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Sarasota Herald-Tribune (Florida)

**August 6, 2006 Sunday**  
**STYLE EDITION**

**SECTION:** STYLE; Pg. L106

**LENGTH:** 763 words

**HEADLINE:** Arts advocate

**BYLINE:** BY RUTH LANDO / PHOTO BY ALEX STAFFORD

**BODY:**

Nancy Roucher's license plate reads simply "Arts Ed," but that doesn't begin to describe her passion as an advocate for the arts in schools. The dynamic arts education consultant is on her second go-round as interim executive director of the Sarasota County Arts Council -- a job she held as a volunteer in 1986, the year the organization was founded. That's the same year that Nancy and her husband, Jerry, moved from Decatur, Ill., to Sarasota, where she expected to take up bridge and just enjoy the beauty of the city and the art and music scene.

Instead, Nancy spent 12 years as co-director of the Florida Institute for Art Education, a statewide project to help individual school districts implement comprehensive arts education with primary funding from the Getty Education Institute for the Arts. She also has been a national consultant for the Getty, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies and the National Assessment of Education Progress.

She brought her expertise and mission with her when she moved to Sarasota.

Roucher thanks her parents for encouraging her to see the connection between the ability to appreciate art and a high-quality life. She feels that everyone has an aesthetic sense that can be nurtured -- as elemental as experiencing joy in a beautiful sunset.

"You can cultivate your natural ability and aesthetic perception into understanding, appreciating, enjoying and interpreting art, music, dance and theater," she explains. After her two daughters began school in the late '60s, Roucher helped to start an alternative school where she found that the power of arts enhanced all kinds of learning. "When artists-in-residence are in the schools, great things happen," she says. In 1995, she was one of the key players in a coalition that got arts teachers reinstated in the Sarasota public schools after a budget cut eliminated them. "We want a good, solid education for our children that goes beyond the norm in Florida," the grandmother of five insists. "I'm pretty tenacious."

Roucher started out as a professional journalist with a degree from the University of Missouri, and worked as a newspaper reporter, as a freelance advertising and public-relations consultant, and a university instructor. Later in life, she switched careers and earned a master's degree in aesthetic

education from the University of Illinois, Springfield. Her specialty is designing professional development experiences for teachers and coordinating workshops in the arts and other subject areas.

Until a permanent director is hired, Roucher's Arts Council responsibilities include overseeing tourist development grant awards, education, cultural tourism, public art, membership, working with arts organizations and Arts Day. "It's been very exciting to see again from the inside how the organization has grown since the early years, through Patricia Caswell's leadership, to a multi-faceted community agency today," Roucher says. A longtime Arts Council board member, she continues to serve on the Arts Education Task Force and as Arts in Education chairperson for a school/community partnership program that has received national recognition.

Roucher also gives her time to the boards of SCOPE (Sarasota County Openly Plans for Excellence) and the Florida Holocaust Museum, and is a member of the steering committee for Embracing Our Differences and the education committee of the Asolo Center for the Performing Arts. Needless to say, she doesn't have much time for bridge.

How do you define happiness?

The fun of having all of my family together -- or being totally engrossed in a book.

What is your biggest strength?

Ideas and the ability to work with people.

What is your biggest weakness?

Not being able to put away the piles of paper from all my projects.

What is your greatest achievement?

Bringing arts education into the lives of teachers and students. (I love to see the "spark" when people discuss a work of art.)

What qualities do you most admire in others?

Creativity, intelligence, kindness, humor and tolerance.

Who are your heroes?

My parents, for their love and belief in me.

What talent would you most like to have?

I'd like to be a really good musician. I can play the piano, but not like I dream about.

What are five words that best describe you?

Friendly. Catalyst. Optimistic. Problem solver. Determined.

What is your idea of a perfect vacation?

Going to as many museums, galleries, theaters and concerts as possible, exploring interesting places and meeting people.

How do you want to be remembered?

As a person who made a difference.

**NOTES:** [last word] Nancy Roucher

**GRAPHIC:** PHOTO

(Nancy Roucher)

**LOAD-DATE:** August 11, 2006

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