

# Independence Through Art

Leonard Bornstein volunteers with Arts Unbound in Maplewood.

Posted August 16, 2010 by [Mallory Gelert](#)

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Photo by John Emerson.

Leonard Bornstein guarantees one thing: “If you have lunch with me, you’re hearing about Arts Unbound.” The 74-year-old Maplewood resident and retired teacher volunteers with Arts Unbound, a nonprofit dedicated to helping people with physical and developmental disabilities find independence and self-expression through the arts.

Founded in 2002 by Maplewood resident Cate Lazen, Arts Unbound is housed in a Freeman Street gallery in Orange’s revitalized Valley Arts District. Arts Unbound provides art classes, supplies, and instruction, and gives members the opportunity to sell their work through auctions and exhibitions statewide. Bornstein founded the board of governors to seek private funding and works tirelessly to raise money for the program.

Bornstein also hopes to clarify misconceptions about the disabled. “The public tends to lump all people with one classification under one category,” he says. “They believe that everybody who has autism is the same, yet...there are many varieties of autism.”

Bornstein’s background as a teacher, principal, and special-education administrator in Livingston led him to a lifetime of work with the disabled. He retired from teaching at age 49 and, in 1987, joined the board at JESPY House in South Orange, an organization that helps disabled adults live independently.

Several Arts Unbound participants have sold their paintings at auctions—just one manifestation of the organization’s success. “It is one of the few charitable activities in which you can actually see your dollar at work,” Bornstein says.

Bornstein attributes his passion for art to his wife, Barbara, a longtime volunteer at the Newark Museum. “It fell right into my lap,” he says of Arts Unbound. “Between art and working for the disabled, you’ve got me.”

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