

## **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** A HEART FOR THE ARTS: CAA Valentine Tour of Homes funds arts in Education

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It's almost Valentine's Day, and that means the Cultural Arts Association of Walton County is getting ready for the annual Valentine Tour of Homes, showcasing a handful of the most unique residential gems on the Beaches of South Walton.

This self-guided tour will take place Saturday, Feb. 12 from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. to raise funds for the CAA, the Local Arts Agency for Walton County that supports the arts through leadership, advocacy, funding, programs and education.

All proceeds from the Tour benefit the CAA's Educational Giving Program, which provides \$20,000 annually in grants to Walton County teachers and need-based and college scholarships for students.

Event Chair Nina McCaslin-Horn carefully chose the homes on this year's tour, including "Chatham House," Seaside's original "dogtrot" recently renovated in a fresh new style. Guests will be able to tour Alys Beach's new, luxurious, hotel-style "Aspri Villa" and then take a quick shuttle ride to a 1925 Gulf-front homestead named "Emerald Crest."

"We wanted to present a diverse array of styles that have evolved through the years and provide an exclusive opportunity for the public to explore these beautiful homes," says McCaslin-Horn. "The public can garner a unique appreciation of the diverse architectural styles of our community, and at the same time, provide much needed support for a very worthwhile mission."

"Each home on this year's tour is impressive in a unique way and has its own story to tell," says Jennifer Steele, CAA Executive Director. "We think tour guests will be as fascinated by the beach-front cottage that was used during World War II as they will be by the stunning 11,000-square-foot Alys Beach retreat that sits across the highway."

As a bonus, tour attendees can turn their ticket stubs in at World Six Gallery located at 34 North Barrett Square in Rosemary Beach throughout the day to be entered into a drawing to win original artwork by Allison Wickey, Beaches of South Walton's 2011 Artist of the Year. Wickey will be in her gallery/studio to meet and greet tour-goers and discuss her work.

Tickets for the Valentine Tour of Homes are \$20 in advance and can be purchased online at CulturalArtsAssociation.com where a map can also be downloaded. Tickets may also be purchased locally at the following locations: in Rosemary Beach at World Six Gallery (34 North Barrett Square, Mon-Sat), in Seaside at Sundog Books (89 Central Square, 850-231-5481, 7 days), at the CAA office (Bayou Arts Center, 105 Hogtown Bayou Lane off CR 393, 850-622-5970, Mon-Fri), and near Sandestin at Silver Sands Factory Stores (Shopper Service Kiosk located near Juicy Couture, 7 days). Tickets will increase to \$25 the day of the Tour and can be purchased at any of the homes throughout the day.

For more information about the Tour and the Cultural Arts Association of Walton County, visit CulturalArtsAssociation.com or call 850-622-5970.

## **HISTORY OF THE HOMES**

Several years ago, the CAA began including an historic home on the Tour to highlight some of Walton County's heritage, along with the newer, world-class architecture for which the area has come to be famous.

This year's historic home is "Emerald Crest," which was built near in 1925 when Lucien May homesteaded 160 acres near Seacrest along the Gulf of Mexico.

Mr. May lived there for two years and raised fruit trees, vegetables and chickens before President Calvin Coolidge deeded the land over to him in 1927. Located at 9368 East County Hwy 30A, this home got its name when a great uncle stood at the bluff, noting the crescent shape of the coast line and the emerald green waters and said "This is an Emerald Crest."

The house was used as a vacation home by the family, except from 1941 to 1945, when the U.S. Coast Guard took it to use as an out post to watch for German U-Boats. They added lockers in the bedrooms, which are still there, and stables where they housed horses used to patrol the beaches. The only evidence of their presence today is the lockers and the ping pong table (still used by the family) on the front porch.

In the early 1960's when highway 30-A was planned and constructed, the family was able to petition to have the road run somewhat inland, instead of right along the Gulf, as had been done in Panama City. This move helped everyone who has enjoyed the extra added value of being south of 30-A. The house was originally about a hundred yards from the gulf, near the center of the original parcel, but in 1973, when the majority of the land was sold, the house was moved to its present position in the south western corner of the property, about 40 yards from the gulf.

In 1975, the property was again sold, this time in an auction, to Mr. Elton B. Stephens of EBSCO, and now it is Alys Beach. The original house had a wrap-around porch, much of which has been converted to more bedrooms, although the front porch stands exactly as it has since 1925.

Vinyl now covers the original wood siding, and it's been re-roofed quite a few times, but all the doors and windows are the original ones, and have stood up well to the many years of family use.

Because this home is at the end of a very long, narrow driveway, a complimentary shuttle will be provided for guests to take a quick ride from Home #3 located at 140 North Charles Street in Alys Beach.

Home #3, the largest we have ever presented, is an 11,250 square foot compound named "Aspri Villa," which is Greek for "the large white mansion."

This 5-Star hotel-style estate home is owned in part by Charlie Renfroe, and is situated in the community of Alys Beach. Renowned Florida architect Tom Christ, and Atlanta interior designer Christa Renfroe Hurley teamed up to create a truly one of a kind masterpiece that embodies the epitome of style and design.

"It has a beachy feel without being predictable. "Because the architecture is so exquisite, I wanted to compliment it with a soothing, timeless look," says Christa. 9,500 square feet of living space surrounds a private saltwater pool with underwater music features and a sheer decent waterfall.

At the front center of the house, the winding staircase elegantly ascends to the tower room and rooftop terrace that features a luxurious Jacuzzi and, of course, the magnificent views of the Gulf. This home provides a wonderful contrast to "Emerald Crest," which used to sit on the site that is now Alys Beach.

"Chatham House" owned by John W. Houghtaling, II of Metairie, LA, is the final home on the Tour.

This residence, located at 71 East Ruskin Place in the Town of Seaside, balances desire for the heroic in architecture with the necessity of good urban manners. When first designed and built by Walter Chatham in the late eighties, this house received much attention for its marked departure from the surrounding houses of early Seaside. Originally composed of two separated pavilions, "The Dog Trot House" acted very much in the spirit of its namesake type commonly found in the south.

New owner Houghtaling, after a few years of enjoying the house as originally designed, decided it was time to make necessary adjustments, and in the fall of 2009, the 2500 square foot renovation and addition was finished at a total cost of over a million dollars. Braulio Casas was the architect behind the revisions and the new landscape design, and John Fernandez designed the interior.

In pattern, form, color and material, the renovation and addition have given the house a new lease on life. An essay in balance, the house once again has become an attraction for its dramatic departure from the Seaside norm. It is recommended to view this home later in the day when parking will be more available along Central Square and Smolian Circle in Seaside.

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