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Onward: Cultural coalition elects leadership, seeks input

[Kristina Dorsey](#)

The newly formed Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition - which aims to support and promote the region's cultural and creative sector - is continuing to evolve and grow, having elected a founding board of directors and hired an executive director.

Wendy Bury, a Stonington resident who was the founding executive director of La Grua Center, is the coalition's executive director. She was also founder and chair of the Stonington Nonprofit Roundtable, where she led a two-year study on the economic and social impacts of public charities.

The board of directors includes more than 20 community leaders. Among the members of the executive committee are Robert Mills, president of Norwich Community Development Corporation; Dan McMahon, director of marketing and public relations of Goodspeed Musicals; and Beth Pite, a strategic marketing and nonprofit management consultant who has been named the coalition's board chairman.

This all follows two years of work by a transition team to figure out what the region's strengths and needs are, based on surveys and interviews.

This is actually the last of nine regions in the state to form an organization that serves the arts and cultural community. The guiding force statewide was John Cusano, the community development coordinator for the Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism who encouraged the creation of regional arts alliances around Connecticut.

Pite, who is also a pastel painter, says the Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition is "really about advocating for the arts-heritage-cultural sector and helping people understand the tremendous economic contribution this industry makes. It's not only about quality of life, but it's about real jobs bringing real money to the region."

For instance, businesses form around those arts-heritage-cultural sites; frame shops might pop up near galleries. Or, when people go to a town or city to see a show, they might then stay to go to a restaurant.

"Part of what we will do is communicate that better to the world, and part of what we will do is support those folks in the area who are already doing these things, largely unsung," Pite says.

She says, too, that one of the group's charges from the state is to help bring people organizations together so they know what each other is doing. That way, they can build on their efforts instead of functioning separately.

Bury says, "There are the many different groups that are doing the same things in different areas where they may, together, be able to learn from each other, collaborate more, work together, share information, share resources, all for the benefit of the community, for the organizations and for everybody around them."

An example of possible concrete action: Bury says that if, say, the group created a comprehensive regional calendar, it might show that a number of events are happening at the same time and have a common denominator. The coalition could connect those dots, Bury says. They could help promote those events as a group or suggest ways the individual organizations can partner with each other.

Or, Pite says, if one organization is contemplating buying ticketing software, for instance, it could see if another group has tried one that they would recommend or not recommend. Or, if several groups are looking to buying such a system, they might do it together.

Pite has worked extensively with coalitions in other parts of the state. She was on the executive committee of the Greater Hartford Arts Council, which is the biggest such group in Connecticut, and she consulted with or served on the boards of five other such groups.

"We're taking a lot of those lessons learned and applying them here," says Pite, who lives in Groton but also has an apartment in Hartford.

During the first part of this year, Bury will travel and meet with leaders around the region and will hold office

hours, too, for individuals, organizations or business representatives. Her hours are 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Feb. 6 and 13 and March 6 and 13 at The Day offices, 47 Eugene O'Neill Drive, New London; and Feb. 20 and 27 and March 20 and 27 at the Norwich Community Development Corporation offices at 77 Main St., Norwich.

The coalition encourages arts, cultural, historic and creative business representatives to provide current contact information and/or to set up a meeting with Bury. Call (860) 448-5135 or email SCCCoalition@gmail.com.
