

Elayna Toby Singer Oversees Busy Public Art Agenda



Elayna Toby Singer

When **Elayna Toby Singer** relocated from the Gulf Coast to the Treasure Coast a year ago to become **Palm Beach County's** first Art in Public Places Administrator, the change was more than geographical. The seasoned nonprofit executive and cultural administrator shifted her career priorities, as well.

"Arts, culture and the environment make up my professional triangle," Singer explains. "After being in the botanical garden world for 15 years, I was looking for a way to move art to the top of the triangle. I became aware of Art in Public Places opportunities nationally, and it just

clicked as a concept. When this position became open, I applied for it and, *Voilà*, here I am."

For the past 15 years, Singer worked with botanical and cultural arts nonprofit organizations in San Francisco, Chicago, Philadelphia and Naples, Fla., with an emphasis on promoting and preserving indigenous artistic, cultural and environmental resources. Most recently, she was the Associate Producer of *Untold Stories*, a production of public television station **WFCU**, which portrayed the history of Southwest Florida's diverse communities. Previously, she led strategic and master planning for the 160-acre **Naples Botanical Garden** and served as Associate Director of Visitor Programs and Services at the **University of Pennsylvania's Morris Arboretum**. She was recognized with the Mayor's "Access Achievement Award" in Philadelphia for her leadership in providing access to visitors with diverse physical abilities.

In making the move from Naples to Palm Beach County, Singer says, she sought a more cosmopolitan environment as well as one where she could build something new – figuratively as well as literally. "I'm a creator and I see this position as a real opportunity to be part of growing the cultural

arts community by building on what's already here," she observes. As the County's Art in Public Places Administrator, Singer directs the development, fabrication and installation of public art projects at facilities throughout Palm Beach County on behalf of the **Board of County Commissioners**. The projects are being funded primarily with \$1.5 million designated through two County Cultural and Recreation Bond Issues – funding for which the Cultural Council advocated. Of the total, \$500,000 has been allocated for public art at the courthouses, while the remaining \$1 million will be spread throughout other County facilities.

The initial items on Singer's agenda include a public plaza at the South County Courthouse on Atlantic Avenue in Delray Beach, another project at the West County Courthouse in Belle Glade and a combined public art and landscaping project at the Convention Center. The budgets range from \$40,000 to \$250,000.



Muralist Andrew Reid tests two paint types for the South County Courthouse.

"All of the projects were chosen by the County's **Public Art Committee** for their high visibility and artistic impact in the community," Singer notes. "We're cultivating future support from our citizens."

Another priority for the County's program is the development of a matching grant opportunity for nonprofit organizations and municipalities to partner with artists to create public art projects in visible, accessible, community-oriented spaces. She also oversees the public art program at **Palm Beach International Airport (PBI)**, which encompasses a permanent collection of about 40 pieces and changing exhibitions that highlight the local talent of Palm Beach County artists.

Her work is guided by the Board of County Commissioners' Public Art Committee, which is chaired by Commissioner **Mary McCarty** and has seven other members, including Cultural Council Board Member **Rick Gonzalez** and **Bill Nix**, Vice President of Marketing and Government Relations, who represent the Council. Administratively, Singer is situated in the County's **Facilities Development and Operations Department** – a fact that she views as a great asset. "Integrating a large-scale institutional facilities development program and the arts can be a challenge, but in this case we're already part of the same team."

Singer has quickly integrated herself into the local cultural community. She served on the Palm Beach County Cultural Council's Grant Review Panel for the Category B and C-II programs and is a Trustee of the **Ann Norton Sculpture Gardens**. On a broader scale, she is a member of the **Americans for the Arts Public Art Network**, the **Florida Association of Public Art Administrators** and the **International Ecotourism Society**. As an active member of the **American Association of Botanical Gardens and Arboreta**, Singer chaired the Education Committee and served on the Board Nominating and Annual Conference Committees.

The County's Art in Public Places Program was created thanks largely to the efforts of former County Commissioner **Carol Roberts**, who spearheaded its funding. For the first several years, the Cultural Council assumed responsibility for the program, which focused initially on providing public art at PBI. Three years ago, following the passage of the Cultural and Recreation Facilities Bond Issue, management of the public art program was transferred to the County's Facilities Development and Operations Department.

"The County's Art in Public Places Program will have countywide impact," Singer points out. "The Cultural Council and their individual and organizational members provide a natural foundation for partnerships. I see the Cultural Council as a critical conduit and link between the County's Art in Public Places Program and the broader cultural arts community."

Singer's academic credentials for her diverse career include being a **Longwood Fellow** and receiving her master's degree in Public Horticulture Administration and Nonprofit Museum Management from the **University of Delaware**. Her B.A. in Cultural Anthropology and Elementary Education is from the **University of Wisconsin-Madison**. In her spare time, she creates beaded jewelry and makes mobiles with beads, seeds, twigs, shells, wires and found objects. Her multiple interests and experiences are bound to serve her well in her new role.



Ceramic tile artist Carlos Alves captures the essence of Delray Beach's first railroad station in one of the new bench tops for the South County Courthouse.

Public Art Committee

Commissioner **Mary McCarty**

Bill Nix

W. "Rod" Faulds

Elizabeth Tennyson

Rick Gonzalez

Kara Walker-Tomé

F. Joan Goldberg

To learn more:
pbcgov.com/fdolart

David Miller



Council Seeks Artists' Input

At the invitation of the Cultural Council, more than 35 Palm Beach County artists from a variety of disciplines participated in a forum on April 4 at the **Armory Art Center**. Part of the Council's strategic planning process, the session was designed to give artists an opportunity to air issues affecting them and their work. The participants included (from left) **Elayna Toby Singer**, Palm Beach County Art in Public Places Administrator; **Amelia Ostrosky**, Executive Director of the Armory Art Center; **Rena Blades**, President and CEO of the Cultural Council; and **Miroslav Antic**, Painting and Drawing Department Chair at the Armory.

