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## Cathedral Arts Project celebrates 25 years of arts education

This year, the Cathedral Arts Project celebrates its 25th anniversary. Since 1993, CAP has provided quality arts education – including dance, music, theatre and the visual arts – to more than 27,000 K-8 students in Duval County.

Founded by Gail Weltsek and a small group of parishioners at St. John's Episcopal Cathedral, CAP began with one dance class for 10 students at a nearby transitional housing facility. The program was launched to provide an opportunity for meaningful arts education to children who otherwise would not have access to the arts.

"It just started out as an idea," said Weltsek, whose son was an aspiring actor at the time, and is now a professor of art education. "It was his idea to do something for the children. It just happened one morning sitting at the breakfast table saying, 'Wouldn't this be great?'"

And so, CAP was born. The original dance class was taught at the cathedral, until an elementary school principal asked if a similar program could be offered to the students at her school. "We went into the schools because it made sense to go where the children were," said Weltsek. "And it just grew!"

It was immediately apparent that there was an incredible need for a program like CAP in many schools. The small group of parishioners grew to eight volunteer board members who worked with every school that was willing to participate. Within three years, CAP had partnered with 15 elementary schools, providing free dance classes. By 1999, programming had expanded to include the visual arts and violin.

Following such rapid growth, CAP decided to incorporate and was designated as a 501(c)(3) charity in 2000. Shortly afterward, Kimberly Hyatt was hired as President & CEO, a decision that Gail Weltsek was thrilled about. "Kimberly was the right person at the right time," said Weltsek. "She's incredible, and I'm so proud of how everything has turned out."

With Kimberly Hyatt at the helm, CAP has grown not only in size, but also in scope. Multidisciplinary programs are now offered at more than 20 schools and community centers each year, professional development sessions are offered to local artists and educators, and CAP has become a voice for the importance of arts education.

"Over the years we have expanded our services to include partnering with others to help them provide arts education, as well as advocating for Duval County Public Schools to provide more arts education," said Hyatt.



CAP has received recognition as a leader in arts education at the local, regional and national levels – including funding from the National Endowment for the Arts to support a visual arts program for incarcerated youth.

How will CAP celebrate this milestone? The highlight of the year will be the 14th annual Spring for the Arts, the signature fundraising event for the organization that has generated nearly \$5 million for arts education programs since its inception. The event will take place Friday, April 27, at the River Club, and will feature performances by current CAP students as well as alumni. In addition, CAP is launching a summer camp which will feature multidisciplinary arts classes for 6- to 11-year-old students.

“What started as the dream of a small group of parishioners has become a nationally recognized organization,” said Hyatt. “We look forward to seeing the impact of arts education on our students for generations to come. The story of CAP is the story of a community that understands how quality arts learning can change young lives.”

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*The **Cathedral Arts Project** is the leading nonprofit provider of quality, comprehensive and ongoing instruction in the visual and performing arts for elementary and middle school students in Duval County. The driving force behind all CAP programs is the belief that the arts matter – they provide essential skills, like creative thinking, perseverance, teamwork and self-discipline, that benefit all people in all areas of their lives.*

*Too often, certain populations of students do not have access to an arts-rich education because of limited access and resources in their schools, communities or homes. Yet these are the students for which the arts can have the strongest and longest-lasting impacts. CAP needs your support to accomplish its vision for every child in Northeast Florida to have access to a well-rounded, arts-rich education that endows his or her spirit with the imagination, self-confidence and strength of character that inspires great leadership and a will to succeed. Learn more at [capkids.org](http://capkids.org).*