

Local Art Institutions Make Learning More Fun With “Edutainment” Programs

The fun learning opportunities include expert lectures, exhibit walks, art classes and more.

By TAYLOR STRICKLAND
Daily Sun Senior Writer

As mixing education and entertainment becomes increasingly popular, local arts institutions aim to quench residents’ thirst for knowledge with a series of interactive lectures, classes and exhibits.

“In the landscape of today’s media, where information is abundant but attention spans are fleeting, our approach is education as entertainment,” said Taylor Adkins, marketing director for Significant Productions, the production company that oversees The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center and The Studio Theatre Tierra Del Sol. “This concept, partnered with forward-thinking companies and educators alike, aims to transform traditional learning into engaging and enjoyable experiences that captivate a variety of audience members.”

At The Sharon, the Change-maker Speaker Series features presentations from well-known creatives and influential people such as former NASA astronaut Terry Virts, who kicked off the season with an inside look at what it means to be an astronaut and how it changed his view of the world.

He was followed by Annie Griffiths, a world-renowned photojournalist and the first woman to make photos for National Geographic.

“The speakers’ expertise

lies in different topics, yet both performances share a common goal of educating and entertaining the audience,” Adkins said. “The Sharon’s diverse range of performances ensures there is something for everyone, catering to a wide spectrum of interests and preferences.”

Up next in the Change-maker Speaker Series is “The Search for Longevity,” presented by Blue Zones photographer David McLain at 7 p.m. today. After, The Sharon welcomes clinical psychologist Dr. Rachel Toles, who will provide insight into deviant minds in “The Psychology of Serial Killers and Why They Captivate Us” at 7 p.m. April 25.

For more information, go to thevillagesentertainment.com.

The Enrichment Academy

Learning opportunities abound at The Enrichment Academy, a program of The Villages Recreation and Parks Department that offers hundreds of fee-based, community education courses for Villages residents and nonresidents alike.

“Our motto is ‘Never stop learning, keep on growing,’” said Melanie Sarakinis, the recreation manager for The Enrichment Academy.

Carefully crafted to complement the existing local lifestyle, course subjects range from aquatics to art and crafts, culinary arts, dance, gardening, health and wellness, history, language, literature, music, philosophy, photography, science, writing, travel and much more.



Submitted photo

The Sharon L. Morse Performing Arts Center’s Changemaker Speaker Series hosts influential people and experts who give presentations on their careers and experiences. Terry Virts, a NASA astronaut credited with shooting the most photos in space, kicked off the series with “How to Astronaut.”

Sarakinis said all of the classes are well-attended, with some of the more in-demand courses occasionally requiring a wait list.

“Art, health and wellness, and technology are most popular,” she said. “Another popular one is aquatic — people love anything to do with the pool.”

Classes at The Enrichment Academy are designed to be interesting, engaging, informative, accessible and above all, fun. Learning takes place in small group settings that allow people to get the most out of class and their time with the instructor.

The academy also hosts guest speakers from all over the country to share insight into their area of expertise. Up next is fitness coach Jaime Brenkus, the creator of 8 Minute Abs and a Jack LaLanne program adherent.

He will give a presentation on building ageless energy and timeless health through nutrition and exercise at 6 p.m. April 18 at Ezell Recreation.

Registration fees for lectures are \$12 for residents and \$15 for the public. For classes, fees are based on class duration and materials. Sign up at theenrichmentacademy.org.

Leesburg Center for the Arts

At the Leesburg Center for the Arts, a variety of classes are available for students of every skill level, including a new course, “The Artist’s Way.” In this 13-session course, Margaret Everson teaches techniques to help people harness their creative talents.

“It’s designed to not only help artists continue with their practice, but also to

help with artist’s block,” said Richard Colvin, executive director of Leesburg Center for the Arts.

Another new addition to the center’s regularly scheduled programming is the monthly art history lecture series with Adrienne H. Lee, “The Wandering Art Historian.”

“She does a wonderful job of conceiving and giving these talks,” Colvin said. “She has a real commitment to both underserved and unexplored artists.”

For instance, in 2023, Lee devoted most of her lectures to exploring underappreciated women artists in history. The latest is a four-part series on Vincent van Gogh, ending with a lecture on the artist’s influence on popular culture, at 11 a.m. April 24.

Colvin said each part of the lecture series is designed to stand on its own, so people can join even if they missed the first three lectures.

“Not everyone can come to everything all the time, so I construct them with some level of autonomy,” Colvin said.

For more events from the Leesburg Center for the Arts, go to leesburgarts.com/adult-programs.

Appleton Museum of Art in Ocala

About 45 minutes north of The Villages is an art institution accredited by the American Alliance of Museums. Not only does it feature a permanent collection of more than 24,000 objects, it offers classes, tours and more.

“Year-round, the Appleton Museum of Art hosts a variety of educational programming that supports the special exhibitions and world-class permanent collection,” said Victoria Billig, assistant director for the Appleton Museum of Art in Ocala.

On the first Saturday of every month, museum admission is free. In addition to being able to look through the galleries at no charge, the Free First Saturday program includes artist-led gallery tours, film screenings, presentations by visiting speakers and more.

The May and June Free First Saturdays are organized around upcoming exhibitions that focus on Florida’s natural wonders.

In May, Gabi Sullivan, Ocala’s water resources conservation coordinator, presents “Connecting Y(our) Water,” a look into how water flows through the city and the role consumers have in protecting the resource.

In June, artist Margaret Ross Tolbert will discuss her solo exhibition, “Water’s Margins,” and how Florida’s springs continue to inspire her. Both presentations start at 11 a.m. in the Appleton auditorium.

For those who prefer a hands-on experience, the Appleton offers studio art classes, workshops and camps.

“Taking an art class at a museum is a unique opportunity — it’s the perfect place to learn and get inspired to create your own masterpieces,” Billig said.

For May, the museum is offering two printmaking workshops. Potential students can learn the art of cyanotype with artist and College of Central Florida Professor Tyrus Clutter, and gel-plate printmaking with Appleton educator Vanessa Zumba-Gonzalez.

To see more upcoming programs and classes, visit appletonmuseum.org.

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