

→ PROFILE



Artistic Alliance

by DEBRA WALLACE | photography by JODY ROBINSON

The visionaries who founded the Michener Art Museum in Doylestown figured early on that the museum would need the support of the surrounding business community in order to thrive. Looking back, they were right on the money.

For more than 30 years, the Michener Art Museum's Corporate Business Partners Program has been building a dynamic alliance between the local arts community and the Delaware Valley's business community, to include hundreds of businesses of all sizes. The program dates back to 1988, when Sylvan Pools founder Herman Silverman and Pulitzer Prize-winning author James Michener worked alongside the Doylestown community to transform a shuttered prison into a distinguished museum and historic site. Shortly after, Silverman pushed for a commitment from the business community to become actively involved in its support of the museum.

Although Silverman passed away in 2017, his daughter, Binny, continues her family's involvement in the museum and the Corporate Business Partners Program. Kathleen V. Jameson, executive director of the Michener Art Museum, describes the program as "a shining example" of a successful collaboration between business and the art world. The program not only supports the museum and its array of exhibitions and educational programs, but it also serves the community as a whole.

"I have never before seen such a robust program like the one at the Michener; it is truly extraordinary," says Jameson, whose 25-year career has included leadership positions at many notable museums, including some much larger than the Michener. "What is special about this program is the genuine

sense of ownership and engagement with everyone, from the small businesses to the large corporations. There is a seat at our table for everyone."

Currently, as many as 200 community and business leaders contribute to the program, "and many of the members have been there from the beginning," Jameson adds. "This certainly says a lot about the community's commitment to the museum and the museum's commitment back to the business members."

Education and community outreach are key aspects of the program, and of the museum itself. Jameson suggests all great art museums have a dual mission: to serve as stewards of art and culture; and to act as an educational resource. They also offer a breadth of classes, dynamic programming, and noteworthy exhibitions—and the Michener Art Museum is no exception. Dues from the business program, as well as the underwriting of special exhibitions throughout the year, make everything at the museum possible.

A proactive advisory board led by its president, Melissa Eiseman, provides the drive behind the Corporate Business Partners Program. A former Marriott executive and the owner of New Britain-based Eiseman Construction, Eiseman has been involved with the Michener Art Museum for 25 years. She says the museum "fosters a great deal of pride in the community." As she recalls Silverman telling her early

The Michener Art Museum builds enduring connections between the arts community and the businesses that support it.



Melissa Eiseman, president of the Corporate Business Partners Program Advisory Board

on, "We all have these bragging rights with regards to the multifaceted museum and its rich array of programs."

To her point, it is not unusual to see multiple generations of a family walking the museum halls or wandering its grounds. At a recent event to celebrate the museum's hard-working volunteers, Eiseman had the opportunity to speak with a high school-age girl whose mother had spent many years working as a docent.

"This girl has been raised with the Michener Art Museum, after taking art classes here for 10 years," Eiseman says. "She knows how special it is."

The Michener Art Museum's robust programming includes lectures and gallery talks, art classes and workshops for all ages, as well as musical performances, community days, and more. One much-anticipated exhibition: *The Color of the Moon: Lunar Painting in American Art*, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the 1969 lunar landing, will run from June 1 to September 8. Featuring more than 50 works of art, *The Color of the Moon* explores the long and enduring relationship between art and celestial bodies.

"As business partners, we are ambassadors for Doylestown and Bucks County, and this is something that gives us a great sense of pride," Eiseman says. "This museum is small enough not to be overwhelming, and it's filled with docents who will bring all of the exhibits to life. The Michener is really a special place, and it has become a true center of the community for everyone." ■



MICHENER ART MUSEUM
138 S. Pine Street | Doylestown, Pa.
(215) 340-9800 | MichenerArtMuseum.org