**PWAS – A Rich History**

The Prince William Art Society, which we call PWAS (pronounced "p-whazz"), did not begin with that name. The art group began in February of 1971 with the name of Woodbridge Art Guild (WAG) and they kept that name for many years. The group began with 60 charter members and they did not have an official home, a location, building or space to meet or show their art.

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The group met in various locations in and around the Woodbridge, Lake Ridge, and Dale City areas. In 1973, the membership expanded making larger accommodations necessary, which meant meeting at Marumsco Creek Park (Veterans Park) and occasionally in local churches including Our Lady of Angels Church on Marys Way, Woodbridge. Other locations for meetings included the Dale City Civic Center.

The WAG members took part in demonstrations, critiques, sketch outs, workshops, art tours and exhibitions...while offering art shows and exhibits, quite often outdoors, including in a small building on the corner of Old Bridge and Minnieville Road - where the Exxon station is now. That building was originally a sort of "Woodbridge Welcome Center" for a time that gave their artwork "cover" from the weather for the art shows.

Members also set up pop-up art shows in front of the local stores at the upper part of Tackett's Mill, until as things tend to happen, potential insurance issues were raised and those pop-up shows had to be stopped. There was even a monthly newsletter in years past keeping members informed on their area's art events.

In 1972, an artist bio-resume was developed which provided an interest/reference file for requests from the community, for art judges, teachers and special commissions for art work. - From a Woodbridge Art Guild's Edgewater Gallery announcement page.

In 1975, the Guild joined the Eastern Prince William Chamber of Commerce, with an average of 125 members. The membership expansion meant that there were lots of great art shows all over the county throughout the year. Then in December, WAG would finish the year with a Holiday Reception and member art show.

The Woodbridge Art Guild was officially incorporated in the state of Virginia as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, which has a board of governors, directors, meeting minutes - all of the paperwork and rules that necessitate that status in 1976.

**Tackett's Mill Expansion**

The WAG members longed for a permanent home for their art activities and for the community to enjoy, learn, and for purchase.

The Officers and Board of Governors at that time were Diane Angell, President and co-director, Fuller Brown, co-director Helen Turner, Jewell Burns, Kathy O'Day, Rick Alt, Jean Beamer, Sherry Smith, and Wanda Lin, along with the help of other artist members worked hard to fulfill a dream that was about to come true.

Tackett's Mill had built out the lower section of the shopping center with the Mill and pond - a beautiful area with paths and waterfall and new retail shops spaces waiting to be filled. On November 23, 1984, the Woodbridge Art Guild Board and members (listed above) were instrumental in opening the Edgewater Gallery at Tackett's Mill in the lower level where the Mill is and there was a major celebration. The "water-front" space was a lovely location with a view inside and out, displaying the waterfall and nature outside and beautiful artwork inside. As many art locations do, the membership volunteers their time in "manning the store".

Then, unfortunately, after about 2 and 1/2 years, with time, space and rent changes, the Edgewater Gallery had to close and WAG was again, without a home. So once more, the artists were longing and looking for a permanent space for a gallery, classrooms and arts learning space - a real place to call home.​

WAG even had a brief stint in a store front location across from Lowe's on Minnieville. A non-profit small business often has difficulty using a spot rent-free when those shopping areas obviously want those spaces to make a profit. Meetings again took place wherever they could. At that time many members were military spouses, and/or quite a few worked in DC or were deployed. As is true with this area of Northern Virginia, military families come and go annually, and the membership fluctuated along with it.

The artist membership had always created many types of art and sold it at their various pop-up shows and events. Their art ranged from paintings in acrylic, oils, watercolors, alkyds, mixed media, ceramics, pottery and more.

An occasional member "hit it big" with respectable sales success and moved on to bigger and better things in their own studios in the NOVA area and sometimes across the world. Lena Liu was one of those members that has had a very successful artistic journey.

**The Change to PWAS**

Prince William County is a very large county with well-known cities across it including Bristow, Gainesville, Manassas, Haymarket, Nokesville, Quantico, Dumfries, and Occoquan along with Woodbridge. Some discussion occurred with members feeling that the name "Woodbridge Art Guild" was probably not inclusive enough to describe the entire county and perhaps draw (pun intended) more artists in. The membership changed the name to the Prince William Art Society representing that all artists residing in county are welcome to join (age 18 and up) and not just "Woodbridge".

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Often, PWAS members are and have been members of other local art groups and art galleries and shops. The Loft Gallery in Occoquan, the Lorton Workhouse, the Prince William County Arts Council (PWCAC), Manassas Art Guild (MAG), and the several other galleries in Occoquan are a few of the other local art organizations nearby where many of the membership have earned local recognition for their talent and hard work in those spaces as well as with PWAS.

In 2008, Alice La Bier, President of PWAS at the time, suggested a Scholarship Program that would work with PWC high schools and the program was begun. The program awards scholarships to up to two 12th grade students graduating and preparing to pursue a bachelor's degree in Fine Arts or Art Education. The program was named in honor of Jewell Pratt Burns, a founding member of WAG and PWAS.

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Until recently, Clearbrook Center of the Arts at Tackett's Mill enabled the PWAS group to house and display their art - considering them to be the current "artist in residence" until May 2022.

**PWAS Today, Member Meetings and More**

The Tall Oaks Community Center at 12298 Cotton Mill Drive, Lake Ridge, VA 22192 is where PWAS meets (typically, see events for any changes) once a month on the fourth Monday of the month. Visitors are welcome and the discussion includes the latest and upcoming events and activities that artists may choose to participate in. Often there is a guest artist speaker or demonstration, periodically there is "show and tell" by members to show what they are working on now.

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Prior to the 2020 COVID restrictions, PWAS members participated in many wonderful workshops, museum field trips, art shows and other art events. 2020 tossed the art events into the air in PWC and those restrictions also meant that the Scholarship program was put on hold and the members went to Zoom meetings like much of the rest of the world.

In the spring of 2021, PWAS started meeting in person once again at the Tall Oaks Community Center and the Spring Tall Oaks Art Show took place in May 1, 2021. The art events and shows are once again on the calendar going forward. (See the section for Upcoming Events)

On Saturday, June 5, 2021, the PWAS membership gathered at The Winery at Sunshine Ridge Farm in Gainesville and celebrated the 50th anniversary of PWAS. Members, their spouses, and guests enjoyed celebrating the long history of art in Prince William County and presented a bouquet to Jewell Pratt Burns for her 50 years and dedication to PWAS and its Scholarship Program. For the month of June, PWAS members displayed artwork at the winery, which was juried in.

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In November and December of 2021, the Prince William Art Society was offered by the Prince William County Arts Council and JBG Smith (who manage the Stonebridge Shopping Center) the use of an empty retail space for three days. This 'popup' art show was in conjunction with their Christmas festivities beginning on Black Friday running through what is now known nation-wide as Artist's Sunday. The art show was so successful, it was extended several more weekends.

And as far as the Scholarship Program, which works in conjunction with the PWC school systems - we were able to again award up to two 12th grade students graduating and preparing to pursue a bachelor’s degree in Fine Arts or Art Education with a scholarship on Monday, May 23, 2022. (See the Scholarship & Outreach section)

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In early 2022, the PWCAC and JBG Smith again approached PWAS with the offer to expand the Open Space Arts (OSA) gallery to all artists in Prince William County. The PWAS group would manage the volunteer schedule and be the art ambassadors to the many visitors coming by the gallery.

The artwork at OSA will change out approximately monthly and the featured art will be a mix of Prince William County artists, art groups, and special themed presentations. Calls for Art will go out periodically for the next month's art show. Typically, artists will need to be 18 or older, a resident of Prince William County, or be a member of a Prince William County art group. The PWCAC may periodically work with students to offer art shows for younger artists.

All art shows at Open Space Arts are juried, which means the art must be selected as the best from all of the artwork submitted to appear. The artwork ranges from acrylics, watercolors, photographs, pastels, landscapes, abstracts, sculpture, and pottery.

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The artists of the Prince William Art Society are of very diverse backgrounds including art hobbyists, the working artists, retirees, and teachers, which will ultimately be very valuable when offering workshops and classes. The future of PWAS is very bright and there are many plans for not only PWAS, but reaching out to the PWC community of art enthusiasts as well as artists.

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References: [Prince William Art Society (PWAS) for Art and Art Lovers - A History](https://artistryspin.blogspot.com/2021/08/post-1-about-pwas-history-of-prince.html)