



**District of Columbia
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DCAC Archive: Director's Letter September : October 2009

Every so often I ask whatever assembled audience I may have at the time, "Who gives a damn if DCAC exists?" This is usually after a lengthy discussion about our poor economic condition, our lack of support by the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, the Meyer Foundation and the Cafritz Foundation. And this, of course, is a trick question, because I know the answer very well, but usually my audience doesn't. Typically, there is a quiet moment of reflection when I drop this bomb. As they ponder my query, evaluate the indifference of the funders and earnestly try and answer me, I enthusiastically jump on the answer: "The members of DCAC! They give a damn, and they give their money, too!" At this my audience will often look both relieved and alarmed. Relieved, because now they don't have to think anymore about the correct answer to my question, but alarmed, because they know that the membership pool is not huge, and if we are relying on that money to stay afloat, then we are in real trouble. But it always jumpstarts what I really want to talk about and develop. Membership.

Developing membership is one of my big rallying cries. Whenever someone wants a "favor" from DCAC, which usually involves a donation of our space, my first question is: "Are you a member of DCAC?" If not, they don't usually get any "favors" out of us. (Well, that's not always true; we are rather generous towards good causes.) But my point is that without the members we wouldn't be here, they keep us going, and not just financially. It's a great boon to our morale when the membership forms come back with checks, but more than that, lots of them have nice notes attached about how much DCAC means to them. Sometimes I get notes out of the blue, wonderful little thank you cards, expressing gratitude for such and such program, or appreciation for an exhibition, or the unexpected delight for a theatrical piece. Whenever I speak at our exhibition openings, I always ask for a show of hands for members, and I am always impressed by the attendance. Sometimes I even get people giving me a check with a membership form by the evening's end, telling me that they couldn't let the moment pass and they look forward to being a member, knowing they are contributing to our continuation. Believe me, for someone who only gets paid sporadically, it's great to see folks ponying up with their \$30 for the year. It means they have faith that we will hang on for another year and that they are willing to throw their lot in with us. I have no statistics to back this up, but off the cuff I'd bet that almost 30% of the people who are members of DCAC donate to DCAC as their sole charity. It's not philanthropy, it's faith.

B Stanley,
Executive Director