

Cultural Coalition to hold second Thrive conference

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Mashantucket — What makes for a successful rebranding of an arts or cultural organization? How can historical societies draw in younger audiences? How has the relationship between a gallery and an artist changed time?

These are some of the questions presenters will seek to answer at the second Thrive conference, hosted by the Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition.

The event is intended for those who work in the arts and culture industry in the region — though people will come from throughout the state — and the focus is on the business side.

Arts and culture "should be harnessed and utilized" as an economic development strategy, said Wendy Bury, executive director of the Cultural Coalition. She added, "A little bit of money in the arts sector can change a downtown community in a very short period."

Bury also noted that while people may have great jobs at Electric Boat, "if they're not happy when they're not working, they're not going to stay."

Thrive will be held from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Dec. 4, at the Mashantucket Pequot Museum & Research Center. Tickets are \$60, or \$45 for partners of the Cultural Coalition, and can be purchased at bit.ly/CTthrive18 (<http://bit.ly/CTthrive18>).

Following a coffee hour and prelude, the schedule includes breakout sessions and a lunch with a keynote address.

The keynote speaker will be Matthew Wilson, executive director of MASSCreative. The advocacy organization started the **Create the Vote initiative** (<http://www.mass-creative.org/ctv>) in Massachusetts, which Conn then adopted.

Attendees also can choose from several 30-minute breakout sessions.

In one, Mystic Seaport President Stephen White will talk about the museum's rebranding and the subsequent reaction, which White described as "a broad spectrum" locally but "almost universally positive" on the national level.

White said that inviting people in to talk about the changes gave them the "context of why we did what we did," and that it just took some people a while to understand the rationale.

One session will focus on how Interdistrict School for Arts and Communication utilized the arts in its **award-winning immigration project** (<https://www.theday.com/local-news/20180225/isaacs-immigration-selected-for-national-award>), while one titled "From Crazy to Catalyzing: Taking a Chance on a New Idea" is about the Wee Faerie Village at the Florence Griswold Museum.

Stonington Historical Society Executive Director Elizabeth Wood and Norwich Historical Society consultant Regan Miner will talk about the challenges of heritage organizations in staying relevant and appealing to young audiences.

Wood told The Day that the new **Rollie McKenna photography exhibit** (<https://www.theday.com/events--exhibits/20181101/a-village-love-affair-exhibit-captures-photographers-life-in-stonington-borough>) "caught the attention of so many people because it's within their living memory, a lot of it, and it just really raised our profile."

She added that in doing work with Stonington Public Schools, she tries to encourage the concept that we make history every day, and that for these students, part of their legacy might be a Facebook or Instagram page.

In one session, Marquee Gallery Director Clint Slowik and artist Sikiu Perez will talk about changing gallery-artist relationships — he said galleries don't act as gatekeepers and tastemakers in the way they used to — and offer marketing tips.

One recommendation he has is exactly what he's doing: participate in a presentation or artist talk, because "it helps people to see you, it garners that exposure, presents an opportunity to network with other professionals." Perez has worked with Expressiones, a presenter at Thrive in 2016. Expressiones Cultural Center Executive Director Jose Garaycochea-Ulloa called Thrive a "phenomenal platform for us to spread our message," noting that he sat down with the director of the Connecticut Office of the Arts.

Thrive was last **held in December 2016** (<https://www.theday.com/business/20161206/arts-and-culture-groups-told-to-dare-greatly>). Noting that it takes a lot of time and resources to put on the event, especially having a staff of two, Bury said the Cultural Coalition decided to hold the conference biannually.

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