

Susan Paschkes
2010 Ambassador of the Year

“There must be someone doing more!” says Susan Paschkes in response to her being named Art-Reach 2010 Ambassador of the Year. “But, it’s wonderful. I really feel appreciated.” And the award is well deserved. In her two years as an Ambassador, the ever-humble Susan has volunteered in every area of the organization and proved her expertise and dedication invaluable.

Susan moved to the area six years ago and began working as an event planner in Philadelphia. After a few years she began looking for opportunities to do more and the search engine volunteermatch.org led her to Art-Reach. Susan joined Art-Reach as a [Host](#), [Episodic](#) and [Special Projects Ambassador](#) where she finds it easy to invest her time. She has hosted Art-Reach members at countless shows, worked at various special events and even participated on the Art-Reach Brunch planning committee for the last two years. “Honestly, I probably get more than I give as a volunteer” she insists.



Susan and Michael Norris at
the 2010 Jazz Brunch

Art-Reach, however, begs to differ. Associate Director Stephanie Borton says: “Ambassadors are the heart of what makes Art-Reach thrive and reach beyond the capacity of a five person staff. Susan embodies this. She is always available and willing to give her time and talents. She

challenges Art-Reach to think in new ways, is kind to everyone she meets, represents our organization to a number of community members; but most importantly, she has a huge heart and cares about our work. Our mission is truly part of how Susan lives her life. Making the arts accessible is who she is, and we are grateful.”

Susan’s most memorable experience at Art-Reach came when she volunteered at last year’s Independence Starts Here event. Before the Enchantment Theatre Company production of Harold and the Purple Crayon, Susan and other volunteers led sensory tours of the set and props for Art-Reach members. Susan shared a story of one girl in particular:

“I met this young, 12 year old girl who was blind and I took her through a tour. She was so sweet. At the end of the night she was walking out past me and I said good night to her and she responded: ‘Good night, Susan. Thank you!’ Here is this little girl who can’t see and she is out in the world in such a courageous way and so open and fearless and excited. That, to me as a volunteer, is priceless.”

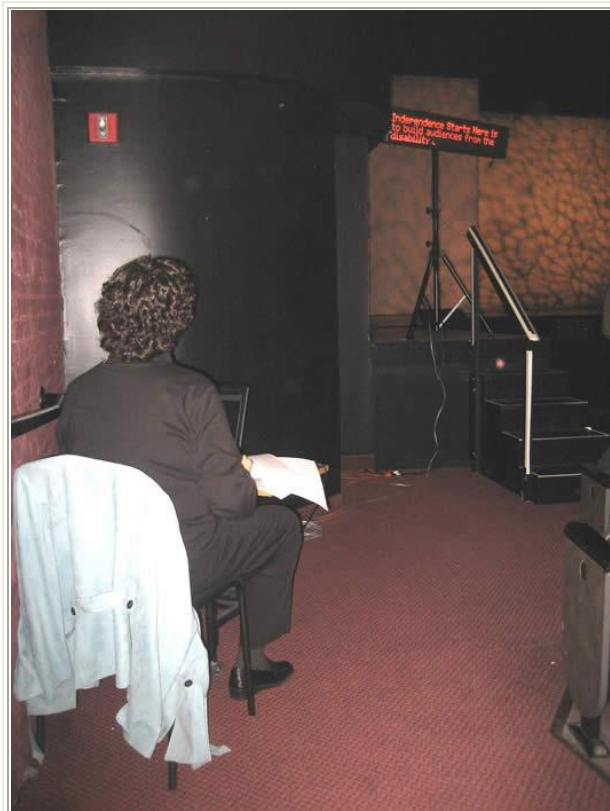


Susan leading an Art-Reach patron on the Sensory Tour for Independence Starts Here: Cinderella

In what little time she has to spare, Susan pursues her passion for theatre as a member of the [Bridge Players Theatre Company](#) in Burlington, New Jersey. She recently wrapped her second show at Bridge Players, playing Lillian Troy in I Hate Hamlet, and hopes to expand her participation to direct a play in the 2011-2012 season. The Bridge Players Theatre also supports accessibility by hosting shows in a wheelchair accessible space and providing various accessible features for individual performances or upon request, including: assisted listening devices, sensory tours, large print and braille programs, audio described performances as well as the

Bridge Player's unique "program by audio." Recognizing the mutual benefits, Susan has brought the Bridge Players Theatre Company to be a partner with Art-Reach.

In the future, Susan would like to capitalize on this partnership by developing a theatre workshop for Art-Reach members. She envisions a program of improvisation and role-play tailored to any special needs of the participants. Susan has done similar work with children at a summer camp and says, "Creative play is a fabulous way for people to interact, express themselves and be productive with their energy."



Susan operating the Open Captioning system for Independence Starts Here: Harold and the Purple Crayon.

It is impossible not to be inspired by Susan. She spends all of her free time either feeding her cheese addiction—"the smellier the better" she says—or volunteering. (She insists she still finds time to watch "too much" TV, but somehow I doubt it.) Her next project is a fundraiser for a local pastor who was paralyzed following a severe car accident. She describes him as an "amazingly inspirational person" and is helping to plan a musical review fundraiser in his honor.

Her advice to anyone thinking of volunteering: "Get up! Stop procrastinating! Someone wants what you have!" Art-Reach is the perfect place to volunteer, for her and everyone else. "Your

contribution is always valued at Art-Reach. No one is ever pressuring you to do more. Art-Reach will find a use for whatever you can give.”

Susan, however, gives more to Art-Reach than anyone could possibly expect and yet she still believes she is getting more from it. “Volunteering for Art-Reach makes me feel like I’m doing something special with my life outside the nine to five. But the best part is still that 12-year-old girl. Best part of the past two years.”

By Sarah McCague

Sarah serves as [Special Projects Ambassador](#) through [Art-Reach's Ambassador Program](#)