

# THE EVENING SUN

CHENANGO COUNTY'S HOMETOWN DAILY NEWSPAPER

P.O. Box 151, Norwich, NY 13815 • news@evesun.com

## Calling All Creative Teens: There's Still Time to Register for The CAC Student Theater and Arts Program

Published: July 15th, 2022



**By:** Sarah Genter

Barbara Gregson: The Chenango Arts Council's Summer Cool: Student Theater and Art instructor Barbara Gregson. Gregson will be teaching students registered in the program the art of Renaissance mask making, as well as acting techniques such as improv and mime. Artist Branden Law will be co-instructing the program and teaching students how to draw and paint portraits. (Submitted photo)

NORWICH — The Chenango Arts Council (CAC) is providing their annual Kids Summer Art Camp program once again this year, but it has expanded to include both visual arts and theater. This expanded program is known as Summer Cool: Student Theater and Arts.

Students registered for the program will learn a litany of creative and artistic skills, including improv, mime, mask making, storytelling, drawing, and painting.

"This is the first program with the theater component. We've done Kids Summer Art for many years, ongoing, and it was more visual arts: painting, drawing, papier-mache, which is still part of it. But now it's in conjunction with the theater program," said CAC Administrative Assistant Mary Beth Miller.

"Last year in particular, all the kids who were here for the Kids Summer Art, we had our theater company putting on a play at the same time, so they could see our theater and they were really excited about it," she continued. "So we thought that might be a good thing to bring into our Kids Summer Art Camp and to let that be a regular part of the program."

The workshop sessions are open to middle and high school students, and will be held from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., Monday through Friday, at the Chenango Arts Council. Sessions include August 1 to 5, August 8 to 12, and August 15 to 19.

Participating students are encouraged to wear clothes that can get paint on them, and are welcome to bring lunch. Chobani yogurt will be provided each day as a snack. COVID vaccination for students is recommended, but not required.

Registration is ongoing at [ChenangoArts.org](http://ChenangoArts.org), or by calling 607-336-2787. Miller recommends interested students register as soon as possible. Each five-day session is \$150 per student, and includes all supplies. Scholarships provided by the RC Smith Foundation are also available to those who need them.

"If a student is interested in taking the course but didn't have the ability to pay, they would just call this office and we would be able to come up with some scholarship funds to be able to take the class. And there are scholarship funds still available," said Miller.

The program is following a theme titled "Me, Myself, and I," and is being taught by two instructors. The visual arts component will be taught by Branden Law, a Norwich native who studied at the Savannah College of Art and Design and SUNY Oneonta, and is currently earning his MA in Art Education at Adelphi University.

Theater and Renaissance mask making will be taught by local artist, actress, and author Barbara Gregson of the Gregson Theater. A world traveler, Gregson has studied mime in Paris, Renaissance mask making in Italy, and drama in London, and she has an extensive background in teaching theater and mask making to students of all ages.

For the Summer Cool program, Gregson will be teaching the students how to make their own papier-mache "neutral" masks. A plaster cast is created of the student's face, and then they use papier-mache to line the inside of the cast and create the mask.

"It'll be two people on either side of the person's face, so we're both putting the strips on them fast. It takes like 10 to 15 minutes for it to dry, so it's quick," she continued. "You do four or five layers of these plaster strips, and they can be sitting up, it's no big deal. It's not like the old fashioned way where you'd pour the plaster over their face, we're not doing that. This is a method I developed to work with students."

Gregson will also be teaching students various acting techniques such as improv and mime, which pairs with the use of the papier-mache masks as they do not allow the actors to speak during a show.

"With the theater mask, just by the way you turn your head and everything and there's the shadow and the lighting, and expression comes from your body," she explained. "That's why I love

it, because you don't have to worry about what you look like. And you don't have to worry about lines; If it's a full mask you don't talk," she explained.

Law will be teaching students how to paint and draw portraits in a 60s style reminiscent of Andy Warhol. Gregson said students will then use their portraits to create the set for a Friday afternoon performance for friends and family in the Arts Council theater.

"The idea is the show is about their lives. So the portraits are going to be hung on the set, and they'll wear their masks, and they'll be doing pieces of their lives, and it's all original," said Gregson. "It will be something from their lives but a variety of pieces. It might be five or six pieces for the whole show, and each week it will be different of course, because it's different kids. So it'll come uniquely out of the group. Maybe six or seven pieces, maybe five one time, it may be a little longer. The whole show will only be like 45 minutes."

The Summer Cool: Student Theater and Arts program is made possible by several sponsors, including BlueOx, Golden Artist Colors, Preferred Mutual Insurance, NBT Bank, Chobani, Walmart, Visions Federal Credit Union, and the RC Smith Foundation.

"When they leave all the kids will be taking home with them the cast, the plaster cast of their face, and a mask, a papier-mache mask, as well as some self-portraits. So, they'll be taking home a lot of cool stuff that they made," said Gregson.

"This is an incredibly creative opportunity for all the kids, for all the students," she added. "You're becoming a storyteller as well as a writer, as well as a choreographer, and director. It's all these things."

More information on the Summer Cool: Student Theater and Arts program can be found at [ChenangoArts.org](http://ChenangoArts.org), or on the Chenango Arts Council Facebook page. Questions about the program can be directed to [info@chenangoarts.org](mailto:info@chenangoarts.org) or 607-336-2787.

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