

In Celebration of the 20th Anniversary of the New Jersey Cultural Trust



By Dr. Carol Cronheim
New Jersey Cultural Trust Board Member
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This year marks the 20th anniversary of the [New Jersey Cultural Trust](#), a public/private partnership that works in harmony with the [New Jersey State Council on the Arts](#), the [New Jersey Historical Commission](#), and the [New Jersey Historic Trust](#). It is the only state agency with a mission that encompasses the entire non-profit cultural community: the arts, history, and humanities. In the past two decades, **\$14,464,711** have been given out to more than **196** organizations to ensure that our cultural community continues to thrive so New Jersey can continue to flourish.

The idea of creating an endowment that could serve as a permanent source of funding for New Jersey's arts, history and humanities community found its voice at the 1995 Governor's Conference on the Arts – Arts in Focus III -- and ultimately was part of the 1998 iteration of Arts Plan New Jersey. Besides calling for additional support in general, the Plan called for the establishment of a "permanent source of annual support for the arts to augment current sources...to stabilize arts organizations." In 1994, legislation created the Task Force on New Jersey History, which started documenting the financial, capital, and organizational needs in the history community. It quickly became apparent that joining forces would result in a stronger, united cultural industry in the state.

The New Jersey State Council on the Arts, the Department of State, and the Task Force on New Jersey History embarked on several years of listening and learning from constituencies across the state and experts across the country. Their research, along with input from the [New Jersey Council on the Humanities](#), led to various ideas for a feasible permanent funding mechanism for culture.

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Meanwhile, the Governor's Office was meeting with private individuals and groups that were interested in shoring up the mainstays of New Jersey's cultural community. The idea picked up steam when these two efforts were brought together to encompass a way to harness the power of the larger institutions while empowering all of New Jersey's cultural organizations.

The resulting New Jersey Cultural Trust was created in 2000 to fill the gaps in arts, history, and humanities funding. Its enabling legislation defined three purposes: to build endowments, finance capital projects, and improve organizational and financial stability. As such, the NJCT serves a unique, three-fold role in the cultural community for "tax-exempt, non-profit organizations whose primary mission is to promote the performing, visual and creative arts in New Jersey or to promote and preserve history and humanities in New Jersey."



The NJCT would like to thank the prime sponsors of its founding legislation, former State Senators Joe Kyrillos and Bernie Kenny and former Assemblymembers Leonard Lance and Rose Heck. Special thanks to former Congressman Lance as the lead sponsor who shepherded the bill through committee, onto the floor, into the other chamber, and indeed across the aisle in nearly record time. It passed both houses without a single dissenting vote.

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The NJCT also wants to thank Governor Whitman and her administration for their hands-on support of the legislation. Governor Whitman signed the bill at a public ceremony on July 25, 2000 at the War Memorial in Trenton. Within minutes, the Dodge Foundation presented the Cultural Trust with a check for \$1 million to the fund, a gift that demonstrated its confidence in the initiative and acknowledgement of the great need. This gift was quickly followed by early important support from the WJS Foundation.

The NJCT would also like to thank and acknowledge the Cultural Trust's board's original executive committee, Co-Chairs Josh Weston and the late Judi Dawkins, Vice Chair Carol Cronheim, and Secretary Debbie Bozarth for guiding the groundbreaking fund for the arts, history, and humanities through its formative years. Its first Executive Director, Barbara Moran, was instrumental to the Trust's launch, as was her early staff, Nancy Alia and Dina Sollosi Erickson, who remains with the Trust under the long-term, steady leadership of current Executive Director Sara Cureton.

May the next twenty years see an expansion of the Trust's wherewithal to carry out its important mission. During this severe economic downturn brought on by the pandemic, the need for its services has only become greater. A fully funded Cultural Trust would benefit the entire cultural ecosystem and by extension be a boon to New Jersey's communities, classrooms, and overall quality of life.

Image Credits

The images featured are part of a social media campaign highlighting FY20 NJ Cultural Trust grant recipients in celebration of the 20th anniversary. In sequential order of appearance, images include:

- The [Drake House Museum](#) in Plainfield, New Jersey.
- [Historical Society of Princeton](#) Open Archives event.
- The Woodbury Gather ribbon cutting, part of the [South Jersey Cultural Alliance](#) Arts Tank Creative Placemaking Competition.

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