



ROYAL OAK COMMISSION FOR THE ARTS  
**ANNUAL REPORT 2023**







## **Mission**

The primary goal of the commission is to encourage and promote arts and culture in the community. The City of Royal Oak recognizes the importance of arts and culture to a vibrant, healthy, and sustainable community. The city strives to promote and encourage arts and culture through the public and private display of art.

## **Commission for the Arts Members**

Jason Gittinger, Chair  
Alesha Beistline  
Denise Reske  
Jodie Ellison  
Laura Bonnell  
Melissa Tobias

## Letter from the Chair

Dear Members of the Royal Oak City Commission,

I am writing to you in my capacity as the Chair of the Royal Oak Commission for the Arts (ROCFA) to submit our Annual Report for this past year. This letter accompanies the report, highlighting our key achievements and extending our gratitude to those who made them possible.

First and foremost, we want to express our heartfelt thanks to the volunteers and community stakeholders whose dedication and passion for the arts have been the cornerstone of our success. Their tireless efforts and commitment to fostering a vibrant arts community in Royal Oak deserve our utmost recognition and appreciation.

This year has been a remarkable one for the arts in Royal Oak. We have successfully brought art closer to the people of our city. These initiatives have not only enriched our community's cultural fabric but have also provided a platform for local artists to showcase their talents. The positive feedback from residents and visitors alike is a testament to the success of these programs.

Looking ahead, we are excited about the future and the opportunity to further our mission of encouraging and supporting arts and culture in Royal Oak. We remain committed to making the arts accessible to all and to continue fostering an environment where the arts can thrive and be celebrated.

We are grateful for the support the City Commission has extended to us over the past year and look forward to your continued partnership. Together, we can ensure that Royal Oak remains a vibrant and culturally rich community.

Thank you once again for your unwavering support. We are excited about what the future holds and are eager to contribute further to the cultural vitality of our beloved city.

Sincerely,  
Jason Gittinger  
Chair - Royal Oak Commission for the Arts

# With Special Thanks

## Funding Partners

Royal Oak City Commission  
Royal Oak Downtown Development Authority

## 2023 Art Explored Artists

## Artist Donors

### Piano Project

**Painters:** Ginger Klinkman, Sylvia Heidtman, Christal Heidtman, Carol Depottey, Peyton Depottey, Taylor Garrison, Alesha Beistline, Giovanne Beistline, Henry Beistline, Liana Beistline, Sue Carls, Denise Reske, Wendy Beistline, Annie Findlay, Nadine Gittinger, Jazzy Gittinger, Sammy Gittinger, Andrew Schalm, Jodie Ellison, Jim Ellison, Pat Paruch, Maddie Wisner, Catherine Mracna, Reagan Huff, Brandon Kolo, Megan Oxley, Sarah Oxley, Andrew Oxley, Chris Knack

**City Staff:** Todd Fenton, Susan Barkman, Jeremy Peckens

**Professional Movers Crew:** Andrew Androff, Justin Nichols, Antonio Pasha, Ian Kramer

**Piano Site Contacts:** Craig Mangold (Holiday Market), Kirk Reedy (Guitar HiFi), Lori London (Write Impressions), Blaine Tillander (Granite Networks), Tony Yasbeck (526 Main Dueling Piano Bar), Ryan Welch (Hollywood Market), Shelly Mazur (Royal Oak Farmers Market)

**Piano Tuner:** Kerry Lundquist

**The many volunteers who made items for Share the Warmth.**



**In memoriam of former City Commissioner, member of the Commission for the Arts, and dear friend, Pat Paruch**

We would like to acknowledge the contributions of the late Pat Paruch.

**The Commission for the Arts worked on five primary goals in 2023.**

**1**

**Become a more sustainable committee.**

**2**

**Identify our local artists**

**4**

**Build collaborative, community-based art program**

**5**

**Develop an art requirement**



# 3

Improve  
communication  
and outreach to  
Royal Oak  
residents



# Artist Laureate

The Royal Oak Artist Laureate program is designed to recognize and acknowledge the artistic contributions of experienced individual artists, to provide a year of exposure for the selected artist to share their talent with the community, and to encourage and nurture the arts and creative culture in the city. The appointment of the Artist Laureate is considered a civic appointment and one of honor. Applicants must be a current resident of Royal Oak, an experienced artist, and may be from any artistic discipline. Each Artist Laureate has a specific project pre-approved by the Commission for the Arts that they will complete by the end of the year-long appointment.

This year's Artist Laureate is long-time Royal Oak resident and poet, Roberta Brown. She is committed to the arts in many ways, such as through her writing and participation in the Royal Oak Symphony Orchestra. Ms. Brown has a degree in Psychology and Music Therapy from Wayne State University as well as a Master of Arts in Public Administration with a specialization in mental health administration. Ms. Brown's project, Poetry in Public Places, will feature poetry writing workshops and readings for the community. Attendees will have the option to submit their work to be included in a published book of poems that will be developed over the next year. The book will be made available through the library and other community spaces upon completion.



## **Art Explored**

The Art Explored Program allows community members to submit original artwork. Once submitted, the Commission for the Arts undergoes a selection process to decide which pieces will be publicly displayed in Royal Oak. This is a unique program that enables the city to highlight artistic talent from everyday individuals.

Stay tuned for the 2024 Art Explored selections in January!

## **Share the Warmth**

Share the Warmth combines textile arts with offering a helping hand to our unhoused, and low-income neighbors. Volunteers knit hats, mittens, gloves, scarves, and other cold weather necessities throughout the year and the Commission for the Arts puts them on display at the library. Items are available for anyone who needs them on the outside of the building. The items displayed are displayed along the 11 Mile Road entrance. As the park is finalized, additional items may be displayed. In the past, about 170 items were taken throughout the winter.





# New Murals



## Crawford Cosmetics MedSpa Mural

by Caitlyn Williams  
118 N Washington Ave

This mural was designed by Michigan-native muralist Caitlyn Williams, who has designed and painted beautiful murals for other businesses throughout our great state. This mural displays a lovely Grecian aesthetic and can be seen right from N Washington Avenue.



## Galaxy Mural

by Matthew Abraham  
Comet Burger  
207 S Main St.

Metro Detroit entrepreneur and artist Matthew Abraham created this mural on the backside of Comet Burger. The galaxy-themed design fits perfectly with the space-themed restaurant.



## Geo Pattern Mural

by Mat Rousso  
Northend Taproom  
111 S Main St.

The location of this new business is located right on Main street in the heart of downtown. The artist of the mural utilized the same colors that are used in a mural on the inside of the Taproom.

# Collaboration Giving Back

## Hamer Finch Wilkins Park

706 Walnut Ave, Royal Oak, MI 48073

The vision for the new Hamer Finch Wilkins Park (at Crooks and Walnut) is a peaceful and reflective garden. The design includes pathways, benches, new landscaping, and educational components that tell the story of the city's early Black pioneers, Henry and Elizabeth Hamer, and their descendants. The park sits on .29 acres. It was dedicated on October 29, 1956, and was previously known as Beechwood Park, but was renamed in 2022.

The focal point of the park will be a bronze statue of Elizabeth Hamer created by Detroit sculptor Austen Brantley. Just this past September, six Armstrong Maple trees were planted on the park grounds to represent each of Henry and Elizabeth's six children. Henry and Elizabeth Hamer were slaves in Kentucky who made their way to Royal Oak with help from slavery abolitionists through the Underground Railroad network.



## Elizabeth Hamer

Bronze Sculpture by  
Austen Brantley

COMING SPRING 2024



# 2024 Goals

**The Commission for the Arts wants to work on three primary goals in 2024.**

**1**

**Actively seek ideas and participation from all segments of the community, encouraging dialogue and working in partnerships with artists, local businesses, creative professionals, and arts organizations.**

**2**

**Provide opportunities to artists of all racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, disabilities, and other diverse groups.**

**3**

**Strive for artistic excellence in artwork, and art experiences that enhance the community and public spaces throughout the City.**

## New Art at the Senior Center



