



Mari's Place for the Arts holds a "call to action" to support underprivileged kids

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Kienan Briscoe

EVERETT, Wash., November 11, 2022— Approximately 50 people gathered at Forest Park's Floral Hall in Everett on Wednesday, November 9, for Mari's Place for the Arts' Board of Directors event. During the cocktail hour before the event commenced, the room was bustling with conversation of how Mary Toews, the organization's founder and CEO, is "the sweetest woman alive" and how "art means so much to her."

"For me, everything we have, from your car to your bed, from your toothbrush to your pencil, from the freeway to taking a train, music, writing, plays, movies, started on a white piece of paper by somebody creating," Toews said. "Everything is art and art means everything to me."



Mukilteo Mayor Joe Marine at Mari's Place for the Arts Executive Board event at Forest Park's Floral Hall in Everett on Wednesday, November 9, 2022. Lynnwood Times | Kienan Briscoe.

Mari's Place, which was named by the children who attend it, is an art school for children and teens at surface level, but an initiative to bring the arts to underprivileged kids at its core. Through scholarships these children can undertake drawing, painting, drama, dancing, and music classes at no cost to them or their families, an idea that Toews formed from watching her son's interest in performance arts and recognizing a "serious state of misfortune" within the Latino community she subscribes to.

The overall objective of Wednesday's event was, in many ways, a call for action; to spread the word of Mari's Place to the community, pique an interest, and ultimately search for donors, ambassadors, and a strong board of directors to keep the organization's good work alive. These potential ambassadors can donate just one, or two, dollars a month to support the arts in underprivileged kids. As it stands, about 80 to 85% of children at Mari's Place are there because of scholarships who couldn't be if the organization wasn't supported.

"To be a board member for Mari's place means you are involved and personally committed to working with Mary and your fellow board members to find ways of bringing the arts to children who wouldn't otherwise have that opportunity," Russ Kimball, Board Member and Treasurer for Mari's Place, told the Lynnwood Times. "We work with kids in the greater Snohomish County area and expose them to the arts who may not have the financial ability to do it themselves, whether it's dancing, or theater, or the visual arts. They have a great opportunity here and it doesn't cost anything to them or their families."

Toews originally intended the event to be a fundraiser but decided to hold a smaller, invite-only, gathering of people she knew had a deep appreciation for the arts since the economy is less than ideal, she said.

While working as a translator for Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS), Toews began to see a lot of artistic talent within the Latino community and always wanted to do something to cultivate that talent. More importantly she began to realize not many members of the community had access to the proper resource to pursue their artistic interests.

When Toews' son left for college, she returned to her home country of Mexico, sold her house, her land, and her apartment and with that money started Mari's Place in 2011. The organization began by holding art classes from painting to drawing to singing to dancing for just \$5 a class. Toews quickly saw the quality of art her students were producing and immediately knew, in that moment, that this was her calling.

Mukilteo Mayor, Joe Marine, the President of the Board of Directors for Mari's Place, first met Toews while both serving on the Campfire Board. She approached him, looking for a Board of Directors, and the two sat down for lunch. Marine told the Lynnwood Times he initially thought "oh that's cute, it's like a daycare with arts and crafts" but quickly saw the quality of art these children were producing and thought "I have to be a part of this."

"I dare anyone in this room to tell Mary no. And if you do, at least tell me how you did it because I haven't found a way yet since she approached me and said hey will you be on my board?" Mayor Marine joked. "Mary never tells her kids they can't do it, so they don't know and then they do it."

Mari's Place is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) relying completely on grants and individual donations. Recently the organization was awarded a \$150,000 grant from Group Health which Mary plans to onboard new staff members.



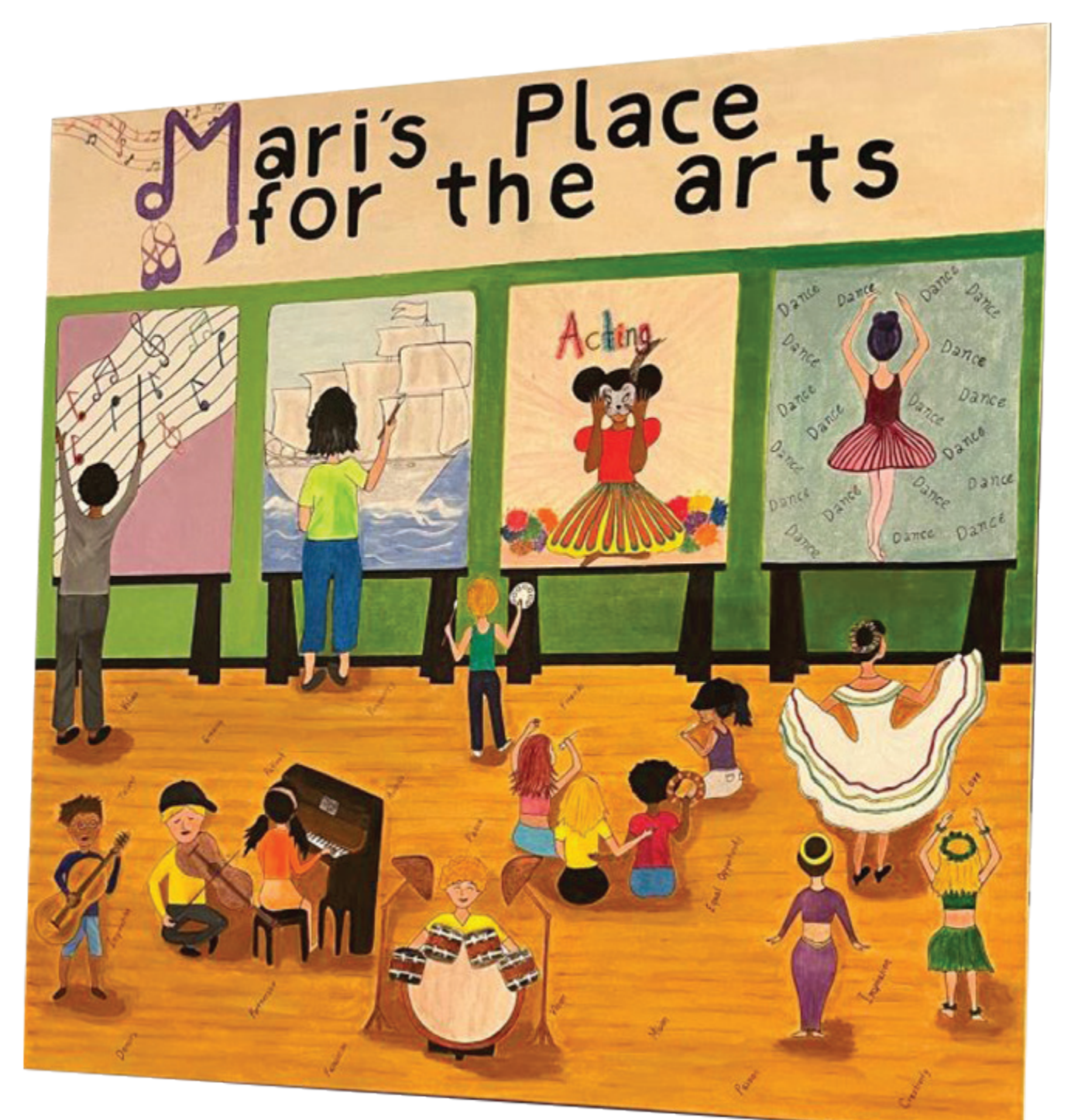
CEO and founder Mary Toews at Mari's Place for the Arts Executive Board event at Forest Park's Floral Hall in Everett on Wednesday, November 9, 2022. Lynnwood Times | Kienan Briscoe.

"It's time for us to grow and I always think I am a mature woman. One day I want to leave and I want this organization to be independent and self-sufficient to continue to do what I do," Toews told the Lynnwood Times.

While cultivating an interest in the arts is the goal of Mari's Place, Toews told the Lynnwood Times it is her mission to also create an organization where her students can return as staff members to create job opportunities for them. This would not be possible without the assistance of a strong board of directors, she said.

You can donate to Mari's Place Amazon Smiles or by visiting their website at <https://marisplaceforthearts.org/donate/>

For those interested in becoming an ambassador or Board Member for Mari's place email info@marisplaceforthearts.org or call 425-330-4425



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