three girls — but I was ready to get back into work full time. If I was going to be away from my kids, it needed to be something I love and was trained to do, which was fundraising, development and programming for the arts. I started working at RACC managing their foundation in 2006, then started advertising for the Miller Center. It was a nice combination of the skills I had acquired up to that point.

Q The Miller Center recently celebrated its 10-year anniversary, so were you part of its development? Yes! We opened our doors in 2007, so I was there from the beginning. I created the business plan for the center. We started out operating fairly typically for a performing arts center on a campus, but I think what makes us different is that we now really do divide ourselves pretty equally with use by the community.

Q What kind of community programming is typically hosted there? Right now, about 40 percent of the programming is generated by our own series, and the remaining 60 percent is pretty much divided by the college's use for special events and lectures and use by

the community — anything from the county using it for public outreach to Reading Civic Theater using it for a musical.

Q What can people expect from the Miller Center's series of productions? We bring in artists in theater, dance, film and music from all over the world. Our niche areas tend to be dance and more grassroots music.

Q Have you seen a lot of cultural growth in the community because of your programming? Over time we have learned what our community's needs are, but we're also able to take a little more risk in our programming. We now have a category called Fringe, and it includes edgier theater and music, or new art forms that people should really know about. That has really broadened the perspective of the folks that come to the facility.

Q Does your busy schedule leave you time to get involved in the community in other ways? Well, at one time I sat on a lot of boards, but I got so busy that it was time for me to step away and develop other parts of myself. I'm a flutist, and I also teach piano. I like to run and ski, so I try to keep myself active, and I really love the outdoors. I've grown to love Berks County; I think it has a lot to offer. I feel like we're a little hidden gem for cultural experiences and outdoor experiences, and I'm happy that the Miller Center is a part of it. ■

Cruise for a Cause. The Center has partnered with Viking Cruise Lines to raffle a river cruise for two. Funds raised will help to establish an endowment fund for production and operating costs. Visit millercenter.racc.edu for details.