

COVID-19 Oral History Project

Transcript of Interview with Judy Byron, Executive Director of Arts for Lawrence, Indianapolis, Indiana

Recorded Friday, April 17, 2020

Interviewer: Emily Leiserson

Topics: COVID-19 impact on arts organizations, virtual arts programming, Arts for Lawrence, COVID and nonprofit organizations, COVID and small businesses, COVID in Fort Benjamin Harrison, Fort Ben Cultural Campus, COVID funding for arts, COVID in Indiana

Emily Leiserson 0:02

Alright, we're recording. I'm Emily Leiserson. I'm doing an oral history with Judy Byron; this is for the IUPUI Arts and Humanities Institute's COVID Oral History project, so it'll be in an online database. It is Friday, April 17, around 2:35pm, 2020. And, yeah, Judy, would you be willing to introduce yourself really quickly - just any information you want to share.

Judy Byron 0:36

Sure. So my name is Judy Byron and I'm the Executive Director for Arts for Lawrence. We're a nonprofit arts organization on the northeast side of Indianapolis, and we are the stewards of the historic Theatre at the Fort. And we have a mission to inspire everyone every day by connecting the community to the arts. And we do that through programming of visual, performing, and literary arts.

Emily Leiserson 1:06

Okay. And I just did another interview with Victoria Musser, your fundraising officer, so Arts for Lawrence should be well represented in our database.

Judy Byron 1:17

Great.

Emily Leiserson 1:18

And then also just to disclose for the record, I'm on the board of Arts for Lawrence, so we know each other prior to the recording as well. So, you've returned our informed consent form, but just for our recording, would you be willing to state that you received that and that you are fine being recorded.

Judy Byron 1:38

I did, and I am.

Emily Leiserson 1:40

Fantastic. Thank you so much. All right, we'll start with just general background. Can you tell me a little bit about your day to day life and schedule: how it is now and also how it was before. COVID-19 came?

Byron 2:03

Sure. So, my schedule and my staff's schedule had already been disrupted because we were under renovation at the theater. Our offices had moved from the theater to the parks department next door. We were all sort of in one office on top of each other. And we'd had practice in not only postponing our programming, but in working remotely because often our internet wouldn't work, or that sort of thing. So, the- once the pandemic hit and we were all sheltered in place we were already doing a little bit of remote working and this just made it a full time situation. And also, day to day before the pandemic was similar in that we were very, we were going day by day because of construction delays, and we were very excited about that. Construction was behind us and we were going to be able to open the theater and then it was a double whammy and the pandemic hit, and then we were again stressfully day by day trying to figure out when we could open programming. So now my days are spent at my dining room table with my laptop. My staff and I all use Google Chat, so we are all still chatting with one another during the day. We also use Google Hangouts for our staff meeting and any other meetings when we need to meet face to face. So, we're still in contact with each other. It's a little tougher at home. And again, it's sort of an extension of that construction issue, where my files aren't here and there's piles everywhere and things aren't quite as organized as I wish they were. And that coming on top of being really tired of having that kind of mess due to construction. So I can tell, kind of predict, for some of the other folks that didn't have this on top of

construction that that unorganized feeling gets compounded.

Leiserson 4:42

Mm hmm. Sure. Yeah, so your construction schedule, you were just about to reopen, right? When what was the reopening date going to be?

Byron 4:55

So, originally the reopening date was going to be February, and construction was delayed. So we postponed our February show for May, and were going to open in March instead. And then, of course, we didn't open in March, and we didn't have our ribbon cutting. And so, the programming that we have scheduled between February and December, right now is scheduled between August and December in a very tight fast fashion. But as you know, things change daily and it looks like that will probably change again.

Leiserson 5:42

Yeah. Not to mention, it seems to me at least, like so many people now are trying to schedule things between June, July, August, and before, you know, before it gets too cold November, December So, are you seeing that there's this pileup of programming from others?

Byron 6:05

Yes, and you know it's already hard in the Indianapolis arts industry. We were really fortunate in Indianapolis to have such a wealth of theaters and gallery openings and you know First Fridays has all kinds of things going on in town, so we're already on top of each other a little bit. And this just compounds that because there just isn't as much time between shows. So, yeah, that's a concern. And it's something that, you know, hopefully we can partner with one another. I know the Indianapolis Chamber is going to help with an events calendar once programming does start opening up, so we can see what each other is doing and maybe cross promote.

Leiserson 6:55

Yeah. So you mentioned right before we were recording, you're doing weekly meetings, virtually with the ICAA the Indianapolis Consortium of Arts Administrators.

Byron 7:04

Yes.

Leiserson 7:06

How are those going?

Byron 7:07

They've been really, really helpful. I've got to say the arts leadership in Indianapolis and the state of Indiana has been really super. They're very informative, we hear from a lot of different folks; sometimes what we hear is not great news. But there's a lot of support there, and there's a lot of ideas sharing of how to be nimble and try to keep our arts industry going. You know virtual programming seems to be not only working, but something that the community wants. I mean I think people are really going stir crazy being stuck in their house with Netflix and nothing else. And so I think we're looking at six months to a year of arts programming in Indianapolis being virtual.

Leiserson 8:17

Mm hmm. Yeah, so I think what I'm hearing is, you know, at the same time there's this great need for the arts from people who are at home, but also there's a real struggle for arts organizations, you know, to function, since they depend on traditionally having infrastructure, having a place, having people gathered together.

Byron 8:45

Right. Ticket sales, right? I mean our program revenue is a third of our income, if not more. And it's really, really important to us that we have that. And then our income from businesses, which is primarily sponsorships, when you don't have the festivals and the big programs that have their names on it those sponsorships we anticipate will be less this year. So that's hard too. Plus our local businesses. A lot of them are feeling this. You know, they're, it's hurting them too. So, you know, will they have discretionary funds to sponsor a concert series or a Children's Theatre Festival? We don't know.

Leiserson 9:44

Right. Are there ways that you guys are making up that income?

Byron 9:50

So one of the things and, you know, kudos to you too Emily, you know our board of directors has raised above and beyond their annual pledge to start a relief fund, an online campaign for a relief fund. Obviously we've gone after all of the relief help that's out there. We've applied for the Small Business Administration loans. We're looking at relief grants. Arts for Lawrence itself, although this is hitting us hard in the pocketbook, we are in a better position than a lot of arts organizations our size because the city of Lawrence, who is the owner of the theater, has a lease with us that's \$1 a year and includes our utilities. So we're not having to pay that rent and keeping the lights on, kind of thing that a lot of small organizations are having to do, so we're lucky in that regard. And we're really thankful that the arts funders in Indianapolis and Indiana are going to bat and providing more funds for arts organizations. So.

Leiserson 11:19

Do you, um, so you mentioned Arts for Lawrence is more fortunate than many organizations. Do you have a sense of the state of arts organizations and artists? Kind of whether or not arts organizations' economic future sustainability varies by size or type of organization?

Byron 11:47

I've been thinking about that a lot actually especially after these Friday meetings. It makes me recognize the benefits that Arts for Lawrence has. You know when I look at these other organizations that are just about our size that have to pay rent and utilities and think wow, you know, that's another hardship. And then I'm also seeing that you know some bigger organizations, although their program income is so much bigger, they're also, I think, able to sustain themselves because they've limited themselves to a skeleton crew, but at the same time that means that there are people in the arts industry that no longer have jobs. So I think the entities will survive this, even though there are layoffs and or furloughs. And that's really sad for fellow workers in that industry. And then, you know, we've, we've heard of a couple of small organizations that are threatened with shutting their doors forever. And, you know, nobody wants to see that happen either.

Leiserson 13:02

Right. Yeah. Do you, um, you partner with a lot of individual artists as well. Do you have a sense of how they are doing?

Byron 13:15

They're the ones I worry about the most, especially the performing artists out there who, you know, if they don't have their gig with an audience, they're not working. There are relief funds out there, and I'm trying to help as many individual artists know that. I know that they gave the numbers at this morning's meeting, and I can't remember off the top of my head, but I want to say less than half of the grants that they have money for have been applied for. So there are relief funds out there for individual artists, it's just connecting them to them and making sure they know you know that they're there and how to receive them, performing artists and, and then teaching artists. And it's also one of these, how long will it be? Right? So we thought oh well it'll be till the end of April or maybe the end of May and now we're hearing things that, you know, large gatherings may not happen until there's actually a vaccine, which could take up to 18 months. And then the time that it takes to get everyone's vaccine could be multiple years. So that's pretty scary for someone whose income is generated from gigs with audiences of 50, 100, 500 people.

Leiserson 14:42

Right, right. And, you know, music online, for that sort of artist, it may be a lot harder to do, you know.

Byron 14:52

Yeah. One of the things we're trying to, to examine, you know, I think we can put programming out there virtually, but how do you bring in the revenue for those artists when it's online, and people can turn on the radio and listen to music anytime they want to and not spend a dime? I also think though that this pandemic globally is causing you know big studios that are creating movies to stop production. And I heard that AMC movies may be on the verge of bankruptcy. So they're there, and, and, you know, the sports industry to be playing to no audiences. And of course there aren't any traveling concert series or Broadway series

happening. So I think people are going to start to really miss that and want that and perhaps something that's more connected to the community with local artists will fill that void that the general population looks at from, you know, Hollywood and Netflix. So, how will we make that into a revenue stream I'm not really sure yet, but I do believe that the local artists can connect to the community in a stronger way now, on a virtual platform than ever before.

Leiserson 16:38

Yeah, that makes sense. Yeah, what, what sorts of values are people receiving from the arts engagement that you all and others are doing online?

Byron 16:57

So, the wine and paint virtual class that we had on Wednesday for World Art Day was really surprising to us. We had planned to have this at a local restaurant to, you know, raise funds and celebrate World Art Day. And you know who doesn't like to sip on a glass of wine and learn how to paint a picture? We were going off of a Georgia O'Keeffe large flower composition that we're sort of emulating. And we've done this kind of thing before, and they've been popular but not as popular as the virtual class. When we moved it to a virtual class where people could drive by, honk their horn, we'd run out with a little bag full of supplies for them. And they took them home and then they joined a Facebook private group. And you know the video was a little splotchy in places. And Cheryl is a wonderful teacher and in person, you know, you could see so much more, but it was amazing how appreciative everyone was for that class. I think people really miss being able to do this, and the fact that it wasn't quite as polished as we like our classes to be, I think it was even better received because they don't have the opportunity.

Leiserson 18:32

Interesting. Yeah, that's really interesting. I think, you know, we see arguments for the arts that get to quality of life, entertainment. What do you think people will need or do already need even more than they needed before, that they can receive through arts engagement.

Byron 19:07

You know, I have always been an advocate for the arts and what it can do for someone's quality of life and their sense, their sense of who they are, their relaxation; for me, it's kind of a meditation. I think what might happen is a better awareness for the general public that that's really true. That when before COVID-19, people have busy lives and, you know, they might go to the movies or they might go to a ball game or they might, you know, or they might say, you know, I would never take an art class, I can't draw a stick figure. But when they don't have the engagement with people, which I've always said this too, you know, food and the arts, those are two things that just cross all barriers, all boundaries. You know it's just a way that people can relate to one another, regardless of their background, their religion, their race. And so I think people are really going to see that. I think they're going to see that. Hopefully if we can do this in a virtual platform that it's, it's really important to connect to one another and arts is a great way to do that.

Leiserson 20:32

Yeah, that's great, that's very well said. So tell me a little bit. This is backing up a little. Tell me a little bit about where you live, even your zip code if you're comfortable sharing that, and what you've seen in the community, before and after COVID-19?

Byron 20:57

Sure, so I live at Fort Ben [Fort Benjamin Harrison], it's the northeast part of Indianapolis, in Lawrence. One of the excluded cities. My zip code is 46216. My house is actually one of the old officers' quarters from when Fort Ben was an active military base. And I love my neighborhood. It is historic, it is walkable, and it's just beginning to be kind of a cool destination in Indianapolis. We have a state park within our little city, which is in my backyard, which is great. And of course in the wintertime people aren't out and about as much as they are in the spring. We've had a few times where the weather was nice enough for us to get out and walk, and, you know, early in February we had a really beautiful warm day, and my husband and I took the dogs into the park and the cars were just backed up out of the State Park. We were so glad that we could walk in, because it was just so crowded and there were so many people and people were smiling and waving at each other. And since COVID, we still like to get out and walk the dogs. But people are crossing the street, when they pass each other, giving each other plenty of room. And although people are polite and saying hello, the engagement is very different, you know, people see another person and instead of smiling and

saying hello coming to the first- coming to your brain first, their first thought is, I got to get away from that person, I, you know, I can't be within six feet of their air. It's scary. It's scary to see that, and especially when I moved here because, partly because of the walkability, and I know so many people here at the Fort love that about this community. And yet it's those kinds of communities - which are much denser than ours - but, you know, New York City and big cities where people have to pass each other on the street, that's where the virus is spreading. And so it's different, definitely different. People are scared.

Leiserson 23:46

Yeah. Do you see people wearing masks or face coverings?

Byron 23:55

Sometimes. I have seen, not necessarily masks but scarves. And, you know, homemade face coverings as opposed to what you might picture as a mask. And yet, I've seen police officers wearing masks, store clerks wearing gloves and masks. So, yeah, and I don't go shopping. I just don't. I've been to CVS, I've been to the grocery store, in the last four weeks once. So I've been into two stores in the last four weeks. I just, yeah. Kroger delivers.

Leiserson 24:38

Yeah, so you're ordering online and getting delivery.

Byron 24:41

Yeah.

Leiserson 24:42

Yeah. Um, when you first learned about COVID-19, what were your thoughts and how have those changed over time?

Byron 25:00

So in February I went on a vacation; my husband and I went on a vacation to Mexico. It was very warm and beautiful there. And I knew about COVID-19 at the time; it was primarily in China, and spreading, but I had not heard of any incidents in the US. And we were in Cancun from February 14 through February 23, and on February 23 on our flight home, we sat next to a nurse. And she apologized to us about seeming odd, but she took out a Clorox wipe and started wiping down her seat and her tray and everything. And my husband and I were just kind of looking at her, and she said would you like one, and we both said yes please. And we wiped down our seat and our tray, and it was about that time that I thought, wow, yeah, airplanes are germ, and who knows who was on this airplane before me. I also picked up a bug, while I was in Mexico. I had a headful, very sneezy, and a cough. It was a cold or a very minor flu bug. But I was afraid that people would think that I had COVID-19, because people didn't really know what the symptoms were at the time. And then as things got it got even worse I started worrying myself. Could this be COVID-19 could I be carrying this virus, so....

Leiserson 26:57

And there wasn't any testing

Byron 27:00

No. No testing, right, so you just didn't know. And then, as I started to learn of people I know who were sick and stories from people, I know just how devastating this is. My sister is a retired nurse and her husband is a physician and his college colleague is an infectious disease doctor. He is 70 and had recovered from cancer, and got the coronavirus, and my sister said he never had a chance. And he just didn't. And he knew it, and sometimes you know, when you're in that field, you know more than you should. But he was in that high risk category and he succumbed to COVID-19. It's stories like that.

Leiserson 28:08

Yeah. Do you know other people who have contracted it?

Byron 28:14

One of our fellow board members has been sick. She was never tested, because when she came down with it the tests were unavailable. But I actually spoke to her last night in an executive committee meeting, and it

was the first day she had felt good, better. It was the first day she was fever-free. It was the first day that she didn't spend many hours in her bed. She had taken a 20 hour nap and that's all. And so yesterday was April 16, and she fell ill on March 24. So that's a long time to be sick in your bed with a fever. And, yeah, she seems to be coming out the other end okay, but not a fun experience.

Leiserson 29:09

Yeah. Yeah. What issues have concerned you the most about this pandemic?

Byron 29:25

I think that- I'm not sure. I think that I spend most of my time worrying about making sure that my staff continue to have jobs. That's a huge concern of mine. I have always been a sole proprietor kind of business owner; this is the first time I've had people that depended on me for their livelihood, and I don't want them to lose their jobs. And so that keeps me up at night. But more so I worry about my friends and my family's health. I worry about the people that aren't taking this seriously, that think that they're invincible, that, you know, cheat on the shelter in place rules. I think that's what I worry about the most is how long will this last, if people for whatever reason, whether it be necessity, whether it be ignorance, or just not believing that it's as dangerous as it is, I worry about how many people will get sick and die.

Leiserson 30:55

Mm hmm. Yeah, I think I was just seeing that in Indiana, there were 1000 new reported cases in the last 24 hours. And so it's still, you know, our curve here is not flattened yet.

Byron 31:14

No. No, and I saw, the first prediction I saw was that the curve should flatten Easter weekend. But yeah, I heard the same thing. I can't remember if it was this morning or yesterday morning that I saw the highest number of new cases of Coronavirus in the state of Indiana. And so yeah, it looks like we haven't hit our plateau yet.

Leiserson 31:46

Yeah. Do you have any idea or guess or sense of why that is? We hear about the curve flattening in other parts of the country. But it seems to vary a lot state by state or region by region.

Byron 32:05

Yeah, from for me, and of course I'm sheltered in place so my bubble is very small, right, all of us are sheltered in place and I know that Governor Holcomb was really pretty early for especially for the Midwest to have people, social distancing. And you've seen the videos of Indianapolis; they're surreal right, with no people and no cars. And so it's surprising to me that it's still moving on the upward tick. That being said, I'm in an industry that is pretty much shut down, and I know there are a lot of industries that aren't. So I suppose they're interacting, and even if their families are sheltered in place, if there's still people out there in essential jobs they're spreading the disease.

Leiserson 33:15

Yeah. Well, so I have a couple of other questions about Arts for Lawrence. So you mentioned one of your concerns is for your staff. You have five staff, is that right?

Byron 33:28

Well there's four full time staff members, and then we have an intern, and, you know, interns come and go. But we also have a part time social media specialist, I guess you could call her, who relies on us as well, so four and a half.

Leiserson 33:51

Yeah, yeah. And how, how have all of your situations changed? How have your programs changed, and, you know, you mentioned the example of World Art Day but you know what's going on with all of your day to day?

Byron 34:10

So programming is the biggest change. What's staying the same is the big project for the Fort Ben Cultural campus. Construction is an essential business. And so that is still moving along; that's still keeping me busy,

and that's still keeping Leng busy, but programming, of course, has been this moving target. And, you know, every time we, you know, aim the arrow at the target it moves, which has been frustrating and time consuming and stressful. So, right now we've, sort of- the programs that we keep pushing farther and farther out, postponing, we're just not even thinking about them anymore. Now we're just looking at them as, "Hey, we'll jump back to them when we get the word that we can. But how do we create new virtual programming?" We've started a podcast. It's in its second week now, maybe it's third. No I guess it's the end of the second week. And Toni is interviewing people in the arts industry. It's a cute little morning podcast; it's about 10 minutes. [Neat.] Yeah, it's neat. We're, we're vamping up our YouTube channel so that we can put any kind of video that we do on YouTube. We're talking to some of our performers about coming in and, you know, doing a performance on the stage without an audience, but letting us videotape it and getting it on the YouTube channel. So the programming, even though we're not bringing in any revenue, it's a lot of work, and a lot of stressful, moving targets. Researching, you know, there are, once you go virtual, there are laws about musical copyrights and all kinds of things that we don't quite understand yet, so it's a lot of work.

Leiserson 36:33

Yeah, yeah. So, yeah, is there anything else you'd like to share about what you see at Arts for Lawrence before we move on to other topics?

Byron 36:46

I just want to share that our big project for the Fort Ben cultural campus, the theater renovation, which is finished, and the things that are moving forward almost on schedule. Because it's essential it's moving along, but there are still a few delays from subcontractors that have closed their doors, but it looks great. We are so excited to share it, and we're so sad that we can't. And that it's going to get dusty before anybody can come in and see our brand new venue. But again, we're going to try to do some virtual tours, so that people can see the fun stuff that's happened and hopefully we'll be able to program it.

Leiserson 37:47

Yeah. Virtual tours sound great.

Byron 37:50

Yeah, we thought so. We thought we'd, you know, share it, if nothing else by a video and people can touch it and smell it at a later date.

Leiserson 38:06

Yeah, yeah. Oh, that's great. I'm glad that there are some exciting things in store. You're going to whet everyone's appetite for them once, once we can all get back out.

Byron 38:18

Yeah.

Leiserson 38:23

How has this changed your family's day to day activities?

Byron 38:30

So my husband is retired. And one of my staff members, Leng, actually lives here with us, so she and I tend to work a lot, because we never go home from work. And my husband is a great cook. And a great baker. So right here in the dining room, I can hear him right now, he's in the kitchen doing something. So there's always some yummy, you know, loaf of bread or something going on while I'm working that's distracting me in a good way. So, you know, for the family, the dogs, they're gonna have separation anxiety when we finally do leave the house, because they're so accustomed now to just being at our feet while we're working. And you know I live in a really cool place. Our neighborhood is very close knit. We've checked in on each other, you know. We wave from six or 12 feet away from each other, but I feel fortunate to have the family that I do, I'm not lonely. And the neighborhood that I have. We had a fun Easter surprise. One of our neighbors, a family of three children ages 15 to 20, the 15 year old daughter challenged her two older brothers to a race around Lawton Loop, and Lawton Loop is a one mile circle so it's a great place to do a race. And they let all the neighbors know. And so we all came out on the porches and routed them on.

Leiserson 40:22

That's really fun.

Byron 40:23

Yeah, so you know, there's still a feeling of community here in my neighborhood and my family's hanging in there. We

Leiserson 40:38

Do you, um, what about your kids and your grandkids? How are they doing?

Byron 40:44

Yeah, so our family's spread all over. Carl and I have six sons combined, and they are all over the country. Everyone is healthy, so that's a good thing. We have grandkids in Virginia, in the DC area. We have- our two youngest grandchildren are just over a year old. Otto is in San Francisco, and Silas is in Seattle, and both of those cities have been hard hit with the coronavirus. Our family and our grandkids are all healthy. But of course we're not going to be going out there to visit them anytime soon. So that's really hard, to know that I can't go out there and hug those babies, who are growing up so fast. So, but there's, you know there's FaceTime and zoom and we get together remotely.

Leiserson 41:46

Are the older grandkids, doing school online now.

Byron 41:51

Yeah.

Leiserson 41:52

Do you know how that's going?

Byron 42:56

So originally, Carl, my husband, was going to go out and kind of babysit while they were e-learning and their parents were working from home too. And that was at the end of February, early March, he was thinking about thinking about it. And then of course, decided that was a bad idea. So, I think they're hanging in there as best as can be expected. You know, I feel for all the parents, working parents out there with their kids at home. I have been in zoom meetings where people aren't getting, they don't have enough bandwidth for them to actually be in a meeting and their children to be on school meetings at the same time. So, yeah, yeah. But interesting times that we can still do that, that we have the internet and we have zoom, and we can be in a virtual classroom and a virtual staff meeting.

Leiserson 43:12

Right, yeah, we are lucky to have all the technology that we have to connect us.

Byron 43:20

Yeah. Although maybe we should just sort of be kicking back and playing board games and connecting with our families. I think there's a lot of that going on. I think families are kind of connecting in a better way.

Leiserson 43:40

Yeah. Yeah. Do you see that with your family do you get more time to connect with them or.

Byron 43:47

I don't know. You know I think for the three of us that are in this house, Leng and I work together and we're still working together. And we sort of have our routine of dinner together and then dispersing to our different TV shows and things like that. [Yeah]. No, our situation hasn't changed too much.

Leiserson 44:21

Yeah, yeah, well that's interesting, in and of itself, you know. Definitely. So, yeah, what other, if any communities do you feel yourself a part of, other than you know work and your neighborhood that you've talked about? Are there other communities that you are part of that have been affected?

Byron 44:55

Let's see. Well we've talked about the general Indianapolis arts [Yeah.] group, and, really, I think that, you know, my work and my hobby are kind of the same. So you know, as much as I worry about my own programming and I worry about the other organizations that are suffering, I'm also missing those IRT shows and, you know, going out on first Friday and checking out, you know, the Arts Council's gallery and seeing people that I recognize and run into whenever I'm out and about in the arts world. So I miss seeing people. You know, there's so much zoom going on. And I'm really glad for the people that keep their video camera on, because I just like seeing their faces, even though they're just sort of, it's not usually very attractive, it's usually you know sort of off their nose and on their laptop. But I really miss seeing people. I enjoy seeing faces that I recognize.

Leiserson 46:13

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. You know, I think you mentioned this maybe before we were recording but you have been working a lot. You said you've been working even more than you want to.

Byron 46:29

Yeah, I'm tired too. I feel like, because the days are so full of zoom meetings, and because there's so many changes and so much planning that has to take place, and budgets that have to be changed. And yet, like I said, the big project that I'm working on is still moving ahead. I'm finding that there's a lot more work to do. And even though the programming seems almost stagnant, I feel like I'm doing two or three jobs. It's busy, it's very busy.

Leiserson 47:08

Yeah, that's really interesting. Yeah, well, it makes sense with what you're saying if you can't really plan for a program or an event, you end up doing the same things over and over.

Byron 47:22

Yes, and of course we're looking for, you know, relief funds and so you know, we applied for the PPP loan and were approved, but that was a process. You know, that was a lot of work, because it, you know, they had to come up with this so quickly that, again, the target kept moving. And the more we tried to shoot our arrow at the target it moved again and paperwork changed. And it's been a busy time.

Leiserson 47:55

Yeah, well and thank goodness you did that. You did that quickly, right, because I think they've run out of funds.

Byron 48:03

We did that as quickly as we could. Yeah.

Leiserson 48:07

But that's another thing is you know sometimes there are things coming up that we have to respond to immediately. Yeah.

Byron 48:12

Right so whatever else I was going to do that day, didn't get done. Which, you know, so there's been a lot of piling up, things falling off of our plates. And it's also you know the time that we scheduled our audit. This was the first year that we had to go through an audit, mainly because of the big Lilly grant that we received, and we wanted to make sure that we were documenting those financials properly. So it was a first experience with an audit, and that still took place. And it was a lot of work that we were anticipating, but it was in a time that is so crazy anyway, and working from home and our files are in the theater.

Leiserson 8:44

Right. Yeah, audits are stressful enough. Right. Yeah. Oh, and you're doing strategic planning.

Byron 49:02

And we're doing strategic planning, and now our strategic planning is changing because of course, a lot of what was in the strategic planning revolved around our programming of large gatherings of people. So, yeah, we seem to be doing a- revising a lot of things.

Leiserson 49:33

Yeah. Yeah, that makes sense. And I apologize if I'm asking you to repeat yourself, but I don't want to speak for you. Do you feel like with, for example, the strategic plan, you're able to do it now, or do you have to wait a little longer, and then see what happens?

Byron 49:56

You know, amazingly enough, we've been looking at it because it's not quite board approved yet. And, you know, we thought we had our final draft, and now we're going to tweak it a little bit. We are still able to do it, I believe. I think that we're going to tweak it a little bit, so that the part in it that we were going to focus on outreach includes virtual programming. And what that might look like, and developing that further, you know, even on the other end of this pandemic, there's going to be a new normal. And we don't know what that's really going to look like. It's not going to go back to the way we thought it was. So, I think our strategic plan, luckily, is still very valid, with a few tweaks.

Leiserson 50:58

That's really interesting and positive.

Byron 51:01

Yeah, I really think so I think that, and hopefully I'm not being Pollyanna here, but I think that the fact that we have those funds for the Fort Ben Cultural Campus, and that is so much of what we're doing right now. And that's not jeopardized. That and the fact that we do want to explore outreach opportunities, and now we're just doing that on a virtual basis. I feel good about achieving our strategic plan. I worry about our program revenue; I worry about that a lot. I worry about our community's ability to donate, because I know that this is going to hit our businesses and our community members in the pocketbook as much as it's hitting us. So I worry about finances some, but I don't worry about fulfilling our mission. And I do believe that we're in a better place than a lot of small arts organizations our size. Thanks to, you know, making sure that we do have reserves in the bank. Thanks to the cultural campus project, which will continue to move along and thanks to the resources that have been put out there for arts organizations through the Arts Council, the Arts Commission, the state of Indiana, the Small Business Administration. There's a lot of relief out there. So I tend to be the optimist, and so I get, people tell me I'm kind of Pollyanna-ish but, you know, I'd much rather hold on to that positive thought than not.

Leiserson 12:36

Yeah. Do you, you may not be able to answer this, and if not, that's okay, but do you think that potentially the funding model for arts organizations will change from what it has been? That is, reliant on ticket sales and membership as well as maybe endowment income and donations. Do you think there may be some sort of shift in that balance of different sources of funding?

Byron 52:54

I don't know. I'm sure that it's going to shift, I'm sure it is. I just don't see going through something this traumatic in our, our society and our culture without it changing, but I don't know what that look like. Yeah, it'll be interesting to see on the other end.

Leiserson 53:52

Yeah. I yeah I wonder about that too. Yeah. [Laughing] Yeah, so. Okay, so how, how do you think people around you are changing their opinions or their daily activities or their relationships since this pandemic-?

Byron 54:21

I think you froze. I hope I didn't. I like to see, I like seeing that people are taking it seriously. I like seeing that people are crossing the street when they see people coming by. But I - are you there?

Leiserson 54:50

Okay. Yeah, I can see you now. Okay,

Byron 54:53

Great. Um, could you hear me?

Leiserson 54:55

No, I couldn't. Would you be willing to repeat that?

Byron 55:00

So the question was how people were- Can you repeat your question because you cut out at the very end there?

Leiserson 55:08

Of course. So how have you seen people changing their attitudes, their opinions, their relationships, their activities, since this pandemic started, if at all?

Byron 55:28

Right. So, I'm really pleased to see people using precautions, crossing the street when they're when they see someone coming. Using personal protection with masks or gloves. I see those changes, and I like those changes. What scares me is when I don't see those changes in people or that they're kind of ignoring that. I'm also seeing people, especially through like social media, where people are connecting with one another, that they're trying to find the positive, they're trying to make sure that there's a positive here. I was in a virtual meeting, which all my meetings are virtual right now, right. And it was really fun to hear- we all went around the room to introduce ourselves, it was a new group of people, and we were all asked to state our name and you know why we're in this committee and then to offer a silver lining that this pandemic has offered us. And it was fun to hear everyone's silver lining, that people do have silver linings, and the fact that the committee organizer made sure that everyone shared that with each other, to keep people motivated and you know there's definitely a stress and a depressive piece to this pandemic that, I'm sure, I can't imagine anyone is escaping. And so it's nice to see people asking about the good [right] that I think before was probably dwelled on, you know.

Leiserson 57:37

Yeah, yeah, it's nice to recognize the positive.

Byron 57:43

My favorite one was one of the people's silver lining was that he didn't have to do laundry because he'd been wearing his pajamas all week.

Leiserson 57:53

[Laughter] Yeah. I like that one. Well and I will note too, if you hear background noise here, it's because I'm at my partner's, and he has a six year old. And so, they have sometimes, you know, battles going on or various activities. This is just part of our normal

Byron 58:27

That's always what entertains me the most is during virtual meetings when the children come in or the dog race by, or in my case, my husband came in and showed me some virtual reality app on his phone that put a penguin on my on my computer in the middle of a virtual meeting, like, you're not six. Get out of here.

Leiserson 58:55

But that is a thing and that's another part of our daily life. Yeah, meeting, animals, kids, family.

Byron 59:05

Yeah, I've also heard people are you know checking out what everybody's houses look like, and...

Leiserson 59:12

Yeah, you get this kind of voyeuristic window. Do you, um, have you been listening or watching or gathering news in any way?

Byron 59:28

I have. I am an evening news junkie, have been all my life. And I'm trying very hard not to. I found that it was really adding to my stress. There are certain broadcasts that I just, I don't need to hear it. Although I am, you know, very concerned about our cities in the US and, and when their curves are flattening, and that sort of thing. So I try not to try not to make it too much of my day. But I'm staying, I'm staying in touch. It's a lot easier to read it. I think, than to hear it on the television and then hear more clips and parts of it. The media,

and it just, it breeds anxiety. So, I read iton sources that I feel I can trust.

Leiserson 1:01:00

Like what? What sources?

Byron 1:01:03

I'm a huge reader of the New York Times. I like their reading. I follow some NPR journalists.

Leiserson 1:01:23

Yeah. Are there things that you wish the media was covering more at the moment,?

Byron 1:01:31

I think so. I think that, um, I think the media is doing a good job, I really do, I am grateful for what I get from the media. I don't normally share my political beliefs a lot, because I work with a city government, but I will stay here, and I know I'm recorded, that our president scares me. And the daily press briefings drive me crazy. I hear things that coming out of our country's leader's mouth that are inaccurate and not backed by support of the professionals and the doctors, and it scares me. So, and then after hearing something like that, to have the media explained to me how ignorant or untrue something is just adds to the stress. So I try not to watch that just, I just don't.

Leiserson 1:03:04

Yeah. Yeah. So I have a couple of follow up questions. If any of this feels too political you don't have to answer, but I'm just curious how you see, what differences you see between the federal government response and the state or local responses?

Byron 1:03:21

I am really pleased with our state response. I'm really pleased that Governor Holcomb put social distancing in place as soon as he did. I think he was ahead of the curve there. I hope that will make a difference in our numbers. I do believe the federal government could have done more. And I feel like the nation's leader should be taking responsibility, rather than shuffling responsibility. This is something unprecedented. Any leader would have made mistakes, just by trying to guess how to come out of something like this. But I don't think there was a strong, even will, to make sure this didn't affect our citizens. And I think the federal government truly screwed up. You know we didn't have a pandemic force that was once in place, and this current president is who disbanded that. And you can't just say, "Oh, this spring it'll go away when the weather's warm," and then come back and say "you know I don't take any responsibility." And then I think they truly screwed up.

Leiserson 1:05:14

Yeah. And other than not wanting to listen which I totally understand, do you feel like there's an impact on you from that lack of trust in what the federal government is doing or saying?

Byron 1:05:29

Yes, yes and there has been for me for the last three and a half years. Yes, you know this pandemic is something that many in the world of viruses, have been afraid of and you know, you want to heed to those who spend their careers studying and predicting what could impact a global society. And so, yes, it makes me fearful, makes me a news junkie, makes me really listen to who is up for election, and who I can vote for. And it also, as someone who works across party lines and wants to be a-political in my career, because I do work in local governments, it still makes me want to discuss with my friends and my family, who think differently than I do. Makes me want to converse with them about what I think I know. And how do they know what they think they know? And where do they get their source of information, and why do they believe it's true? In a world where I believe our nation's leader lies.

Leiserson 1:07:20

Yeah. So you've had those conversations; how have those gone?

Byron 1:07:28

Um, my husband is really good at those kind of conversations. I'm not. I tend to wait until I'm emotionally affected, and then, you know, wouldn't matter what I said or what they said, we just sort of stand in our

corners. But I love the way my husband approaches things that are scary to him and to me, because we have very similar opinions. He's a fact checker, and so he's always asking why, why do you think that way? And, you know, how did you learn that? And where did that come from, and when I watch him do that, I recognize what truly is inaccurate. Because if you can't answer those questions, and you don't have a document to back, something that you say is factual, a document or a conversation or you know, an article or something written by someone who actually knows what they're talking about. You know it- facts can be checked.

Leiserson 1:08:4

Yeah, yeah, yeah that makes sense. Well, so just a few questions. We're getting close to wrapping up. What do you think, looking toward the future, what would you like to see or not like to see as the country starts to reopen? In whatever time that is.

Byron 1:09:09

I'd like to see a vaccine tomorrow. I am so grateful that, you know as-. Let me back up. As much as I think this country is upside down with those who have more money than God and those who really struggle financially, I really want to help those families that, you know, live below the poverty line. And even, even that poverty line, those who are above it, are still, you know, paycheck to paycheck. And yet, when you look at people like Bill Gates and the Gates Foundation, who has funded sources so that all experiments towards the vaccine can be funded instead of just a few at a time. I love seeing philanthropists like that. So I hope we see a vaccine sooner than later. I hope that society establishes some personal protection habits, whether it's bowing instead of shaking hands, whether it's wearing face masks in public. I don't know what it's gonna look like, but I'd love to see that be a part of our culture, because this isn't, coronavirus 19 isn't the only bug out there. And I'd hate for this to happen again with a new and different bug.

Leiserson 1:11:08

Yeah. Yeah, definitely. Um, so we are doing this oral history project for a while, for a few months at least, maybe as long as the COVID-19 crisis continues. Do you-. So, let me say, we are trying to get people from diverse backgrounds, whether that's race, gender, sexual orientation, we're also trying to get people with a variety of experiences, based on you know their job, their sector, whether they're on the front lines or not. Can you think of people who you would like to see interviewed or you know who might have interesting experiences to share.

Byron 1:11:58

I would think about that and, yeah I'm sure I know some people that would be interested in sharing and could have some diversity to your group of interviewees.

Leiserson 1:12:12

Sure. Well thank you. Is there anything else you want to mention, or share before we stop?

Byron 1:12:22

No, I don't think so. I'm glad you're healthy and hoping that everybody else out there listening to this is healthy and staying in.

Leiserson 1:12:34

Yeah, thank you so much. Well, thank you for your time, Judy. Again, I know you're very busy, and it means a lot that you did this, that you volunteered to do this, and it's been great to hear about what you've been up to.

Byron 1:12:52

Well, thanks. Thanks for interviewing me.

Leiserson 1:12:56

My pleasure. Let me stop the recording.