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Farms resident leading Scarab Club into the future

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When his presidency began in 2014, Duncan Campbell wasn't concerned about the Scarab Club's programming. Its rich offerings – including concerts, lecture series, art openings, social events, sketch sessions and more – were doing well.

What the Grosse Pointe Farms resident was concerned about was public awareness.

Housed in a three-story, red brick house built in 1928, the Scarab Club sits quietly across the street from the Detroit Institute of Arts. Since joining the club “seven or eight years” ago, Campbell has watched people walk by, but few stop in. He decided during his presidency, he would change that.

“Last year we did a whole rebranding campaign, which really captures what the Scarab Club is: We know Detroit by art,” he said, adding the efforts also included a new logo and website, as well as “making the organization more streamlined, more effective to promote artists and programs.”

Not only does the Scarab Club offer more programming now than it ever has, but membership is up from 280 to 380, he said.

“We've never been above 300 members in our whole history, in 110 years,” Campbell said. “We're a 501c3 nonprofit that's open to the public to visit and open to the public to join.”

While Campbell has a lifelong love of art history and considers himself a “museum junkie,” his involvement with the Scarab Club began when his wife bought a gift membership for him when they moved back to his hometown 10 years ago. Since his presidency, not only has membership grown, but the iconic building has seen physical improvements as well. Along with hiring an executive director – which the club was without more than a year – he revamped the board, too, “bringing expertise to the board to make it a more effective organization as we move forward.”

Campbell, who earned Bachelor of Arts degrees in art history and history from the University of Colorado, as well as studied at the American University of Rome, earned a Master of Business Administration degree from Michigan State University and currently is pursuing a master's degree in art history from Wayne State University.



Photo by Stephen Rinaldi Duncan Campbell

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His business background includes working in computerized office systems, politics, real estate and business. He started his own company, Mapping Solutions, 21 years ago.

“We help clients understand who their customers are, where they live, where they shop, where they travel,” he explained. “We help our customers with franchise and distribution areas.”

His volunteerism is almost as diverse, having served a variety of capacities in years past, including scout leader and campaign manager. Currently, aside from the Scarab Club, Campbell is on the Associates of the American Wing Board of Directors, a docent at the DIA and president of the Grosse Pointe Farms Foundation.

“The Farms Foundation is very dedicated to making Grosse Pointe a better place to live,” he said, adding past projects have included adding shade canopies and a firepit to the Farms pool area, as well as bringing a dog park to the city. This year, it’s working on building a family gazebo at Kerby Field.

Despite various commitments, Campbell said the Scarab Club is his biggest labor of love. He has big plans for its future including reducing its debt, building its capital reserves and making it more community friendly by adding high-speed internet and coffee service.

“We want to make it more of a place to gather,” he said. “When we’re hanging a new show and you have all this artwork ready to go on the walls or when you walk into a chamber concert ! it’s just magical. The basement sketch areas, when there’s a live model and 25 people sketching away, or there’s a jazz or blues concert and they come in to rehearse, you can just feel the artistic vitality throughout the building.”

Campbell and his wife, Maura, have three children – ages 31, 29 and 22.

While family also is important, he believes in the importance of giving back as well.

“We’ve all been so blessed,” he said. “We have to involve ourselves to make the world a better place. You’ve got to be engaged; just keep moving forward.

“It’s really important to be engaged in downtown Detroit, too,” he continued. “I’ve never seen Detroit as exciting as it is. I’ve never seen this dynamism in downtown Detroit. All these pieces are starting to come together to make Detroit very exciting.”

For more information about the Scarab Club, visit scarabclub.org.
