

» Interview *Evansville*

# Arts Smarts

A former attorney with a passion for the arts shares her vision for Evansville's arts community

**NOLA F. WRIGHT** became the new director of the Arts Council of Southwestern Indiana in August 2011, two years after moving to Evansville from Kansas with her husband, Richard Coates. The former attorney always has been involved in the arts and was excited to immerse herself into the Evansville arts community.

Now that Wright has had time to settle into her position, she tells *Evansville Living* how she got here, what the new role means to her, and what she hopes to accomplish for the Arts Council.

**CITY VIEW: Your bachelor's degree is in theater. What made you decide to become an attorney?**

**NOLA WRIGHT:** When I graduated in May of 1980, I wasn't quite sure what to do, so I took a temporary job as an assistant to a judge. After a year of watching trials and attorneys at work, I thought "I can do this," so I applied to law school, took out a student loan, and a whole other career blossomed — although it isn't that farfetched; I just went from one stage to another. I have always been a trial attorney, which requires intense study and memorization, speaking extemporaneously, being persuasive, and connecting with an audience, so my theatrical training served me extremely well.

**CV: You had a successful career in law for 30 years. What brought you back to art?**

**NW:** I had been working as an assistant attorney general for the Attorney General of Kansas in the criminal division, which meant I tried major felony cases (homicides, sex crimes, domestic/child abuse) across the state of Kansas, when my husband accepted a position with Fifth Third Bank. Because my daughter was still in high school, I remained in Kansas while he relocated to Evansville. (My daughter) went to college in 2009, so I moved to Evansville — not having a clue what I was going to do. I did, however, join the Arts Council. After getting settled, I received a job of-

fer in Owensboro, Ky., to work as an in-house attorney for a manufacturing business, but the commute was exhausting. I became aware that the executive director position was going to be open at the Arts Council and I thought, "Why not?"

**CV: What is your impression of Evansville as an arts community?**

**NW:** In my experience, for a community this size, the amount of talent and the breadth and depth of variety of that talent is very impressive. There are many well-respected and established artists here — in literacy, performing arts, and visual arts. To have two nationally acclaimed universities that excel in the arts is simply amazing for a town this size. And Evansville has the best arts patrons I have ever had the pleasure of meeting. They have longevity, they are consistently generous, and without them, the arts would dry up and blow away.

**CV: What are your goals for the Arts Council?**

**NW:** The perception in the community, I believe, is that the Arts Council is primarily focused on the visual arts, which is an easy assumption because we have this wonderful art gallery where we sponsor and present different art exhibitions. But we are just as dedicated to the performing arts, music, acting, and to the written word. So, my immediate goal has been to



**A NEW PATH:** After a 30-year career in law, Kansas transplant Nola F. Wright finds herself at home in the company of an arts community.

"brand" the Arts Council, to get our name out there as much as we can, so the public knows about the gallery and what we do. I'd like us to be an integral part of the Bicentennial celebration with our art Fair, ART (June 8-9). Long term goals are to have our Mayor Arts Award party become the most coveted invitation of the social season, to be featured as the Place to Volunteer in *Evansville Living*, and to increase involvement of people from all diverse backgrounds and cultures in the social art scene. I'd also like to increase artistically purposed educational opportunities for young people outside the classroom.

**CV: Are there advancements in art you would like to see in Evansville?**

**NW:** I would love each art organization to embrace the concept of working together on projects and to communicate and cooperate with less duplication and to generate excitement on joint projects without competition for funds and resources. We should have the goal of making Southwest Indiana a destination, so that thousands of people who live here visit here see this as a really fun and inviting place to live, work, and play.

— Wendy