

# Representative Glenn Cummings: Arts Education Provides Skills, Energy, and Balance for Life by Noah Keteyian

*Through various stages in his life, Glenn Cummings has studied painting, writing and drama. From these, he has learned that the arts are the best way to nurture himself and to look for the quiet spaces in his life. The balances provided by working with and enjoying the arts have brought him to where he is today.*

Glenn Cummings is a seventh-generation Mainer who lives with his wife and children in Portland. A champion of children's needs, he has represented Portland in the State Legislature for two terms. As he begins his third term, now as House Majority Leader, he recalls being told of the qualifications that led to his selection as one of the State's most influential politicians. Among the more traditional attrib-

utes, he was told that it is nice to listen to him speak. While he downplays the compliment, he is quick to note that public speaking and the art of working with his voice are skills that he has carefully honed over the years and has come to value in his work as a legislator.

Articulating the vision of the Maine Democrats and uniting his party is only part of his life, as Representative Cummings is also the Director of the new Entrepreneurial Center at Southern Maine Community College. As an instructor of business and economics, he says that he spends so much time working with his logical left brain that, "I love to escape to my right brain." He says that the arts provide energy and balance for his professional life.

Early in his life he spent time with his grandmother, an accomplished painter living on the Maine coast. He and his brother would stay with her and learn to paint with oils and watercolors. "I still have some of those paintings on the wall," he says with pride.

In high school, his drama teacher, Priscilla Montgomery, loomed large. "She was quite demanding. She really knew her stuff and expected the same of us." It was in this study of drama that Cummings learned to work hard at creating precise work. Remembering Montgomery, he says, "She pushed us hard to do our best."

Cummings pursued his interest in theater while studying at Ohio Wesleyan University. In college and later as a high-school teacher himself, he developed strong presentation skills. "I learned how to use strong examples to support an



argument," a skill he finds crucial as a legislator and leader. "As a teacher, I coached the debate team and taught about the interplay of style and substance." Cummings taught his students the skill of utilizing eye contact as well as choosing rich and varied examples while speaking, to surprise and engage an audience.

As a state legislator, Cummings values the skills that he has built through his lifelong study of various art forms. "Creativity comes into play as we solve problems that are both logical and creative." He points out that it is the arts that provide training in the most fundamental aspects of working with people. "As legislators, that's where the power of the arts comes into play, through understanding passions and human nature."

Cummings is pleased to note that Maine is continuing to recognize the fundamental nature of the arts as part of a full education as Commissioner Gendron of the Maine Department of Education has included a position in the Visual and Performing Arts in the current budget. Cummings is concerned, however, with the challenges presented by the current focus on accountability in education. Because of this situation, he says that there is a danger of focusing "solely on the three Rs" to the detriment of the arts, which

## Profiles: Arts Education and the Creative Economy

This profile of Glenn Cummings is the second in a series by MAAE that collects stories about the connections between arts education and Maine's Creative Economy. These profiles articulate the ways in which arts education brings people to communities as well as the connections between arts education and creative businesses and employment. We all use what we learn from the arts every day, often without even realizing it. This year in each issue of this journal, MAAE will profile a person who contributes to Maine's economy by using creativity or other skills developed through arts education. We will draw from throughout Maine's diverse economy. While these people may not be working purely as artists, arts education has contributed in some way to their professional or personal success. If you would like to suggest someone to be profiled (including yourself), email [artseveryday@adelphia.net](mailto:artseveryday@adelphia.net).

*continued*

---

are essential to developing the young creative minds that can thrive in the 21st Century economy.

Cummings points out that the arts are not only essential to economic success but also in developing emotionally healthy people.

"When we talk about the arts, we have to put in the component that can lead to a healthy lifestyle and self-awareness." Cummings is concerned that "kids today are in trouble emotionally; there is an epidemic," in terms of mental health. He looks to young people's involvement in the arts as a sustainable means to help kids manage a busy and confusing world.

Everyone needs more balance in their lives these days, Cummings says, and the arts provide a way to

do that in a healthy way. He says that the arts can teach us to create restful places where we need them in our lives. "You can more easily lead a healthy life when you know you need more space and can be more balanced and sane in the world." ■

*Noah Keteyian loves living on the coast of Maine with his wife and daughter. He was a speaker at the Blaine House Conference on the Creative Economy and is working with groups throughout the state to build opportunities and communities for Maine's young, talented workforce including Governor Baldacci's Realize!Maine initiative and the Midcoast Magnet.*