ONLINE ‘RICKIE REPORT’ GETS TO THE ARTS OF THE MATTER

BY PATRICK MCCAULESTER | Correspondent

There’s an occupational stereotype that irritates Rickie Leiter.

“I don’t believe in that moniker of ‘the starving artist,’” she said. “I don’t believe artists should starve.”

Leiter, who lives in PGA Village, publishes the online arts newsletter The Rickie Report, which covers the east Central and South Florida visual arts scene.

“I help connect artists, art lovers and art patrons,” she said.

The Rickie Report, at www.therickiereport.com, publishes an e-letter daily. The e-letter and achieved website cover a wide range of art-related topics, such as calls for artists, interviews, instructional opportunities and upcoming shows, among others.

Before moving full-time to the Treasure Coast from Massachusetts, Leiter worked with a business partner as an art consultant. She helped individuals and businesses, such as Liberty Mutual, get the perfect art to compliment and set the tones for their spaces.

“We would get a sense of what you’re looking for and price range,” she said. “We’d come back to you with maybe five pieces of artwork for your spot.”

More importantly for Leiter, the job got her immersed in the local arts scene. She knew artists. She knew patrons. She was surrounded by like-minded art lovers. Then Leiter and her husband moved to Florida.

“I missed my community,” she said. “I knew nobody. I was looking for the community of artisans, artists, like I had back home. I felt the community of artists was pretty splintered at the time. I felt alone.”

Leiter is also a jewelry designer.

“I was selling my jewelry at the Norton Museum (of Art) gift shop,” she said.

And at Gallery Five in Tequesta. Still, making jewelry and dropping off new items at shops “I felt very alone,” Leiter said.

Yeah, she joined the arts organizations. But, artists can be cagey.

Then came the moment of unexpected inspiration artists and entrepreneurs alike live for. The Leiters went to the ArtiGras Fine Arts Festival in Jupiter. “We went to the tent of an emerging artist,” Leiter said. “There was no one in this young man’s tent. His art was phenomenal.”

So she started giving him her experiential tips on what he was doing right and how to attract more attention and explain himself to more art lovers. “Then he said, ‘Lady, who are you,’” Leiter said.

At first Leiter was embarrassed. She thought she’d overstated her conversational welcome.

“He said, ‘Turn around,’” Leiter reminisced. “There were about 15, 20 people listening to me talk about his artwork.”

That got Leiter’s attention.

“My husband, Jeff, said this is the happiest I’ve seen you in a year,” Leiter said. “You need to go back to art consulting.”

Leiter theorized that what the local and regional visual arts scene needed wasn’t a consultant, but an evangelist, someone to get artists and their organizations talking about the exciting things they were planning. “I went to organizations and said I’ll promote your events,” she said. “They were afraid someone would steal ideas. I said this is a different sandbox. In this sandbox everybody plays together.”

With her disarming, candid, conversational style, Leiter convinced folks to talk to her about their parts in the local arts industry. Yes, art is an economic industry built on one of humanity’s most primal urges – the desire to share, learn and grow from one another’s ideas that we see even in 60,000-year-old cave art.

“People don’t understand how much money arts brings in to even little towns and cities,” Leiter said.

Among those The Rickie Report is popular with, Leiter said, are people realizing they can launch into exciting second careers with their art.

Arguably one of the most famous late-life artists is former President George W. Bush. His portraits of veterans, for example, have been published in a book and exhibited at the John F Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

“When people retire, they don’t die,” Leiter said. “They reinvent themselves, or they move and reinvent themselves. Emerging (older) artists can get a lot out of The Rickie Report.”