

Organizational History

Jackson School of the Arts

Mission

To provide quality, accessible arts education programs for Jackson County youth regardless of their financial means.

Jackson School of the Arts was established as a 501(c)(3) organization in 2001 by a woman named Leslie Montgomery who saw that many of her children's friends and peers had no access to arts programming because it wasn't offered during school, and they could not afford the high cost of after school classes and programs.

She believed that all children regardless of their financial means should have a means to discover and experience the arts. With this vision Jackson School of the Arts was created and it's mission remains the same today: to make the arts accessible to all children in Jackson regardless of their financial means. What started as a very small program serving 40 children has grown into a center for arts that serves 600 children each week with long term classes and is also a resource to the community for arts education programming.

Jackson School of the Arts enables children to discover their creative potential with out-of-school programs in dance, art and theater. Classes have always been taught by paid instructors, and we have always based class fees on a sliding fee family income scale.

There is no other organization in our community that provides in-depth on going arts programming that is inclusive to all. Our organization has been successful to date because we focus on the people and the community we serve and also pay close attention to current trends both locally and at the national level.

Organizational Timeline/History Highlights

2001 Offered private piano lessons for 15 children at the Martin Luther King Center, the Boos Recreation Center and the Word of Light Outreach Center. Ballet for 25 students was offered at the McCulloch Elementary after school program.

2002 The office moved out of the founder's house to 804 S. Milwaukee and an administrative assistant was hired. Partnered with the Martin Luther King Center to put on The Wiz. The theater production included 50 children and 250 people attended the performance.

Ballet classes were offered at Northeast Elementary as part of the Jackson Public School Project Success Program and culminated with a ballet recital and spaghetti dinner. K.A.S.T was also offered (kids after school theater) at Northeast Elementary School and 35 children participated. A K.A.S.T. also ran at Hunt Elementary serving 17 students ages 6-10 and the group produced "Big Bad Wolf on Trial."

2003 Jackson School of the Arts created a week-long summer arts camp for low to moderate income children the summer that ran 2002-2006. The cost per camper was \$40. The camp grew from 48 children in its first year to 65 and served youth, ages 9 – 15.

2004 the Jackson School of the Arts moved to an old elementary school building on Longfellow where it rented an office and 2 classrooms. Here the first dance classes outside of the school system were offered. Assistant Director Kim Hastings (Curtis) was hired.

The partnership with Jackson Public Schools continued wherein JSA provided before and after school arts programs at area elementary, middle schools, and the alternative high school serving approximately 100 kids each year. We formed new partnerships to provide arts programs to youth including the Florence Crittendon Services, the Court Reporting Program, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Girl Scouts and Cub Scouts

2005 Founder Leslie Montgomery moved and Kim Hastings became Executive Director.

2007 The Board of Directors adopted a “Renewed Plan-New Future Plan.” In an effort to avoid duplication of efforts in our community, we consolidated our piano program with the Jackson Symphony Orchestra Community Music School. After a short and successful fundraising campaign we relocated the Jackson School of the Arts to the up and coming arts and cultural district next to Armory Arts Village. We renovated 2,300 square feet of an old factory space to include 2 studios suitable for dance and theater, an art classroom, a parent waiting room, reception area and administrative office. As a result of an effective marketing plan, we tripled student enrollment. Added a part time administrative assistant.

2008-09 Tough economic years for the Jackson community. We saw many nonprofits close. Our enrollment was not affected and in fact we grew.

2010 We added a third dance studio. 2 full time staff.

2011 Expanded our waiting area to accommodate more parents and siblings. Added Saturday programming to accommodate growth and demand for classes.

2012 We added a 50 seat theatre and dance store. 3 staff (added receptionist)

2015 Added a small café and a “mini museum.”

2016 Added a 4th dance studio, Friday and more Saturday classes to accommodate program growth. Hired a part time Assistant Director. The board formed a relocation committee to address organizational growth.