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HAPPY 2ND BIRTHDAY, TORGGLER FINE ARTS CENTER!

SPECTACULAR FACILITY BRINGS ARTS TO CAMPUS, COMMUNITY

by [Kelli Caplan](#) | October 30, 2023*Read time: about 4 min*

As the Mary M. Torggler Fine Arts Center turns two this month, George and Mary Torggler are like proud parents, basking in the glow of its achievements thus far and excited to watch it hit new milestones.

"I think it's been very successful so far," George Torggler said. "We are very, very pleased."

The Torggler, sporting its signature three cascading glass domes, has quickly become a regional hub of creativity where art, history, education and community intersect on campus to enrich lives and broaden horizons.

"It's been fabulous," said Mary Torggler. "The facility is just outstanding."

Mary and George Torggler are longtime supporters of arts and education programs at Christopher Newport. Through their generosity and vision, the Torgglers have aspired to create distinctive opportunities for artists in both the performing and visual arts to flourish.

The \$60-million building, funded by the state with additional support from private donors, is home to Christopher Newport's Department of Fine Art and Art History and also to several galleries that showcase exhibitions featuring



the works of local, national and international artists. It is a center bustling with programs for both CNU students and the broader community, offering year-round art classes for the public and a summer camp for children.

“The Torggler, with its stunning glass domes mirrors possibilities that the arts play in the vibrancy of our University community,” said Dr. Michelle Erhardt, Chair of the Department of Fine Art and Art History and Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Humanities. “It is a visible reflection of the University's commitment to the arts.”

Torggler officially opened its doors in October 2021.

“The very existence of the Torggler represents CNU’s commitment to a strong liberal arts education, of which the visual arts are a critical part,” said Holly Koons, the center’s founding executive director. “The exhibitions we present in the galleries often intersect with other academic disciplines, offering insight into history, literature, science and mathematics, to name just a few. Torggler is a key campus resource for all students and faculty.”

The opening of the Torggler, Erhardt said, “marked a new chapter in the Department of Fine Art and Art History’s story.”

“The Torggler has brought unprecedented opportunities for both students and faculty,” she said. “It has enhanced our efforts to attract and recruit the best and brightest visual arts students to CNU. Because the Torggler is a state-of-the-art facility, with modern art studios and classrooms, it enhances our ability to offer exceptional visual art instruction to students from across campus and also supports the growth of faculty research and creative activity.”

In its short life, the Torggler has made a huge impact on the regional art scene.

“The Torggler’s combination of extraordinary architecture, high-quality exhibitions, and diverse community programming has definitely elevated the cultural landscape of the region and its quality of life in general,” Koons said. “In addition to presenting work by local artists, the Torggler brings exceptional work by professional artists from around the globe to Newport News, offering new ideas and fresh perspectives.”

The Torggler, which is adjacent to the Ferguson Center for the Arts, is 83,000 square feet and includes a 150-seat auditorium, a community gallery, and studio facilities for the academic department as well as classrooms for public art classes and workshops. It also boasts several galleries, including the spectacular Anne Noland Edwards Gallery, which features major exhibitions.

The main gallery's namesake, Anne Noland Edwards, is a native of Newport News. Along with her husband Gus, Edwards has dedicated herself to supporting the visual arts at the Torggler and other prominent institutions, including the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond.

Edwards said the Torggler is “magnificent” and “inspiring” both in its construction and the exhibitions it has featured. The exhibitions, she said, are “worthy of everyone attending.”

“It shows what creative minds can do,” she said. “It couldn’t be better.”

Working with Koons, Edwards said, has been rewarding and enlightening.

“Our visions have melded so well together,” she said. “We really hit the jackpot with Holly.”

Since it opened, the Torggler has welcomed more than 35,000 visitors. It has presented seven exhibitions in the main gallery, five of which were original exhibits organized by the Torggler staff. In addition, 15 exhibits have been showcased in Torggler’s three other galleries: the William Grace Community Gallery, the MicroGallery, and the Academic Gallery. The Academic Gallery is devoted to presentations of student, faculty and alumni work.

The center is a “jewel,” as it shines brightly and adds enormous value to both the campus and community art worlds, said William Grace. He said the Torggler elevates the cultural offerings on the Peninsula and puts the region on the map when it comes to the arts scene. He is thrilled that the community gallery that bears his name gives local artists a place to exhibit their work.

“The Torggler Center is great. It’s world class,” he said. “It gives the campus great exposure.”

As the concept for the Torggler was being developed, the Torgglers envisioned an arts center that would complement the array of performing arts offered next door at the Ferguson Center. Their son, Hunter, graduated from Christopher Newport with a degree in music. They wanted the Torggler to be a state-of-the-art facility that focused on art and art history and offered classes and enrichment to both students and the greater community. It was key, they said, that programming be offered for all ages, from children to adults who have retired. They felt strongly that it be free and open to all and a place to spotlight emerging and established artists in a rotating array of exhibitions.

And most importantly, they hoped for a dynamic, engaged executive director to lead the effort.

All of their wishes were granted, and the vision that has become a reality has far surpassed the couple's expectations.

"We have been totally impressed, right down to the exhibits," Mary Torggler said.

"The response and support from the community has just been phenomenal," George Torggler said.

The Torgglers fell in love with CNU when their son was a student, and they wanted to give back in a way that would benefit the entire community.

"We have an affinity for CNU," Mary Torggler said. "It's a gem."

When they decided their project would be a fine arts center, George Torggler thought of the perfect way to honor his wife: name the building for her. And better yet, surprise her with the idea.

"It was overwhelming," Mary Torggler said. "I was gobsmacked."

A huge supporter of the arts, Mary Torggler takes great pride in the Torggler Center's evolution and mission. In fact, she has partaken in the offerings, taking a sculpture class and loving every minute of it. The Torgglers have also sat in on art history classes.

"The facility is just outstanding," George Torggler said. "There is nothing like it."

Their son, they said, is thrilled that they have invested in his alma mater.

"He's proud of us and all the school has done for him," Mary Torggler said.

As the Torggler charges into its third year, there are plans to continue its momentum, working to bring exciting exhibitions and innovative ideas, to grow its reach and continue to expand its impact as one of Virginia's cultural pearls.

"The Torggler is still very young, with a bright and exciting future ahead," Koons said.
