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FIELD'S VISION INSPIRES ANNUAL ARTS FESTIVAL

SANDRA TRUITT FIELD'S career has taken her from high school choral teacher to music education professor, professional singer, and even first runner-up to Miss America. But her latest job — a "volunteer" post that came after she "retired" in 2007 — keeps her busier than ever, and allows her to share her love of the arts in a uniquely fulfilling way.

Field, a 1978 Furman graduate, is president of the board of trustees for Juilliard in Aiken, a one-of-a-kind, weeklong arts festival which this year is slated for March 5–11. The event brings students, faculty and alumni from New York's Juilliard School, which many consider to be America's premier performing arts institution, to Aiken, S.C., for public performances, master classes, in-school workshops and other events.

"Juilliard does not do this with any other community," Field says. "They travel and perform in other parts of the nation and world, but there is no organized festival anywhere else, so we feel tremendously fortunate to have this kind of partnership with them."

The unlikely partnership began when Steven Naifeh and Gregory White Smith, Harvard-trained lawyers and authors whose biography of Jackson Pollock won the Pulitzer Prize, decided to donate their home in Aiken to the Juilliard School. They wanted the historic 60-room mansion, Joye Cottage, to serve as a retreat for Juilliard students, faculty and alumni.

"They are passionate about the arts and felt that by giving to the world's premier conservatory, they were in fact supporting the arts and our community in a very significant way," Field says.

In a Juilliard news release, Naifeh and Smith said there "is nothing compared to Juilliard's gift to the world. And we are fortunate, indeed, to live in a community that shares our support for arts education and our belief, which is Juilliard's belief, that the pursuit of excellence — in the arts, as in everything — can truly improve lives."



That's the philosophy Field wanted to build on when she proposed the festival idea to Naifeh and Smith. The goal was to strengthen the community's relationship with Juilliard and to boost arts education and quality of life for area residents. Last year, more than 2,500 children participated in Juilliard in Aiken outreach programs.

This year's festival will feature 39 artists — 21 musicians, eight actors and 10 dancers. "It's the first year we'll have artists from all divisions of the school," Field says. Performers will include faculty chair and organist Paul Jacobs, plus a jazz quintet, vocal quartet, string quintet and two pre-college artists, among others.

Field, who grew up in Hickory, N.C., began as a music education major at Furman. She planned to become a choral conductor and educator, but during her senior year music professor Bruce Schoonmaker directed her in the opera *The Old Man and The Thief* and encouraged her to pursue performance. She went on to Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill., where she earned a master's degree in voice performance, began working as a soloist for opera companies and choral organizations, and spent a year teaching in a high school.

She also became Miss Illinois 1981, and her performance of an aria from *Carmen* propelled her to the high finish in that year's Miss America pageant. After spending a year doing appearances, she moved to New York and worked as a singer and actress. She eventually returned to teaching and earned her doctorate in music education at Columbia University Teachers College.

In 1999 Field was hired to develop a music education degree at the University of South Carolina-Aiken. She taught and directed three choral ensembles before retiring from her tenured position in 2007.

At the time she anticipated living a more leisurely life, but soon her friendship with Naifeh and Smith, and her idea for Juilliard in Aiken, had her working harder than ever. "I never realized the extent of the responsibilities," she says of her

new role. "But I knew it would be a wonderful opportunity for the community, and it would also be personally fulfilling."

The inaugural festival was held in 2009, and despite the struggling economy, the community embraced the program and helped ensure its success. Now, Field's dream is to build Juilliard in Aiken into a regional event that brings visitors from surrounding areas to see the high-caliber artists — and to enjoy Aiken's picturesque scenery and historic, small-town charm.

Most importantly, she hopes the festival will inspire people of all ages and encourage more support for the arts. "School budgets are being cut every year, and the arts often get cut the most," she says. "If we can help our schools by enriching the arts curriculum, then we've improved education. And we know the arts have a positive effect on quality of life, so our goal is to provide cultural offerings that are enriching to all."

— LEIGH GAUTHIER SAVAGE

Visit <http://juilliardinaiken.com> to learn more.

Photo by Phil Jones.