

IN A NEW LIGHT CAMPAIGN



OUR DONORS

Opening Doors, Reaching Out

BMA donors Jim and Lorayne Thornton are supporting family programming with real impact

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"Baltimore is very fortunate and so are we," says donor and BMA Trustee Jim Thornton. "We have a museum that's progressive in its thinking, with solid leadership, a strong board, and great programs."

So when Jim and his wife, Lorayne, thought about what kind of contribution they wanted to make to the BMA—and how their gift could have true impact—their thoughts turned to Baltimore City

Schools, where the opportunities are greatest but the outreach must be strategic to be truly effective.

"We're strong advocates of free admission," Jim says. "It opens the Museum's doors to people who might not ever attend." Indeed, since the BMA began offering free admission to the public, 42 percent of visitors are first-timers, and participation in family programs has gone up 90 percent.

One of the areas that the campaign seeks to bolster is family programming. The Museum is currently recruiting a manager to develop and enhance family learning.

But the Thorntons wanted to take family programming one step further. "We've been talking on the board about the importance of reaching families," Jim says. "But in communities where families are nontraditional—in the families that are

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most difficult to reach—how do we get them involved?”

It’s an issue that’s familiar to Lorayne, who worked for many years in Baltimore’s public school system and understands the inherent difficulties. “I’ve come to the conclusion that if a child is excited, then that’s a catalyst for the parent,” she says. “Let’s face it—a child can motivate parents better than anybody.”

The Thorntons realized that a way to reach those families who might not ordinarily take advantage of Museum activities is to spark the interest of children in their schools.

The BMA is now developing a pilot program that targets several Baltimore schools for partnerships and plans to work directly with the schools to create programs for families.

Jim and Lorayne are pleased to be active at the BMA, a passion they came to later in life. “I hadn’t envisioned myself as a patron of the arts,” says Jim. He and Lorayne grew up in Alabama, and Jim was the first in his family to attend college. Both say they never really thought about art until they took a college humanities course. They were also impressed by Hale Woodruff’s renowned murals in the library at their alma mater, Talladega College.

“This is a great example of how one of our donor’s philanthropic goals matched the Museum’s vision,” says BMA Director Doreen Bolger. “It really is a perfect fit.”

“Museums can be overwhelming if you don’t feel as if you belong,” Jim says. “We would like to inspire families to become more engaged and help them become more well-rounded. We’re hoping that through education and outreach, we can reduce barriers and really allow people to appreciate the world of art.”