

SOUTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT CULTURAL COALITION

North Stonington hosts a get-to-know-you gathering for region's arts and cultural groups

September 27, 2018 11:43PM

By Ryan Blessing, Sun staff writer

NORTH STONINGTON — The relaxed and informal setting at the Jonathan Edwards Winery served as the backdrop Tuesday for representatives from more than 30 arts and cultural organizations to get to know each other better.

The gathering, called Culture Connects, was the work of the Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition and its executive director, Wendy Bury.

"We surveyed our partners back in February and asked what you'd like to see more of," Bury said. "One of them was, 'We love your events and workshops, but we don't get a chance to socialize.'"

The night served as a way for members of those organizations to meet and connect in a more meaningful way, Bury said.

The gathering, intended to promote greater interaction and "icebreaking" among participants, was sponsored by the Town of North Stonington and the North Stonington Historical Society.

"This is kind of a spark for North Stonington. There's been a lot of great things going on in town," North Stonington First Selectman Mike Urgo said. "Arts, history, agriculture and tourism. It's something that hasn't been mentioned a lot but is something we see as an integral part of our community."

Among the participants were arts organizations such as the Norwich Arts Center and Garde Arts Center, the La Grua Center in Stonington, Connecticut College, the Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra and the New London Community Orchestra.

Also in the mix were representatives from supporting businesses such as People's United Bank, Dominion, and Merrill Lynch, as well as the Mohegan and Mashantucket Pequot tribes.

Rather than letting the participants huddle in small groups of friends or acquaintances, Bury devised a series of "meet and greet" exercises to get folks out of their comfort zones.

"We're going to actually force you all to meet people you've never met before," Bury said.

Guests first broke off into groups of about eight to 10 based on the first letter of their first name, and took a few minutes to introduce themselves to their group. Then they broke and formed new groups based on each attendee's last name initial. More introductions and chitchat ensued.

SOUTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT CULTURAL COALITION

Finally, Bury asked each person to introduce herself or himself to someone they hadn't yet met, and then for both people to introduce themselves to two other people. Finally, the group of four met four more guests to form groups of eight.

The nonprofit Cultural Coalition serves 550 organizations across the region, including museums, historical societies, arts groups, municipalities and more.

"We are here to help you all run, and thrive and to make sure that the region thrives," Bury said.

rbleasing@thewesterlysun.com