

Ep #27: The Armonk Outdoor Art Show with Nicole Blum



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Harriet Libov

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Welcome to *Your Real Estate Connection in Westchester*. A show for people looking to buy or sell homes in the Northern Westchester County area. Join local real estate expert Harriet Libov as she shares her professional advice on the local real estate market, connects you with knowledgeable community residents, and gives you helpful insights behind the home buying and selling process. Now, let's dive into today's episode.

The fall is beyond beautiful in Northern Westchester, and there are quite a few events that everyone who lives here looks forward to in the fall. The annual Armonk Outdoor Art Show is one of them. I think every house that I've been in to see, and that's a lot of houses, has something in it from the art show. This year the art show will celebrate six decades of fine art and fine crafts on Saturday, October 1st through Sunday, October 2nd. It's an incredible milestone for this nonprofit annual show, marking 60 years of raising funds for the Friends of the North Castle Public Library, which supports the library's vibrant educational and entertainment programs.

When art show volunteers set up for that first show on the lawn of Armonk's Methodist Church in 1961, they could not have possibly envisioned the 9,000 visitors that would one day flock to the community parks field each year. 60 years later, the Armonk Outdoor Art Show remains almost entirely volunteer run, and offers the perfect community activity to enjoy on a fall day.

The show is consistently ranked among the top fine arts and fine craft shows in the nation. Their jury carefully selects approximately 140 artists each year from close to 600 applicants. The show's chosen exhibitors are innovators in their fields, representing 12 different mediums including oils, acrylics, watercolor, mixed media, printmaking, drawing, pastels, sculpture, photography, digital art, wearable art, and fine crafts. Here are all the details you need to know for this year.

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The dates and times are Saturday and Sunday, October 1st and 2nd from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., rain or shine. It's at the community park 205 Business Park Drive Armonk, New York 10504. I hope you take some time today as I have a conversation with Nicole Blum, the new managing director who is bringing new enthusiasm to this annual Northern Westchester event. Nicole will also tell us about a very exciting event before the art show, the art of storytelling. So let's settle in and enjoy the conversation.

Harriet: It's September already. Sad to see the summer end. But this is an amazing time of year in Northern Westchester. As many of you know, I live in the community of Armonk. So I have been an attendant of the art show since I moved here in 1989. I have several pieces of art in my home that I have bought through the years and still love. They have moved with me into another home and stayed through a recent renovation.

A bit of history that I never took the time to learn is that in 1961, the Friends of the North Castle Public Library, including Charles Elson, Lucille Bruno, and Jean West, decided to try an outdoor art exhibition as a way to raise funds. With only a handful of artists showing their work on the lawn of the Armonk Methodist Church bordering Main Street, the Armonk Outdoor Art Show was born.

The show soon outgrew the church yard and was relocated to the library's parking lot. Accompanying the small yet fine display of art in the early days were memorable cakes, pies, and much loved art show brownies baked by volunteers in the church kitchen. Schultz's famous cider from their iconic local farm stand was always there to wash it all down. As the show and its crowds grew, the venue again changed first to the American Legion Field in front of town hall, and finally to its current home at the community park in 1997.

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Now 60 years later, 160 exhibitors are chosen from hundreds of juried applicants from across the country and around the world. This celebration of fine art and fine crafts displayed in a bucolic treelined park has grown to be one of the nation's most highly rated art shows. Each year thousands of art lovers come from near and far to see an ever changing display of paintings, photography, sculpture, jewelry and more. Children's activity and interactive art have helped make this a family friendly annual event.

As the art show has grown so too has its group of volunteers, now numbering 300. Every year as one show winds down, the next is already in the works. Behind all the brainstorming and community outreach is a hardworking and fun loving group of people who strive to make the art show the very best it can be.

Today we will hear from Nicole Blum, the new managing director. We are lucky to have her here today and even more lucky for the time she is giving to this outstanding event.

Harriet: Hi, Nicole, thank you so much for joining me today. I'm thrilled to highlight this amazing event in Armonk that draws people from so many different places. I'm hoping you have spectacular weather as you plan the 60th anniversary because in my many, many years as an Armonk resident, I've seen great weekends and not so great weekend's weather wise. It does make a big difference for the artists, unfortunately. So that's what I'm wishing you. I'm wishing you spectacular weather.

So I've highlighted a bit of the history of the show and its humble beginnings. I should also note that you're a 10 year resident of Armonk and moved from the city and also fell in love with the show, which is why you're here today and how you reached this moment. But I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit about what happens behind the scenes on an annual basis to

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get to this point in October. I know this is all new for you. When did you actually begin as the new chair manager?

Nicole: In January.

Harriet: Okay. So October to January is kind of like a resting point for everybody.

Nicole: Believe it or not, it is to a degree but not for every committee. First of all, I just want to say thank you very much for having me. I really appreciate it. I really appreciate you highlighting this event because it is something that speaking as an Armonk resident, we're very proud of. As you said, I am a fan of it from attending it. I did grow up in Chappaqua. So I attended it as a kid too. So it's something that's been in my life for a long time.

I would say certainly there is a time after the show, once the wrap up is done, that there is a little bit of more quiet time and there are busier and quiet times throughout the year. But it does depend on what area of the show you're working on.

So our applications to artists because our show is a juried show. Artists have to apply, and their application is reviewed by a volunteer panel of jurors with art expertise and backgrounds. That application opens December 15th. So if the show is October 1 and 2nd, there's a committee, our artists relations chair is already getting everything ready for next year's application.

Harriet: Wow.

Nicole: Then I would say that at the beginning of the year, there's aside from the applications there's a lot of promoting that to the artists. So they

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actually involves marketing to the artists, our social media person. We're very focused on getting artists to know that the application is open and to apply. Next year, I think we're going to make a concerted effort with a new committee to have new artists apply as well who have never applied to our show before. So we have this wonderful...We get close to 600 applications for between let's say about around 150.

Harriet: No, I know it's very competitive to get into.

Nicole: It really is. At the same time, we know that we could always be growing, and we could be attracting new artists, and are we reaching them. So that is a focus during the winter. When you might think it's a slow time, there's always volunteers working on aspects of the show. Then of course, as it gets closer is when the various committees that are in charge of major logistical portions, whether the fields committee, parking committee, things that really make the weekend come together, that starts to get much busier as the summer begins.

Harriet: Right, right, okay. The Friends of North Castle Library is the organization that benefits from the show. Can you tell us a little bit about that and explain how that works?

Nicole: Yes, definitely. Your question is a great one because it does speak to how we have themed our 60th anniversary celebrations. But the art show is actually part of the Friends of the North Castle Public Library. So 60 years ago when the first art show was staged, it was a fundraiser put on and to benefit this organization, which had a slightly different name back then, but with the same purpose.

The net proceeds of the art show go to the North Castle Public Library and help fund programs for every age and everyone in the community from the

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earliest classes of music classes for babies to chair yoga for seniors, film study series, language classes, the Armonk players theatre group.

Harriet: I was wondering about that. I was gonna ask you. It's amazing, and are and the North Castle library, which is Armonk because most people don't understand that North Castle is Armonk.

Nicole: Armonk and North White Plains.

Harriet: And North White Plains. Correct. We have an outstanding library that really gets used. So yeah, that's wonderful. I think it's important for people to understand that this is not for profit, but it has a very good benefit as well.

Nicole: It goes right back into the community.

Harriet: Amazing, amazing. So there are many, many long term volunteers that have run the show for many, many years. It was time to pass the torch. Can you tell us a little bit how you decided to take on the role and this new big job as the managing director? It must be a little bit overwhelming as you begin this.

Nicole: It's certainly overwhelming. There's always pressure involved, but what job doesn't have that? But what I recognized was that this would be a position that would allow me to work. It is a paid part time position, but also allow me to give back to the community at the same time. I felt that that was pretty unique, and a role that was something that speaks to all of my passions and experience.

I really love to volunteer, and I love to give back to the community. I was in public relations for many years. I was consulting as a freelance writer and marketing consultant at the time when I took this position. So it's enjoyable

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to use all of my strengths and work experience. But I loved that the ultimate end result of a successful job meant that more money is raised for the library and really, overall, it's when a successful art show is just something the whole community can be proud of. So there was this great marriage of both of those things. That's what really made me excited.

Harriet: Boy, timing is everything because I know many of the people who ran the art show for years and years really needed to pass the torch and needed the right person. So it's a win-win for everybody. So I know this is the 60th annual celebration, and you're going to do the art of storytelling. Can you tell us a little bit what's in store for that?

Nicole: Yes. So we wanted to really highlight this connection between the art show and the library for the community. Because when we were formulating ideas for the 60th and kind of getting a feel within the community, we started to learn that not everyone is aware of this connection and where the art show's proceeds are going.

So with that in mind, we decided to hold—We will be holding, I should say, a special event the Thursday night before the art show, September 29th. It will be at the library. The event will feature tons of fun things including a wine tasting, live entertainment. There's an artist there. There's a lot of different activities. Also the highlight of the event is a collective art exhibition called the art of storytelling. We asked our Armonk Outdoor Art Show artists to submit a piece for this exhibition, and to theme it around a book.

We gave examples. They could use the medium they work in, a different medium. They could use an actual book, use a book as their canvas. It has been wonderful and very exciting to see how each artist has interpreted this theme.

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Harriet: That's fascinating. I bet you it was fun for them.

Nicole: It was fun, and I will tell you challenging for some of them. They were honest. Some of them really weren't sure how to work with it. It's also tough based on the medium they work in.

Harriet: Right.

Nicole: Then some it came very easily because there was a book in mind that they were very passionate about, and that came through really clearly. So it's going to be something that's really fun. Attendees of the event will get to see a sneak peek because these items will also be available for auction with part of the proceeds to benefit the library as well.

It'll be an online auction. So even if you can't attend, you can still bid on pieces. After the event, the auction pieces will also be on display at the art show. So that is something new at the show this year. In the front of the show, we're going to have an art of storytelling tent, and the pieces will be on display and the auction will go on until the end of the show on Sunday.

Harriet: Oh, I'm looking forward to seeing that. That sounds great. I know you always do things for the kids so that people can get there themselves and keep their kids entertained for a little while. What's in store this year?

Nicole: Even though it is my first year with the art show, I can very confidently say this is the most robust kid's schedule that has ever been organized for the show. We've had a wonderful new committee chair, Horizon Camp Group, which includes Breezemont. We went to Breezemont, and they are affiliated with a few other sleepaway camps and day camps. They are the presenting sponsor for the tent.

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We've been able to get some incredible activities all with an art theme. So there are a new programs bringing clay. Leaders with all different tables and kids will be able to learn from leaders. There's clay. There's expert on art and mindfulness. There will be painting workshops, coloring, puppet making.

Harriet: That's far more than they've ever had before.

Nicole: Homegrown Gardens is a new local business. She's going to have a pot decorating and planting. The schedule will be on social media, and I believe it's going up on the website as well. But definitely will be in if you get the art show emails, it will be in there. Please, if you're not getting them, you can sign up on the website. There's at least six to seven different activities going on.

Harriet: It sounds like there's something for every age group. That's amazing. Again, that's where young blood and being a young mom brings new energy to the table for the show. So I think that's amazing.

Nicole: I want to be in the family tent the whole day.

Harriet: Anything else that I missed that you would like to highlight?

Nicole: What really struck me since taking on this role is the effort that has gone into this for 60 years. The amount of work that this very large group of volunteers does. We have up to 300 volunteers during the show, as well as this smaller group of volunteers that have been chairing committees or have had roles on the executive committee. The amount of dedication and work that goes into this that they have done year after year is astounding.

That's one of the most gratifying parts of this role is just seeing what people are willing to do for this community. It's heartwarming and inspiring. That's

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not hyperbole. It's really how I feel. It's very incredible. So that's been a very enjoyable thing.

Harriet: Thank you for sharing that. Because I do think it's kind of a theme that I'm trying to highlight in these communities. Having lived and raised my family here, I see quite a lot of my young clients. I recently spoke to Matt Milam, who I sold him his house, and yourself included. All great young people who are giving back. It inspires me to see this kind of energy coming to our town. So thank you for that. I just wish you spectacular weather so you can reap the benefits.

Nicole: Nobody wants better weather more than me. Luckily, I can't worry about it just yet. It's gonna be great. You know what? It's not gonna rain. Don't worry about it.

Harriet: All right. Well, thank you. Thank you for taking the time to do this. I really appreciate it. Hopefully, I will definitely see you there. I'm gonna try and recruit as many people as I can. So.

Nicole: Thank you so much. Thank you for taking the time and for allowing me to talk about this, Harriet. I really appreciate it.

Harriet: Okay. All right. Thanks, Nicole. I hope you enjoyed this episode with Nicole talking about the Armonk Art Show. I hope you mark your calendar and attend. It is such a great day. Again, the dates are Saturday October 1st and Sunday October 2nd.

I will also be doing public open house at one of my listings, 73 Whippoorwill Road, on that very same weekend. I will have signs in town, but come by say hello and join me for cider and donuts at 73 Whippoorwill Road. It's on the market for \$2 million. It is one of the most spectacular pieces of land in Armonk I have ever seen. So come join me. Come say hi. Stay tuned as I

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highlight other exciting fall events and more new topics in real estate. Talk soon.

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