



# Center for the Arts of Homer



72 South Main Street, Homer NY 13077

(607) 749-4900

[www.Center4Art.org](http://www.Center4Art.org)

**Center for the Arts of Homer**  
72 South Main Street, Homer, NY 13077  
(607) 749-4900  
[www.Center4Art.org](http://www.Center4Art.org)

## **From Dream to Reality**

### ***Building History***

In October 1801, 16 early settlers of Homer came together with the dream of creating a Baptist Church for a new community. It took many years to build one on Cayuga Street, in line with the Congregational, Methodist, and Episcopal Churches and the former Cortland Academy.

Shortly after the first Baptist Church opened its doors in 1827, it began outgrowing its space and making plans for the future. After an 1889 fire next door at Mechanics Hall, the Baptist Church was able to secure title to the spacious front corner lot facing Main Street with the help of two famous Homer neighbors, Andrew Dickson White and David Hannum. With other neighbors, they organized a community effort to design, fund and build a grand new church as an anchor for the beautiful historic Homer Village Green which dates back to 1805.

The group engaged architect Samuel Burrage Reed of New York City who had designed another familiar landmark – the eclectic Chateausque mansion built for industrialist Chester F. Wickwire – which is now the 1890 House in Cortland. The committee asked New York City contractor Hopkins and Roberts for a construction proposal. The cornerstone was set on July 6th, 1893 and the building was completed in only eight months, opening in 1894. The total cost, including construction, seating and interior amenities, the brickwork with materials supplied by area kilns, and the many spectacular glass windows, was \$27,722. It was an engineering and architectural marvel, and an example of the craftsmanship across Upstate New York in that era.

The beautiful brick building trimmed with brown sand stone, accented with unglazed terra cotta is historically and architecturally significant. An example of Richardson Romanesque style, it has many historic pre-Gothic characteristics including arches and rose windows. In the Northeast Tower there is a 37-inch diameter cast bell stamped “Meneely Bell Foundry, West Troy, NY 1874.” Performers from around the world often comment on the building’s rich history, architectural details, and amazing acoustics. Other structures on the property include the Fountain House, purchased by the church in 1896, which dates back before an early 1854 village map. It’s a corner of history.

### ***History of the Center for the Arts of Homer***

200 years after the early group began the planning that would eventually lead to the building, a small group came together in 2001. The Church had once again outgrown its

space and planned to leave the building. What would become of it? A core group of founders -- neighbors and community members -- met with church leaders and held meetings to devise a plan to save the old church and create something new for the community.

A founder's group was formally established by volunteers who brought considerable expertise and energy to the challenge. Their mission was to preserve the building as an important part of Homer's history – and the gateway to the downtown Homer business district, NYS Scenic Route 90, and the Homer Route 281 business district. They recognized that preserving the building was integral to Homer's significant National and State Historic Register District. They also focused on giving it new community life as an economic, social and cultural anchor on the Village's Main Street and the historic Village Green.

The Founder's group wrote a strategic business plan with carefully thought out financial projections, contracted for engineering analyses, developed building utilization and feasibility studies, held fundraisers, wrote major grant applications, worked with banks on loan guarantees and financing, filed for non-profit incorporation, organized volunteer circles, launched programs and events to test the waters, created marketing materials, developed audiences and built the brand. They launched an ambitious capital campaign to provide matching grants for building acquisition and renovations. From 2001 to 2004, the vision took hold through tremendous community volunteer efforts under the guidance of the Founder's group, fueled by a dream and a labor of love.

The Center was formally established as a non-profit organization with 501 (c) 3 status in 2003. Many of the original Founders group, supplemented by community members, created a Board of Directors to serve as policy makers and catalyze the grass roots support that was evident since the Center's first public event in November, 2001.

The Board subsequently initiated an ambitious capital campaign in 2004 to raise \$650,000. These funds would allow the Board to purchase the building, implement "first-phase" interior renovations to enhance its use as the new Center for the Arts of Homer, and fund a small start-up operating budget. Concurrently the Board administered a cultural needs assessment through NYSCA and the Cultural Council of Cortland County, which helped establish potential support for the Center's project from area residents and other potential donors.

The campaign was launched with a generous challenge grant that provided a 1:1 match up to a total of \$325,000 over three years. Within a year, nearly \$217,000 had been pledged (with 100% participation by members of the Center's Board of Directors). The goal was met, and the matching funds were received.

In June, 2005 the Board of Directors purchased the First Baptist Church of Homer with cash and a private mortgage. Permanent financing was secured from the Tompkins Trust Company, backed by a USDA/Rural Development guarantee. The Center for the Arts of Homer was a reality.

## ***The Launch***

In 2005, the Center hired its first paid Executive Director, Daniel Hayes, an arts administrator with a track record of managing and directing a performance space in Upstate New York. Mr. Hayes immediately put together a year-long schedule of exciting performances which runs from September through June, with an average of 25 to 27 performances. The performances were successes, earning the Center funds, community visibility and good will. The Center for the Arts of Homer was quickly established as one of Upstate New York's premier performance spaces.

The Board of Directors and Executive Director undertook additional renovations that established offices, and made fire code updates, new wiring and made enhancements to sound, lighting and performance amenities. A major renovation created new community use space in the former gymnasium, with the addition of a dance floor, and the purchase of equipment and furniture to make it a multi-purpose space for community events, classes, workshops and functions. Space was created for an art gallery, funded through a generous \$50,000 grant from the Borg Warner Morse TEC Foundation. The gallery featured exhibitions by both local and national artists, and developed relationships with local school districts for community art programming.

The Center has also created a Community Advisory Council of civic leaders with diverse expertise and expertise who could provide stakeholder input and engage in long-range strategic planning.

Good planning and community commitment set the organization on the path for rapid growth. The Center for the Arts of Homer became recognized as one of the most entrepreneurial arts and cultural start-ups in Upstate New York by groups such as the New York State Council for the Arts.

## ***A Dynamic Programming Venue***

The doors officially opened for the first season in 2014-2015, which featured Latin Jazz, Salsa, African Music of the Massai, other eclectic music from around the globe, and homegrown talent like Charlie Bertini and the Applejazz Band. Since then, the Center for the Arts of Homer (or "C4A") has become a favorite destination for some of the best in the business. It has helped put Homer on the map, along with regions like the Berkshires, as the place to catch talent in an intimate, beautiful setting, with tremendous audience interaction with luminary performers and emerging talent who are on the rise on the national and regional scene.

Noted performers who have performed on the C4A stage include: Judy Collins, Richie Havens, Arlo Guthrie, Leon Russell, John Jorgenson, Southside Johnny, Ronnie Leigh, David Bromberg, Beppe Gambetta, Celtic Crossroads, Sim Redmond Band, Janis Ian, Graham Parker, The Glengarry Bhoys, Dougie MacLean, Dan Hicks and the Hot Licks, Walt Michael, Ellis Paul, The Dady Brothers, Ramblin' Jack Elliot, Tom Paxton, Jay

Unger and Molly Mason, Loudon Wainwright III, Kenny Neal, Amy Gallatin, Cherish The Ladies, The Four Bitchin' Babes, Jesse Winchester, Johannes Linstead, U. Utah Phillips, Spyro Gyra, Eileen Ivers Old Blind Dogs, Maria Muldaur, Cormac McCarthy and many others. The C4A stage was also the showcase for great regional performances by CNY Jazz Orchestra, Syracuse Symphony, CNY's Finest, the Delaney Brothers, Old Boy Records Showcase, The Cafferty Band, Ten Man Push, Bluegrass and CNY Music Festivals, among many more talented area performers.

Radio plays, performed by Scarlet Ratt Productions, such as *A Christmas Carol*, *It's A Wonderful Life*, *Miracle on 34th Street*, *Christmas Story*, *Dracula*, *War of the Worlds* have thrilled audiences and been broadcast on WHXC radio. CRT's Showstoppers and Superstars youth theater programs, and other collaborative programs have delighted audiences of all ages. Center Players (previously C4Act), have presented vibrant community theater, including drama and musicals, along with a beloved children's and youth theater program. The C4A stage has hosted performances by community choruses, vocal performers, high school master classes and Cabaret Nights, as well as special-themed evenings such as Cole Porter, Swing, Broadway and more. Thanks to the support of a generous donor, C4A has partnered with Tri-Cities Opera to bring operatic events for both children and adults to Homer.

Community classes and programming have included ballet, Irish Step Dance, Scottish Highland Dance, Tai Chi, Belly Dancing, Ballroom Dancing, Salsa Dancing, Zumba, Pilates, Yoga and a variety of dance-exercise classes. Other community programming has included a free film series, Book Club discussions, and special topics arts, crafts, culinary classes and workshops. Education programs include performing and visual arts classes and lessons, needlework circles and more.

C4A prides itself on the visual arts as part of its core mission, and has offered year-round art and gallery shows including special programs like The Rock Garden Art Group exhibitions, Community Art Challenge, Imagination Celebrations student art shows, and special featured shows by solo artists. Gallery exhibits feature community receptions to meet the many national, regional and local artists who exhibit in the curated shows.

Supporting the effort of two paid professional staff (an Executive Director and Administrative Director) is an extraordinary volunteer organization called Center Circle. With more than 100 members, Center Circle provides the essential foundation of support and volunteer-power that a complex arts and community center requires. From selling tickets, managing concessions, staffing events, facilities support, fundraisers and community events, organizing workshops and special events, plus beautification and spruce-up projects, to a wide range of events management activities and more, Center Circle is an organized, committed group of volunteers. Board members and volunteers contribute services to support functions such as marketing, programming, operations, facilities management and development. Together, Center Circle and C4A volunteers are the true heart, soul, spirit – and hands-on-deck – of the organization, and the reason that C4A is a vibrant, dynamic, efficient and effective community arts center. Volunteers are at the very “center” of the Center for Arts of Homer's success story over its first

decade.

### ***The Next Chapter***

Through this amazing effort, C4A reached new audiences -- nationally, regionally and locally – and across generations. Since opening its doors, C4A has produced more than 150 concerts and hosted more than 35 art exhibits featuring national and local visual artists. Main-stage concerts feature national and international touring artists, with many showcasing Grammy award-winning headliners on the Homer stage. But we're just as proud to be the venue for so many talented regional and local artists, with acts that range from acoustic to folk, blues, jazz, opera, rock and indie, among other genres. With offerings that include art galleries and studios, dance, drama and musical theater, free family films, and a wide variety of classes and workshops for all ages, C4A has become the hub of the community. The Center for the Arts of Homer is the setting for family reunions, weddings, baby and bridal showers and funerals – the full circle in the life of a community. The Center loves to host these community events and sees itself as central to the life of Homer and Central New York.

The next decade builds on that success story as C4A continues to innovate under its new Executive Director Ty Marshal who has had extensive experience working with various arts and cultural organizations. His career in the arts began as a theatre instructor at the Classics and Four Arts Academy in Scottsdale, Arizona. He served as an assistant manager at Dia: Beacon, a leading contemporary art museum in Beacon, N.Y. where he also operated Floor One, an independent local art gallery, and was the curator for Windows on Main Street, an annual visual art event that pairs local businesses with local artists. Prior to joining C4A, he worked for various Upstate arts organizations including the Syracuse Children's Theatre, Community Folk Art Center, Syracuse City Ballet and Rarely Done Productions. He came to the Center for the Arts after serving as the Manager of Digital Media with the Syracuse New Times.

Under Ty's leadership, C4A is focusing on building a sustainable growth strategy focused on programming excellence, expanded offerings and outreach, new audience development, and organizational capacity-building and resource development.

Over the past decade, C4A has grown to become a source of local pride as well as the envy of other communities around New York State. The focus of new leadership is to craft a plan for what we want the next ten years to bring – and how we shape that exciting path together. How does C4A expand partnerships to enhance the success of the Center and support community revitalization efforts? How does it better serve the community, engage families and new audiences, and create a legacy for the next generation? What are new models for the arts that can work here? What are the big new opportunities? How do we create new programs that serve the community, as well as regional and national audiences? How do we engage young people and help them become emerging community leaders? And how do we capitalize on so many good things happening in Homer and brand it as a place to visit and live?

It's been a great ten years. It's also an exciting time to think about change. Arts and cultural organizations can be economic drivers for communities, as well as community treasures. That is the forward-looking vision and mission of the Center for the Arts of Homer.

### ***Meeting The Need***

There is a clear relationship between community needs and the benefits a dynamic Center for the Arts can provide.

The Center is now moving into the next stage where support is critical to forward progress. There is an exciting opportunity to enhance, expand and sustain this vital community institution. The challenge is to balance existing programs, expand offerings and be good stewards to a beautiful landmark building, while maintaining our momentum and foster new growth.

A Cultural Needs Assessment pointed to a shortage of Cortland County facilities and space for art-related programs including educational, instructional, and performance venues. When taken in conjunction with the continuing budgetary constraints in NYS regional schools, this lack of arts related spaces and programs presents a challenge to the residents of Central New York. The Center for the Arts provides an excellent alternative for delivering literary, visual and performing arts opportunities at an affordable price.

The Homer and Central Upstate New York area can benefit directly from a thriving Center: tourist traffic, hotel and restaurant customers, and small business growth. There is also an intangible relationship between the creative economy, community revitalization and the arts. Richard Florida, a noted author, researcher and speaker, makes the case that the "the creative class" adds wealth to a region by creating an economic climate and quality of life that attracts talent. Economic development is attracted to vital, exciting and varied cultural neighborhoods. Young professionals want to raise families in such a community; companies and organizations will thrive. Tourism follows, attracted by the performances, art exhibitions and other activities presented at the Center, especially if they are co-promoted through interesting collaborative destination marketing partnerships with area restaurants, retail and other arts, cultural, entertainment and recreational venues.

An investment in the Center for the Arts of Homer is a tangible investment in community revitalization. It grows the area's "creative class" and helps support small businesses and other organizations that are part of the well-connected C4A network.

Support of the Center for the Arts is an investment in the economic and cultural well-being – and the future -- of the Homer-Cortland area and the region.

The Center for the Arts has made significant investments in this community asset. Facility improvements have included a complete roof replacement, major plumbing and

HVAC repairs, complete interior painting, a complete make-over of the performance stage, a new sound system with state of the art equipment, new stage lighting, a green room with private restroom and make-up area for visiting performers, completely renovated Karen Sager Community Room, renovated classrooms, new dance floors, restored historic stained glass windows, renovated offices, and numerous on-going maintenance, upgrades and other improvements associated with an old building.

As part of its next ten-year strategic planning process, professional staff and the Board of Directors will be developing a capital needs list to facilitate continued growth.

The Center for the Arts of Homer is at the core of a community where multiple generations can gather and share arts, cultural, educational and entertainment experiences. It will continue to be an economic anchor for the Homer-Cortland area and the entire Central New York region by attracting artists, residents and visitors who together forge a more vital and exciting community that is a magnet for investment, development and tourism.

The path for moving forward is clear. The community must invest in its future by sustaining this dynamic Center for the Arts that enhances the quality of life in the Village of Homer, Cortland County and the entire surrounding Central Upstate New York area.