

# 'Arts covenant' proposed at Cultural Blueprints

## Mary Stanley talks about her good idea

By Nancy Keefe Rhodes

On Oct. 14 the New York State Council for the Arts (NYS-CA) hosted over 120 participants from the fields of art, politics, education, tourism, business, economic development, urban planning and foundations for Cultural Blueprints, the all-day local edition of a series of meetings across the state to encourage arts as the basis for development and tourism. NYSCA hoped to spark cross-pollination, partnerships and resource-sharing.

Among the key points reported back from the break-out sessions was Mary Stanley's "arts covenant" – an idea that provoked applause from participants and has twice been noted in the daily paper. Stanley coordinates the informal working group Art Across Borders and in years past was a host of WAER-FM's Women's Voices Radio talk show. Last Friday we sat down for coffee and talked further about the "arts covenant."

### What happened when you proposed an "arts covenant" at the Cultural Blueprints gathering?

Actually I raised the idea in two of the smaller sessions. People were either enthusiastic or like, "What's that?" Then in the end it was one of the recommendations to the larger group and the spokesperson asked me to explain it. I did and it was really well-received. People applauded. I think people are looking for a fresh way to look at the arts and development and this resonated.

### The word "covenant" has some rich connotations. Can you talk about what "covenant" means?

A covenant is more than a contract, stronger than a pact. It's a deep, profound commitment among people who see themselves as community. They're promising what they'll do in the name of something they value. We talk about "civic engagement" and I think it ties into that. Sometimes it's had some religious dimensions, harking back to the old and new covenants of the Bible. So it expresses a profound relationship with something higher, a spiritual aspect of our humanity that's more than the everyday. It ramps up our thinking about the importance of art to a good life. At the same time it helps us target where we each decide to spend our money.

### What would an arts covenant look like? What am I promising?

For individuals it could go like this. In the next year I will purchase at least three gifts of original locally-made art. I'll partake of at least one art form outside my comfort zone – that's not my favorite, accustomed art. So if I'm a film person I'll go to a dance performance, or if I'm a jazz person I'll try the symphony or a stage play. I'll try at least one art form from another culture. Art will take me at least once to a part of the city where I don't usually go. I'll do something – take a class, join a story circle, pick an arts project to support. Shops and galleries could visibly identify themselves as participating too.

### "Arts and development" often means boosting tourism. This sounds like the counterpart to that – like activating the people already here.

Yes, exactly. This gives a visible structure to what many people do anyway and it's a way to acknowledge that. And it recognizes that artists have to make a living. It's doing more than hoping that outside tourist dollars trickle down to them. And actually we have to do this anyway if we're going to create a vision for outsiders visiting Syracuse – a community that gets it, a community that isn't packaged, a community where the people living here love art too and aren't just selling it.

### What would the start-up look like?

I think pretty simple, not all that labor-intensive or costly. Members could get a button or a decal or a card with a logo. Participating shops and artists and venues might have a decal on their entrance and print the logo in their programs. Merchants and box-offices might keep an eye on how many arts covenant tickets and sales they made. It can be playful – not like the art police are checking up on you. Maybe some strategically located bill-boards, some newspaper spots. I'd like to see if some of the existing arts-based networks might be willing to seed this since they're up and running already.

Eventually the results of the state-wide Cultural Blueprints meetings will be posted by NYSCA at [culturalblueprints.co.cc](http://culturalblueprints.co.cc).

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## Drugs

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Unfortunately, it may be one piece not soon to fall into place.

### The gray area

Robert Warner, 13th District Onondaga County legislator and chair of the Health

Committee, said last week the legislature has not yet discussed a law that would target unauthorized juveniles for possession of prescription drugs.

"Generally those kinds of laws come from the state level," Warner said. "But not always," he added, pointing out much tobacco legislation that was passed in Onondaga County and later adopted by the state.

"I think we have to really analyze, first of all, 'what is the problem?' to get a handle on it," Warner said of prescription drug abuse.

James Rhinehart, 6th District Legislator, said stricter regulations on prescription medication is not necessarily the answer.

"A lot of this stuff, personally I believe should be left up to the parents," Rhinehart said. "I know it's difficult, but part of it's parenting. If kids are going to steal prescription drugs, I think a lot of that has got to start right at home."

This month, 'Onondaga Tobacco 19,' a proposal that would increase the legal age of tobacco sale from 18 to 19 years old, was passed by the Health Committee for the third time.

Warner said the intent of the bill would be to keep older high school students from purchasing tobacco for underclassmen, and by upping the legal age to purchase tobacco products would hopefully be harder to come by for under-aged students.

"Hopefully by 19, most kids are out of school," Warner said.

Similarly, The National Survey on Drug Use and Health surveys from both 2006 and 2007 showed that more than half those who reported using prescription medications non-medically in the last year, ages 12 and older, said they had acquired the drugs from a friend or relative for free.

Having the same access routes, do prescription drugs afford the same legal attention as tobacco?

Rhinehart said such a law would not be a black-and-white issue.

"What would the law say? ... Do you write some sort of a law with a fine? I wouldn't vote 'no.' I don't know if it would have any impact," Rhinehart said.

But some legislative action is not out of the picture.

"I think probably somewhere along the way, as chairman, I might see how bad the problem is to start with," Warner said.

**"People absolutely need to be aware that anything kept in their medicine cabinet is accessible to anybody in their home."**

**-Jeanne Elmer, director, Student Assistance Program**

### The war at home

Both Elmer and Berry stressed the importance of guardians staying informed about the dangers of prescription drug abuse by children.

"People absolutely need to be aware that anything kept in their medicine cabinet is accessible to anybody in their home," Elmer said.

Berry likened the dangers of unguarded prescription medications to another common household item primarily developed as a tool to help people.

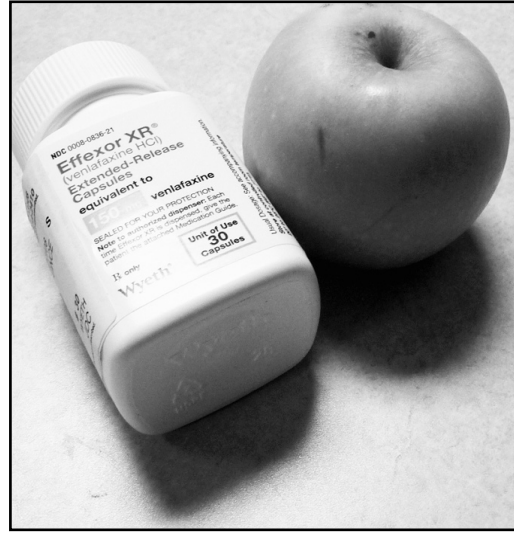
"If you have a small child in your house and you have sharp knives in your house, you protect the children by keeping the sharp knives in a safe place ... and you have to do the same thing with medications," Berry said.

One of the biggest obstacles in countering prescription drug abuse is addressing how easily accessible the drugs can be. The University of Maryland Center for Substance Abuse Research reported earlier this month that 19 percent of teens thought prescription drugs were the easier to buy than beer, while only 8 percent of their parents thought the same.

One solution? Make information about the dangers and prominence of medication abuse as accessible as the drugs themselves.

"I'm glad we are getting so much media attention because it's causing parents to address the problem," said Berry. "It's really important to get this stuff out there," Elmer said. "America has a pretty prevalent substance abuse problem. Kids are doing what they're seeing other people do."

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## Where to go for help

Several programs and services for substance abuse prevention, education and treatment are available to teens and guardians in Central New York, many through Onondaga County. Visit [ongov.net/Aging\\_and\\_Youth/images/YSdirectory.pdf](http://ongov.net/Aging_and_Youth/images/YSdirectory.pdf) for more information about availability, fees, and restrictions associated with specific programs.

### ADAPEP, Alcohol Drug Abuse Prevention Education Program

433.2609  
[youthdevelopment.ocmboces.org](http://youthdevelopment.ocmboces.org)  
School-based drug and alcohol prevention oriented services including, but not limited to, counseling (individual and group), classroom lessons, program presentations and referral.

### ALA-NON/ALA-TEEN Family Groups

471.0191  
Fellowship of young people who have been affected by someone else's drinking.

### Crouse Hospital

Chemical Dependency Treatment Services  
470.8340  
[crouse.org](http://crouse.org)  
Methadone Maintenance Program day treatment services, adolescent outpatient program substance abuse, evaluation/intervention outpatient treatment inpatient program, Commonwealth Place residential center for those 18 years and up.

### Prevention Network/OCAA

471.1359  
[preventionnetwork.info](http://preventionnetwork.info)  
Information about alcoholism and addictions, referral services, prevention/education programs which include speakers, a film library, and the Teen Institute, a retreat-like preventive education program providing training and leadership experience for teens.

### Student Assistance Program

435.3355  
School-based program, restricted to high school students of any age who reside in Baker, Cicero-North Syracuse, Fayetteville-Manlius High School, North Syracuse Junior High, Skaneateles High School or Syracuse City School districts.

### Syracuse Behavioral Healthcare

474.5506  
[sbh.org](http://sbh.org)  
Offers programs for substance abusing youth aged 18 and older.

### Syracuse Onondaga Drug and Alcohol Abuse Commission

Drug Free Coalition  
701.4950  
[syracusedrugfree.com](http://syracusedrugfree.com)  
Provides community mobilization and related activities to decrease alcohol and drug abuse in Onondaga County.

### Teen Institute

A Program of Prevention Network  
471.1359  
[preventionnetwork.info](http://preventionnetwork.info)  
Peer leadership program for youth who want to change the attitudes towards alcohol/drug use among peers.

### Tully Hill Chemical Dependency Treatment Center

696.6114; toll free, 800.456.6114  
[tullyhill.com](http://tullyhill.com)  
The young adult program provides treatment for young men and women aged 16 to 20 years.

Source: [ongov.net](http://ongov.net)