

Editorial COMMENTARY

by Tom Starland, Editor and Publisher

25 Years Ago

Twenty-five years ago I delivered Shoe-string Publishing Company's first publication, *Charleston Arts*, to art spaces throughout the greater Charleston, SC, area. I think we were printing 2,500 - 3,000 copies back then. Now we're receiving over 100,000 downloads of the paper each month - during the last three months.

That was July 1987 when Charleston's art scene was bursting at the seams. Charleston still has way more arts than a city of its size should have or can support, but it didn't have an arts publication back then. I'm not talking about your standard arts and entertainment publication found everywhere now. I'm talking about a newspaper covering the fine arts.

I can still remember many people's remarks about that first issue, which took several months to produce: "How are you going to do this every month?" "What will you find to put in it each month?" as if there wouldn't be enough to fill pages up from month to month. And, my all time favorite which I still hear today, "When will you feature my work on the cover?"

I guess Linda, my better half, and I found something to put in our papers, month after month, except for a few months after hurricane Hugo did a number on the Charleston area in Sept. 1989. We tried to go on as if nothing had happened, but reality caught up with us and we stopped trying to act like the art community didn't have an audience. Most of the available hotel rooms were filled with insurance adjustors and FEMA agents - not the usual tourists. Within a year or so we were back at it again.

At some point in the early 90's we converted to a visual arts newspaper only and until our recent conversion to an online only publication, the problem was never finding

enough info to fill the paper - the problem was finding enough advertising support to add pages to cover everything that was going on. Printing costs were a problem and soon many other publications wanted to cover the arts.

But, now that we have all the space we could want, our problem is getting info from those who are presenting the arts to us by deadline so we can bring it to our readers. Although we provide more info about the visual arts in the Carolinas than any other publication, I still think we are only receiving a little more than 50 percent of what's happening in any given month. Sometimes people tell us they can't process anymore, but our goal is to have it all. You have to have something to shoot for.

It seems the golden years for the arts community was the 1990's and then in the 2000's it all started moving down hill. I'm not going into what that's all about here - even the Internet doesn't have that much space to explain what happened to the arts in the 2000's. In a nutshell - funding for the arts was downsized. And, it's still being downsized today. But, as long as artists keep creating, we'll find a way to bring you news about it.

First we were *Charleston Arts*, then *South Carolina Arts* for a few years and we've been *Carolina Arts* for over 15 years. We've been publishing an arts newspaper for more years than some folks who think they're running the art community have been living. But, that's OK - we've seen more than they can imagine and we know when the bull is hitting the fan. This is a case where experience counts, as some folks like to rewrite history from time to time, or try to re-invent themselves when fresh folks take on covering the arts.

We're not having a celebration, which [continued on Page 33](#)



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