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Ask... the Executive director

Sandra Turner-Barnes was recently appointed executive director of the Camden County Cultural and Heritage Commission, a division of the Camden County Library System.

Turner-Barnes, 58, was born and raised in Lawnside, and has family connections to the town that stretch back for generations.

She is married to Philadelphia jazz great Robert "Bootsie" Barnes. They have two grown daughters and three grandchildren.

Question: What are the important aspects of your job?

A: The most important aspects of the Camden County Cultural and Heritage Commission - and my role as executive director - are spelled out in our mission statement: making the arts and local history accessible to every Camden County resident; fostering the unique role of artists and arts organizations through programming and support; celebrating the county's rich cultural diversity; and supporting arts excellence through innovative programming and community collaborations.

Q: You are a published poet, a recorded jazz singer, and a teaching artist. You have an extensive background in the arts. How will that help you in this job?

A: I love the arts, all the arts, mainly because I recognize the power of art to positively impact and transform individual lives. I believe that our creativity is a key part of our humanity. My background in the arts, as an arts administrator and as an artist, will keep me focused and motivated toward establishing and accomplishing the commission's artistic, cultural and historic goals.

Q: What do you see as your biggest challenge?

A: Artistic and cultural organizations, such as the Camden County Cultural and Heritage Commission, must continue to grow and expand to represent and support our growing and changing communities. Funding is always the greatest challenge, and it will be my greatest challenge to raise the necessary funding to grow this organization so that it is truly reflective of the entire county. I look forward to this challenge and have already begun to put various long-term plans into action to counteract future funding obstacles.

Q: What would you like the community at large to know?

A: I'd like the community to be more aware of the truly great programs and services that the Camden County Cultural and Heritage Commission has been providing for many years - programs and services that I wish to nurture and expand. Programs such as Musical Interludes, which brings the joy of live music to sick and homebound individuals who cannot attend a concert on their own; Arts 4 Teens, which offers middle and senior high school students the opportunity to showcase their own art and have it critiqued by professional artists, helping to motivate and encourage young people to maintain a lifelong interest in the arts; Senior Art Show, an annual visual art exhibition and awards program for local artists over age 60 that recognizes their contributions to the arts.

One of the key services we provide to arts organizations within Camden County is our local arts program, where the commission provides financial funding through the support of the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.

The Cultural and Heritage Commission also provides services to established and emerging artists by offering opportunities for poets, musicians, visual and performing artists to participate in numerous programs either at the Hopkins House or other venues, as well as annually publishing a directory of Camden County artists and arts organizations. There are other very worthwhile programs and services available, and I encourage interested individuals to give us a call at 856-858-0040 or to browse our Web site, <http://arts.camden.lib.nj.us>.