



Peekskill Center for the Digital Arts, once an abandoned retail store transformed into a digital arts center, recently celebrated its 20th anniversary with an art show opening, food and refreshments and a disc jockey. The ceremony at 27 N. Division St. in Peekskill invited founding members and the community to recognize its humble beginnings.

The 20,000-square-foot building, owned and operated by Westchester Community College, serves as the first extension center of the college and an art hub for residents.

Students and working professionals interested in building their portfolios and staying current with the latest art and design technology can enroll in three-credit courses in digital imaging, graphic layout design, web design, 2D and 3D animation, digital film-making and motion graphics. The center also offers noncredit adult courses in software training and pre-college programs in the digital arts for students ages 7 to 17.

Cortlandt Manor resident and mother Kathleen Corgan used to live and work in Manhattan as a cameraperson in the film industry before moving to Westchester two years ago. When she found out WCC offered arts courses in Peekskill, she immediately enrolled for the digital arts certificate program. “I decided to go back to school and do something I love,” Corgan said. “In my program, my instructors helped me put together a curriculum tailored to what I’m interested in pursuing. My hope is to work in graphic design in the digital format by learning about print, 2-D and 3-D animation, digital design and typography.”

About 60 percent of the digital arts center’s students are high school graduates, while the rest are professionals who have college degrees but want to hone their skills before reentering the job market, said Sherry Mayo, director of the Center for the Digital Arts. The center attracts designers, filmmakers, artists and other professionals by offering a digital arts certificate. High school students can choose from 65 general education courses and receive an associate’s degree. The center also offers English as a second language instruction, academic support and advisement and other student services. With 13 classrooms, five digital art labs, two multimedia halls and a fine arts studio, the center enrolls about 3,000 students each year, including 200 pre-college students. The school’s main streams of revenue include state aid, county contributions and tuition. The Center for Digital Arts was founded through a partnership between WCC and the city of Peekskill.

In the early 1990s, city officials asked Tom Halsall, the head of WCC's arts department at the time, if the community college was interested in opening a program in Peekskill's downtown that was focused on artists, said Marjorie Glusker, vice president and dean of continuing education at WCC.

During this time, Mercy College offered its program space in the Peekskill Library to Joseph Hankin, former WCC president. "In a true Dr. Hankin fashion, there was nothing more than a handshake to the agreement between the two (college) presidents and it was done," Glusker said.

While the digital arts center was being built, WCC ran its first digital arts program out of the Peekskill Library. The Digital Arts Center opened its doors in 1994 and in 2003, the digital arts center doubled in size, expanding to the second floor and offering more general education courses. Now WCC has five extension centers throughout the county.

"The idea of an affordable and accessible education for working folks sometimes seems under attack these days given the current emphasis on a narrow definition of both success and of how public money should be spent, but WCC will always stand for these two values as part of its community college mission," Glusker said.

