



Greg Lilly

JEANETTE WEAVER

WORLD-CLASS ENTERTAINMENT

at the Ferguson Center
for the Arts

by Greg Lilly, Lifestyle Editor

Williamsburg resident Jeanette Weaver loves her position with the Ferguson Center for the Arts at Christopher Newport University. She's the Director of Development and helps make arts performances accessible to everyone. "Our audience comes from all over the region," she says. "From Richmond to Virginia Beach and Northern Neck to North Carolina, audiences flock to the Ferguson Center to see artists from around the country," Jeanette says. "Really, from all over the world."

The appeal of the venue for Jeanette as well as the audience is the variety of entertainment the Ferguson Center for the Arts provides. "I have seen things here that I might not have purchased a ticket to see," she admits. "But I've been surprised by how much I loved the performances. Working here has most definitely widened my experiences and appreciation."

Her favorites range from BB King ("A very generous artist") to Jeff Fox-

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worthy ("A funny show and a great guy"). Jeff Foxworthy wasn't someone she thought she would enjoy, but she found his show hilarious. Her list of favorites span from the performances she really wanted to see to the ones that surprised her.

"The London Philharmonic was a sight to behold," she says. "They are one of the top orchestras in the world. Over a hundred musicians on the stage, playing Shostakovich. I was like 'Could we do this all over again, please?' because I couldn't get enough."

Tony Bennett, Bruce Hornsby, Dave Brubeck, Andrea Bocelli also top her list. "Natalie Cole," Jeanette says with a smile. "I rarely stay in the theater during a whole performance because I have so many things to do during the show, but with her, I was there the entire time."

Jeanette began her journey in the field of arts while in college. "I have a degree in piano performance," she says. "It was every New Jersey girl's dream to come south for college. I went to Longwood College in Farmville, VA and graduated with a music degree."

Her father, a career IBM employee, moved the family to Northern Virginia while Jeanette was still in college, so she never went back to New Jersey. During college and after graduation, Jeanette also worked for IBM.

"I worked for them for over a dozen years up in [Washington] D.C.," she adds. "When they were downsizing in the early 1990s, my job wasn't up for elimination, but my location would change. My commute would have gone from 15 minutes into DC to an hour to Gaithersburg, MD. I decided it was probably a good time to leave."

She chose to start over again. "The pianist thing hadn't gone anywhere," she says. "I had fallen into the IBM job. So, I thought now is my time to go back in the arts, not as a performer, but use my business skills in administration. I took a leap of faith."

The Washington Men's Camerata hired Jeanette as their executive director. "Then I worked with the Washington Bach Consort where I met some amazing conductors and musicians, and especially my husband. I like to say I hired him. He's a singer. First and foremost, he's a singer. And he also conducts. Jim has been at Williamsburg Presbyterian Church as music director for more than twenty years now."

She moved here in 2002 when she and Jim married. "I found a job in Richmond at Union-PSCE (Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education)." There, she added fund-raising to her organizational skills. "The Ferguson Center opportunity opened and it was a great fit for me," she explains her last move. "I'm amazed at how much I learned coming here. It's a great experience."

Her work with donors helps bring in world class performers and assists in keeping the ticket prices at reasonable rates. "We bring the best the performing arts have to offer to our community," she says. The backstage halls of the Ferguson Center, where Jeanette points out signed posters from past performances, illustrate the huge span of artists and genres offered to the community. "We have classical music," she describes, "jazz, oldies, country, and then there are acrobats, magicians, comedians - a little bit of this and a little bit of that. It all makes for this great big whole."

Big Broadway shows are not booked at Ferguson Center because the Concert Hall has 1,700 seats. The hall is too intimate for the number of

seats needed to support the bigger shows.

"When you hear a symphony in here," Jeanette says, "you will say this place was built for sound. We have all kinds of Broadway, but not the large shows."

Even more of an intimate space is the Music

guson Center for the Arts Foundation finances the performances with ticket sales and fund-raising. This segment of arts administration is the component that Jeanette finds so exciting.

"Our donors share the vision of attracting the best in the world to our area, for all the com-

We want the artists to enjoy their stay here, and the audience to have a wonderful experience.

- Jeanette Weaver

and Theater Hall, then the "black box" theater allows for innovative productions that require non-traditional staging.

"I love that we have so many options for performances here," she adds.

The back halls of the center buzz with activity from students in music, acting, set-building, fine art painting, and sculpture classes. Although the Ferguson Center for the Arts shares physical space with the school, Christopher Newport University does not fund it. The Fer-

munity to enjoy," she says.

She's proud to say that Williamsburg has a noteworthy presence at performances and at donor events.

One past performance popular with her Williamsburg neighbors and people from all over the region was Bill Cosby. "He was so much fun to meet," Jeanette says. "He's such a presence and so sharp. When he talked about his relationship with his wife, Camille, it was like listening to a conversation about Jim and me.

It was so hilarious."

Along with the performers she works with, the behind-the-scenes staff makes her job enjoyable. "I cannot imagine working in any other environment," Jeanette explains. "We are passionate about what we do here. Otherwise, we wouldn't do it because of all the hours required. We are passionate about wanting this center to be a success."

Success comes from that passion and hard work. She says that the people are the focus. "We want the artists to enjoy their stay here, and the audience to have a wonderful experience."

Her career in the arts pays a reward that can't be quantified. "I've enjoyed the variety," Jeanette says. "Who would have thought I would meet all the people I've met? It's been a who's who of artists, and a rich experience of working side-by-side with really marvelous, dedicated people to bring the performances to the area." **[NDN]**

To find out more about Ferguson Center for the Arts visit www.fergusoncenter.org.

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