



CATA Executive Director, Margaret Keller with husband, Brendan Mathews, and Stephanie Iverson at CATA Annual Performance & Gala.

Making A DIFFERENCE

Highlighting the Lenox residents who volunteer their time for worthy causes in the community and county.

By Heather Herman

CATA – Community Access To The Arts
Nurturing and celebrating the creativity of people with disabilities through shared experiences in the visual and performing arts.

Stephanie Iverson has lived in Lenox for 10 years. She and her husband came from Boston when his business drew him to Albany. They rented for four years and loved it here, and wanted to stay in Lenox versus moving to another neighboring town. Stephanie loves being able to walk into town from her home, which she did to meet me for coffee. Through our conversation, I learned more about Stephanie's work – she has a jewelry line sold at Twigs, Local, and Kripalu, and she is also a yoga teacher at Radiance.

In our interview Stephanie shares her story of volunteer work with CATA for our LL readers who might want to learn more about this great organization that brings creativity and the arts to people with disabilities – and, as you'll learn from Stephanie, brings the community together.



Stephanie at home playing with her dog, Frieda.

CATA provides art workshops for 600 people with disabilities across Berkshire County, in dance, visual art, singing, drumming, juggling, yoga, and creative writing. The organization then brings that creativity back to the general public by sharing the work of CATA artists in art shows and performances. By shining a light on the artistry of people with disabilities, CATA works to change perceptions of disability—and to create a community that celebrates inclusion, acceptance, and creativity.

LL: Who are the members of your family?

Stephanie: Husband, Colin Mathews, and kids: Finn, 13; Beck, 11; and Conrad, 8. (Plus two gerbils, a dog, and a cat.)

Are they involved in this nonprofit as well? They have all helped – gone to the shows, passed out programs at shows, made gala decorations. This past year I went to BCD and worked with my son's

whole 7th-grade class making decorations as a group.

What types of tasks do you perform for CATA?

I began volunteering for the Gala (which takes place in May at Shakespeare & Co.) and have chaired the decorating committee for the last few years. I was on the board of CATA for one year (starting 2012), and then came off last spring. I was on the development committee when on the board, which involved work pertaining to strategy and planning. Now I'm interested in doing some event and motivation work, but with more of a day-to-day focus, and I hope to work more with the actual artists and programs to promote the organization from the grassroots – ground level.

That sounds fun and like lots of work; do you connect with others to bring the ideas to reality? Yes, and I get to collaborate with others, like Joe Wheaton



CATA visual artist Cathy Crofut in front of her paintings on exhibit at the Clark Art Institute in April.

– a local sculptor, who I hired for a recent Gala to create a great video installation that highlighted photos of CATA artists with disabilities and their artwork. For CATA's 20th anniversary I designed a piece of jewelry. The profits from the sale of the pieces (one gold and one silver) went back to CATA. For this project, I worked with metal artist James Kennedy, who made/fabricated the design. Dawn Lane is the Artistic and Program Director of CATA and leads CATA's mixed ability dance troupe, The Moving Company. She directs some outstanding performances at the Gala, which truly brings the community together.

Also, as part of CATADirect (a craft cooperative where community volunteers work side by side with CATA artists), I'm co-hosting the Dec. 2nd Holiday Trunk Show, which features CATA artists' craftwork. All proceeds go directly back to CATA and to the artists with disabilities.

How long have you been volunteering with CATA, and how much time do you spend volunteering? For about five years. For the Gala decorating committee, there are months of part time planning, and the week before the event, it is "hands on" pretty much full-time to create a decorative vibe that corresponds to the theme of the show.

What drew you to volunteer for this organization? Because I have family members with Down syndrome and a passion for the arts. CATA offers an opportunity to mix with all parts of the community and participate, and get to know more people. I get as much, or more from the CATA artists/students as I can give to them. It's close to my heart, and I will always be involved.



CATA's Moving Company, a mixed ability dance troupe, poses after a rehearsal for CATA's annual performance at Shakespeare & Company.



Friendships form in the CATA Direct Crafts Cooperative! CATA artist Teresa Thomas with volunteer Leslie Shatz.

What benefits do you get from volunteering with this organization? Community building – CATA involvement makes me feel more part of life.

How can others get involved with this organization? Contact the office. Margaret Keller, Executive Director, margaret@communityaccesstotheARTS.org or Katie Clarke, Administrative Director, at 413-528-5485.

For those who want to make a donation, your gift helps fund the magic that takes place in nearly 1,000 visual and performing arts workshops serving over 500 people with disabilities throughout Berkshire County. Visit the website <http://www.communityaccesstothearts.org/support/donate>

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