

Putnam Town Crier & Northeast Ledger

Finger on the Pulse of Arts/Culture in Quiet Corner

By Linda Lemmon

Town Crier Editor

PUTNAM --- Congressman Joe Courtney, on a site visit and roundtable tour of Putnam's art and culture world Aug. 15, said more can be done to help the arts.

"We have to pivot to the post-COVID world," he said.

Some of the local "arts folks" showed Courtney their businesses and talked about how they've survived, what's right and what needs tweaking to help them survive --- and thrive.

Wendy Bury of the Cultural Coalition (serving southeastern and northeastern Connecticut) called for a deeper understanding of what local arts are all about and how to help them grow. Public partnerships should be more fully explored. The discussion needs to stay on arts and culture, she said, not necessarily funding. The coalition hosted the site visit and arts and culture roundtable with Courtney.

Dot Burnworth, owner of Sawmill Pottery, hosted the first stop on Courtney's tour. From there the group went to the Bradley Playhouse, The Complex Performing and Creative Arts Centre, the River Trail and the MLK Mural, the art exhibit in the Municipal Complex and more. It ended with a roundtable discussion at the Putnam Municipal Complex and was scheduled to cover: Putnam as a "Distressed Municipality", the impact of COVID, sustaining support post-COVID, public-private partnership (government, arts & culture businesses and creative community), and funding challenges and investment opportunities for revitalization and for all businesses and artists - loans, grants, etc.

Burnworth recounted her business's 19 years, starting from a space in Belding, going to Woodstock for four years and then returning to Putnam in 2009 when she sensed "a shift in Putnam" that would welcome her growth as Putnam grew. She got through the 2008 recession and COVID.

Burnworth said she is trying to get into public art and more community work. The group noted that there is a lack of funding for for-profit and visual arts and no mechanisms for public art, for communities, such as towns.

Delpha Very, executive director of Putnam's Economic and Community Development Department, credited Karen Osbrey of the Putnam Arts Council and Burnworth with opening up the world of arts and culture in Putnam. "They brought art to the community," Very said. Art can be "intimidating" but the pair overcame that with community friendly art such as anyone at a First Fridays event, creating personal tiles that were then installed on an obelisk, plus murals and much more. It represented public and private joining together. Arts and culture in the Quiet Corner is a multifaceted effort, she said. Burnworth told Courtney and the group that the arts represent community. "People are drawn to the arts and creating," she said.

Parents gathered around a soccer field watching their kids play might be one way for communities to connect but art is another.