



NEWS RELEASE: Festival of the Arts Opens at Artworks

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FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS OPENS AT ARTWORKS

BIG RAPIDS—The fourth annual Festival of the Arts began at Artworks on Thursday, Jan. 27, with an opening ceremony featuring remarks and musical performance by John Varineau, associate conductor of the Grand Rapids Symphony.

Varineau, also a clarinetist and music teacher at multiple Grand Rapids area colleges, addressed the audience of nearly 150 area residents between clarinet selections by British composer Gerald Finzi and Hungarian composer Béla Kovács. With the piano accompaniment of his wife, Gwen, Varineau gave a nimble and dramatic performance that won enthusiastic applause.

Citing the celebration of events such as Grand Rapids' ArtPrize for their positive impact on local economies, Varineau discussed the value of community arts initiatives. While secondary benefits are significant, he asserts, people need the arts for a much more basic reason. "Art is not just for the select few but for everybody because it is a part of who we are," Varineau said. "We cannot escape that we are creative beings, that we have the mental facilities to enjoy beauty."

Varineau encouraged attendees to "keep the excitement going" into the month-long series of events, a collaboration between Big Rapids area and Ferris State University volunteers. In 2008, organizers revived the festival, a citywide celebration begun by former Ferris music director Dacho Dachoff in 1959, to create a cultural bridge between the university and local communities.

"Art is something that draws us together," said Varineau. The 2011 Festival of the Arts will afford many such opportunities in its first week alone, featuring such diverse events as a chainsaw art demonstration, historical instrument recitals, art welding and floral arrangement workshops, and digital photography instruction—as well as more traditional theatre performances, concerts, and art classes.

The 2011 Festival of the Arts continues through Feb. 27. More information is available at www.ferris.edu/festival.

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