

## 'INNER ACTIVE ARTS'

# Musician/Artist stimulates seniors' creativity

By Psyche North Torok

Scott Steelman has a passion for all things creative and a keen desire to pass that on to others, especially senior citizens.

Steelman, a native of Columbus' East Side, has spent decades exploring the creative process through composing and playing music, writing, and creating visual art. His family history is rich with writers, actors, and musicians. This fruitful environment nurtured his own artistic talents.

Steelman single-handedly founded InnerActive Arts, which offers programs designed specifically for senior citizens. The program's mission is to enhance their quality of life through the use of poetry, music, humor, story-making, rhythm and other art-based activities. It can be tailored to seniors in nearly any living situation, from independent and assisted living to nursing care facilities. The activities are always geared toward the needs of the individuals. Some of the facilities in which Steelman has worked extensively include Wesley Glen and Wesley Ridge, Whetstone Garden and Care Center, and Creekside at the Village.

From its inception, InnerActive Arts has grown and expanded organically. Originally, Steelman was teaching music part time at a couple of local elementary schools. He began composing music for children and writing books for elementary school

music teachers. He then started presenting recitals at senior care facilities to demonstrate his students' accomplishments. One of the facility administrators asked him if he'd ever thought of doing solo performances for seniors. "It's funny that the springboard for engaging with seniors would be working with children," Steelman said.

After playing music in senior centers for many years, Steelman used the input from activity directors to launch InnerActive Arts. "They gave me some good dos and don'ts and when I was ready, all I had to do was say 'I'm ready.' The staff knew and trusted me. They like the programs; the families like them, and I love them. So it just

**Create:** Steelman asserts that anyone can be an artist. The arts are a concrete way to keep one's creative juices flowing. He says that cognition and awareness may actually improve when a person is actively doing and creating.

**Connect:** One of the most challenging issues to face many elders is retaining a sense of belonging, a sense of community. The Inner-

many programs conceived by Steelman. He uses music and rhythm to provide a sense of connection and well-being among participants. He gathers participants in a "rhythm circle" using instruments and voice to foster movement, dexterity, skill development and community building. "I like to engage them creatively - so I'll sing the first line of a song and they'll sing the next one. All this is on

the fly if I sense that they know the rest," he said. He makes a point of using the songs they most identify with, which he then incorporates into programming.

InnerActive Poetry is another sequence he created at InnerActive Arts. He employs a variety of approaches to encourage seniors to begin writing poetry.

One way he gets folks writing is by having them make lists. "We do a lot of list maker poems," he said. "We make lists of things, and the making of the list generates a lot of discussion. I have my own lists that are entertaining and interactive. I use famous people whose names rhyme, like Clark Gable and Betty Grable, Vincent Van Gogh and Marilyn Monroe. It's a call and response type activity and good for community building."

Steelman has strategies to help the residents get more comfortable with the idea of working in the arts. "The important thing is the rapport and trust that they have with me," he said. "I have to explain that modern poetry doesn't have to rhyme. Don't think of it as poetry; we're just talking. The word

Active Arts program teaches that art expression has helped enhance human connection for millennia. The program helps to deepen one's sense of community by bringing groups together for artistic play and by encouraging students to support one another. Working together in this way helps them get a sense that they are still a vital part of the community. Art expression also helps them to connect internally to family histories and nostalgia.

**Collaborate:** Encouraging students to work together on group art projects further instills that essential sense of belonging, he said. Collaborative efforts help build self-esteem and reduce fear amongst inhibited students.

MusicMakers is one of

keeps growing and expanding," he said.

InnerActive Arts uses three key concepts to carry out its mission: **Create, Connect, Collaborate.**

your memory has faded the imagination and creativity are still intact," he said. "It's really about nurturing and encouraging the participants. They don't hesitate because they don't have to be 'right.' It's a lot more fun for them to be creative and use their imagination."

Steelman uses a technique known as "life review."

"It helps them examine their life, mostly the positive benefits of it, why they're here, the things they've done, and the wisdom they have to share with future generations," he said.

Steelman often has to wear a number of hats within one InnerActive Arts session. "It's common to have a mixture of levels of demen-

tia," he said "I'm always walking a tightrope to make the program enjoyable for everybody and beneficial to everybody in that mixed population group. But I've been able to do it."

Through it all, Steelman seems to have thrived on the challenges presented by InnerActive Arts. "I'm a big fan of lifelong learning, and that's a concept that some of the elders don't even know about," he said. "We do word play, word games. There's an educational aspect of it too. I'll make a whole presentation on the history of modern art, for example. I'm a jazz musician so I know how to improvise and I'm comfortable with people so I can kind of

read them. It's much easier if you know what they want; yet I still keep it fresh."

It isn't possible for Steelman to facilitate workshops everywhere, but he did have a couple of suggestions for any senior interested in trying some artistic expression. "Making a journal is a nice thing if you have a way to do that," he said. "Just start reading some poetry and go with what you like. And make a journal of what you do."

What might the future hold for InnerActive Arts? One possible endeavor Steelman is considering is authoring a book for facilitators. "Some of the best advice I've gotten is to write a step-by-step book on how to reproduce these

programs," he said. "I'd like to make some structure that is replicable. But I'm still at the development stage."

Steelman acknowledges the vital element he brings to the lives of so many senior citizens: "I try to show them the beauty of their own language," he explained. "When you take ideas, thoughts and memories and give them to the world, you're an artist."

For more information about Scott Steelman's work, see the website at [inneractivearts.com](http://inneractivearts.com).

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