

May 20, 2010

To whom it may concern:

As I look back on my tenure at the Arkansas Arts Center, there are many accomplishments of which I am extremely proud. Perhaps most importantly, I was able to solidify a culture of collaboration in which great, rewarding work could flourish. I was fortunate to have the opportunity to nurture warm and friendly relationships with board members, staff and donors. During my time as executive director, the institution and I have reaped the benefits of generous, hardworking board members and loyal, smart staff members, who enabled many projects to come to fruition. I continue to hold the best interest of the Arkansas Arts Center close to my heart. I will always treasure my 7 1/2 years there and will forever cherish the friendships I have made with other people who share my passion for the arts and this institution. The number of people who love and support the Arkansas Arts Center continues to grow, a fact that rewards my commitment to the position I was honored to hold.

The escalating support for the Arkansas Arts Center has propelled it toward the fulfillment of its key strategic goals and objectives. Among the many goals the Arkansas Arts Center has met or exceeded during my tenure as executive director, these are the accomplishments of which I am most proud. I championed the development effort, increasing annual operating gifts by 95%. Through the cultivation of gifts of art and acquisitions funds, nearly 1,100 works of art have been added to the Arkansas Arts Center's permanent collection, an increase of almost 10%. Such permanent works of art provide lasting educational opportunities for current and future generations of Arkansans. As a staunch advocate for education, I am tremendously proud to have increased the Arkansas Arts Center's service to children and underserved audiences throughout Arkansas. 30,000 school students will visit the Arkansas Arts Center in 2009-10, up from only 5,000 in fiscal 2003. Moreover, we have also experienced growth in Museum School enrollment and Children's Theatre attendance, in conjunction with enhanced state outreach participation through the Artmobile, Children's Theatre On Tour and Traveling Exhibitions.

Under my watch, the Arkansas Arts Center has expanded the exhibition program to create an arc of increasingly popular and significant offerings, bringing a number of "firsts" to the museum and to the state. These groundbreaking exhibits include *In Stabiano: Exploring the Seaside Villas of the Roman Elite*; *Treasures of African Art* from the New Orleans Museum of Art; *Pursuing Picasso*; *Jim Henson's Fantastic World*; *Craft in America*; *HOT COLOR/cool glass*; *Andy Warhol: Fifteen Weeks of Fame*; and *World of the Pharaohs*. All these exhibitions, in collaboration with major international and U.S. museums, have established the Arkansas Art Center's reputation as a major regional museum. Most importantly, the high quality offerings have exposed thousands of Arkansas residents to the best art and culture we could bring to Little Rock.

It is of critical importance to note that the primary reason for bringing *World of the Pharaohs* to the Arkansas Arts Center was *not* to generate profit. That is not to imply that we did not hope that financial success would accompany the exhibit. However, at the heart of the matter, *World of the Pharaohs* was included in the trajectory of exhibition planning to ensure the achievement of a major strategic goal of the Arkansas Arts Center – to bring exhibitions of even higher quality, with even greater



appeal to the people of Arkansas and surrounding states. And the people of Arkansas and the region have responded. As of April 12, 2010, the Arkansas Arts Center had exceeded last year's annual attendance, with April, May and June still remaining in the fiscal year.

The Arkansas Arts Center is not alone in facing financial difficulties. The number of American art museums struggling to stay afloat amidst the deluge of layoffs, budget reductions, salary cuts and cancelled exhibitions is staggering. In 2009, at least 58 art museums across the U.S. experienced layoffs, most also in conjunction with other budget cuts and freezes. Two closed completely and one would have sold its entire collection if not for the universal outcry of the U.S. museum community. The universally bleak picture facing art museums suggests that the Arkansas Arts Center was justified in taking bold action to meet its mission and draw in visitors. To do nothing new would certainly have brought diminished results. I only wish the Arkansas Arts Center had been immune to the global economic downturn.

As a long-time trustee recently reminded me, the Arkansas Arts Center has successfully weathered many storms in the past, and it will again. Every leader who has the privilege to lead such an institution brings a different set of strengths to the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead. I trust that the next leader of the Arkansas Arts Center will enjoy the same community support that in my years there brought this wonderful museum a long way toward its mission: to ensure that learning, inspiration and creative expression in the arts flourish throughout Arkansas for people of all ages and backgrounds.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Ellen Plummer", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Ellen A. Plummer