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**News Release:** Embargoed until, Tuesday, November 19, 2019, 10:00 am

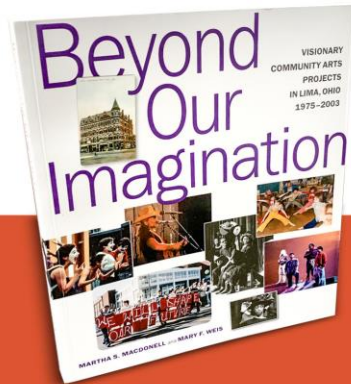
# Beyond Our Imagination

Press Conference &  
Book Release

Tuesday, November 19th at 10AM

ArtSpace/Lima

REFRESHMENTS PROVIDED



**Press Conference at ArtSpace/Lima - Tuesday, November 19, 2019, 10:00 am**

## **Community Arts Memoir Published, a Narrative Guide for the Next Generation**

LIMA, Ohio -- Martha S. MacDonell (Martie) and Mary F. Weis (Molly) release a new book, *Beyond Our Imagination, Visionary Community Arts Projects in Lima, Ohio 1975-2003*. The authors chronicle the founding era of community arts in Lima and Allen County and its enduring legacy. The authors, as well as pivotal community people involved in the development of the projects, will be on hand to talk and take questions about their work.

Written in an informal narrative style and based on 70 interviews, the authors share the twists and turns of: hosting professional dancers in the classrooms to enhance learning through the use of movement; calling the San Angelo Chamber of Commerce for a favor—a free Willie Nelson concert; the epic nine year effort to build a civic center; heritage projects that nourished community pride and economic development; and a three year arts-based civic dialogue project that addressed community concerns.

By taking the long view and scanning the arch of 40 years, the authors discovered the founding projects all had legacies quietly woven into the community. This was worth sharing with the next generation of leaders, locally and nationally. Community arts endures and is worthy of continued training and investment.

Lima residents who worked on these projects wanted a community with human spirit, vitality, and pride, and directly witnessed the positive outcomes of their efforts. One of Lima's continuing narratives is "loss,"—loss of jobs, loss of population, loss of optimism. This made work particularly challenging and often felt overwhelming. However, they recognized the projects complimented the other realms of community—education, economic development, employment and so on. In short, arts with community purpose enhanced Lima's well-being.

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“Martie MacDonell instinctively recognized the power of art as an entry point for young and old to explore life, engage diverse people, and address issues of importance. The presentations were more than entertainment or education. They stimulated conversations in schools, city council meetings, board rooms and houses of worship about issues impacting the community. ***Beyond Our Imagination*** provides a template for a new generation of community leaders and artists,” said Judy Gilbert.

**Judy Gilbert** was co-founder of Allen County Common Threads and has held numerous civic leadership roles including with BP Oil, Bluffton University, Lima Area Concert Band, ArtSpace/Lima.

“The deeper Martie MacDonell’s practice became, the wider and more diverse the educational impact. Young people worked with incredible artists. Later, Train Town/American House and Common Threads initiatives gathered, all too often, “overlooked groups.” Community arts in these years held a feeling of—always aware, always inclusive,” reflected Michael Huffman.

**Michael Huffman** is a retired art teacher and formerly the director of arts and magnet programs with the Lima City Schools and a painter.

“I could not put down ***Beyond Our Imagination***. Reading the dramatic moments during the civic center’s development, felt like paging through a thriller. The whole book features characters taking on impossible tasks, reminded me of a love story and a superhero movie. “I’ve lived in Lima since 1989 and I never understood the arts could have such impact on a community’s self-perception, emotional well-being, and economic vitality. I have a deeper appreciation of the creativity, fearlessness, stamina, and bodacious-ness of these efforts. The mutual love of Lima/Allen County united so many to pursue their unremitting belief that the arts can help us rise above the narrow limits and stereotypes of our beliefs,” said Michael Schoenhofer.

**Michael Schoenhofer** is the retired executive director of the Mental Health and Recovery Services Board of Allen, Auglaize and Hardin Counties and author, “*Stumbling into Happiness*” (2017).

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## **Purchase Books at ArtSpace/Lima, Gift Shop**

***Beyond Our Imagination*** is on sale now at the gift shop and online at <https://www.artspacelima.com/shop> Paperback edition \$20 (plus shipping) and Digital PDF and EPUB editions, \$10 downloadable online.

Gift Shop hours: Tuesday through Hours: Tuesday – Friday 10am– 5pm, Saturday 10am – 2pm.

## **New Education Fund launched with Book Proceeds**

All sales proceeds will go to the *Arts with Community Purpose Education Fund*, a new fund that will support training and related educational programs that further the understanding and development of projects that build on the legacy featured in ***Beyond Our Imagination***.

## **Book signing**

The authors will be available to sign books during the ***Winter Walk***, December 5, 2019, 5pm – 9pm, at ArtSpace/Lima.

## ArtSpace/Lima

For further information, please call Sally Windle, Executive Director, 419-222-1721.

### A FEW MORE BITS

**Book Website:** [beyonourimagination.net](http://beyonourimagination.net)

**Lima's Founding Era Was Remarkable and Known Nationally:** The authors discovered from artists and art administrators who visited and collaborated with the arts projects. "Your community is extraordinary." Initially, the authors were skeptical. Much to their surprise this became a common refrain.

The visiting professional artists and administrators who had worked in hundreds of communities across the nation would convey that, unlike other towns, Lima's projects were *expansive*—often with all sectors of the community involved. Because they addressed complex concerns, the projects endured for years, some even a decade, to complete. In part, leaders held the long view and they were continuing to hone their own skills and as peers, building mutual respect. So they could take on more complex concerns.

**Today, A Common Practice Nationwide:** The arts field is *now robust with community arts*, now called community development. According to a recent survey by Americans for the Arts, in 2018, 97 percent of arts agencies address community development issues (social, education, and economic challenges) and 53 percent have a partnership with local chamber of commerce.

## About the Authors

**Martha S. MacDonell:** Martie spent her career developing community arts programming in Lima, Ohio. She believed arts could enhance a community, which led to arts in education in local schools, economic and cultural enrichment through the redevelopment of Town Square, historic preservation, authentic community-wide celebrations, and arts-based civic dialogue.

At the state level, in recognition of her leadership, the Council for the Arts of Greater Lima received the inaugural Governor's Award for Arts Education in 1981, and Martie received the Governor's Award for Arts Administration in 1983 and was inducted into the Ohio Women's Hall of Fame in 2001. In addition, she received numerous other honors from organizations throughout the state of Ohio. She served on the Ohio Arts Council board from 2000 to 2008 and on the board of the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies in 2005.

**Mary F. Weis:** Molly's community work has been a mixture of program development and community arts administration in Lima, Ohio (including six years at American House) and the Jamaica Plain neighborhood of Boston, Massachusetts. On the editorial side, she helped start the *Nonprofit Quarterly* and coauthored the Animating Democracy case study *A Time of Crisis, A Moment for Art: Sojourn Theatre and Lima Senior High Dialogue Project*.

## BOOK REVIEWS

### David Berger

Sometimes a book is more than a book. It's a map, it's a vision, it's an engine. *Beyond Our Imagination* achieves this. As the authors tell the stories of community arts in Lima, Ohio that span decades, they show the way community arts invigorate, inspire, and transform our lives and the places we live. The book powers the reader, the next generation, in the direction of what else can and should be done.

*David Berger has resided in Lima since 1977—initially as director of Rehab Project, a community development agency and in 1989, as mayor of City of Lima.*

### Barbara Schaffer Bacon

If you have been asked or asked yourself “*What difference are you making?*” you owe it to yourself to spend a few hours with *Beyond Our Imagination*. The beautifully told stories of significant community art projects in Lima, Ohio reveal the subtle architecture of this creative, collective work—how it is made and how it makes a difference. *Beyond Our Imagination* offers a rich multi-voiced retrospective look at projects that responded to conditions in Lima and their cumulative value over time. It is an important social history for community arts and creative placemaking in America and should be widely shared.

*Barbara Schaffer Bacon co-directs Animating Democracy, a program of Americans for the Arts, Washington DC.*

### Maryo Gard Ewell

During my days as a young arts administrator, my colleagues and I looked to Lima, Ohio as one of our “go to” examples. Martie MacDonell envisioned a new role for the arts in a community. We young’uns watched closely. When you read *Beyond Our Imagination*, you will see why. As a community arts historian myself, what’s especially exciting is seeing Martie’s ideas, considered cutting edge at the time, now are broadly embraced in the field. I proudly stand on Martie’s shoulders.

*Maryo Gard Ewell is retired from 35 years in arts administration at the state and community level most recently at the Community Foundation of the Gunnison Valley, Colorado and board member of the Robert E. Gard Foundation.*

### Perry Bush

In this handsomely illustrated and engaging narrative, Martie MacDonell and Molly Weis put a vivid exclamation point on a 40 year history of community arts projects in Lima, Ohio. In their hands, Lima sheds any resemblance to a weathered old industrial town and is revealed as a hub of creative projects: from dance that enhances education in local schools in the 1970s, to a campaign to build a new civic center as the centerpiece of Lima’s downtown, concerts in old industrial sites, a reinvigoration of community memories through drama, music, arts exhibitions and architectural renderings. Finally the narrative proceeds to a richly layered account of a county-wide effort to document the “common threads” holding local people together in the face of the tensions of racial and ethnic diversity. In so doing, the authors present a powerful challenge to anyone doubting the potential of the creative arts to reinvigorate a community.

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In this handsomely illustrated and engaging narrative, Martie MacDonell and Molly Weis put a vivid exclamation point on a 40 year history of community arts projects in Lima, Ohio. They reveal what locals have long known: arts with community purpose invigorates the perpetual necessity of renewal. This is a moving, beautifully illustrated and profoundly exciting book.

Perry Bush is professor of history, Bluffton University and author of “*Rustbelt Resistance, How a Small Community Took on Big Oil and Won*” (2012).

### **Michael Rohd**

Stories of the person to person work required to organize cultural development and build community are more crucial than ever, especially in this era of social media as social justice, cross- sector collaboration, creative placemaking and seismic demographic transformation. ***Beyond Our Imagination***...is full of these stories. The often invisible labor of building trust and sheer will has never been more vital nor compelling than in this tale of a place (Lima and Allen County) and its characters (Martie MacDonell chief among a powerful assemblage). Come for the narrative, stay for the hope—it’s a page turner.

*Michael Rohd is founding artistic director of Sojourn Theatre, lead artist for civic imagination with the Center for Performance and Civic Practice, and institute professor at the Herberger Institute of Design and Art Arizona State University.*