

# Missouri Folk Arts Program

**Lisa L. Higgins**  
Director

## Arts and Aging in Missouri

Over the last decade, the Missouri Arts Council (MAC), our state arts agency, has worked more actively to encourage deeper inclusion, diversity, equity, and access in its programs. MAC, for instance, has sought new collaborations in arts-adjacent and seemingly non-adjacent fields, including topical convenings. On April 26, 2018, MAC and Mid-America Arts Alliance co-coordinated *Art Ease: A Regional Convening on Arts and the Military* in Kansas City, Mo., with support from the National Endowment for the Arts. The conference was such a success that MAC's Special Initiatives Coordinator Virginia Sanders and Executive Director Michael Donovan invited partners to organize *Arts and Aging in Missouri*.

The Missouri Folk Arts Program joined the planning committee, as did the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. The state's Minority Health and Human Services and the Missouri Coalition Celebrating Care Continuum Change also supported the all-day meeting on April 4, 2019 at Memorial Union on the Mizzou Campus. *Arts and Aging in Missouri* featured inspiring performances from a range of Missouri artists: storyteller Deb Swanegan, jazz guitarist Joel Anderson, Missouri Poet Laureate Alike Barnstone, and award-winning visual artist Solomon Thurman. Missouri arts leaders Lois Brace of the Presser Arts Center and Debra Campbell of Arts and AGEing KC compelled the audience with details and demonstrations of ways they implement creative aging programs in Mexico, Mo., and greater



Missouri Folk Arts' director Lisa L. Higgins and Traditional Arts Indiana's director Jon Kay enjoyed facilitating a discussion over lunch with traditional artists, adaptive recreation specialists, a recent Missouri State University Social Work graduate, and others.



Master storyteller Deb Swanegan (Columbia) wowed the audience with poignant tales of her grandmother, as stitched into a quilt passed down from generation to generation.



Debra Campbell, CEO of Arts and AGEing KC, demonstrates the power of physical, artistic activities on brain health and quality of life.

Kansas City, Mo., respectively. Lt. Governor Mike Kehoe stopped by with words of support and encouragement. MAC enriched the agenda with national creative aging leaders: Gary Glazner, *Alzheimer's Poetry Project* founder; UMSL Professor Suzanne Doyle, who lectures across the U.S. about *Ageless Arts: Creativity in Later Life*; and Professor Jon Kay of Traditional Arts Indiana, who researches, writes, and develops programs about handcrafted "memory objects."

The audience itself was full of experts, too, with 116 participants from Columbia, Jefferson City, St. Louis, Kansas City, Springfield, and beyond. Artists, arts administrators, curators, docents, and arts educators sat side-by-side with social workers, caregivers, nursing home staff, physicians, nurses, and entrepreneurs. Museum of Art and Archaeology and Museum of Anthropology staff attended, as did docents and Museum Associates members. A din of conversations rose from over a dozen lunch tables at midday, as the conference encouraged deeper conversations among all participants. MAC was pleased with feedback via a post-conference survey, where a majority of participants expressed their interest in future Arts and Aging events and projects. ■



MAC's Specialist Initiatives Coordinator Virginia Sanders (left) engages with audience members during a break from the conference agenda.



Joel Anderson (Columbia) entertained the crowd with some jazz standards. Outside his office, the attorney practices creative aging, doing gigs weekly at arts and culture events as a soloist and with small ensembles.



Photos by Marianne Kilroy

Audience members grasp keynote speaker Gary Glazner's points as he illustrates his use of poetry in his work with people with dementias. He is particularly fond of Emily Dickinson's *Hope is a Thing with Feathers*, a simple but evocative poem. The day before the conference, Glazner captured the hearts and minds of visitors and staff at the MU School of Health Professions' Adult Day Connection.

