



2022-2023

ANNUAL REPORT





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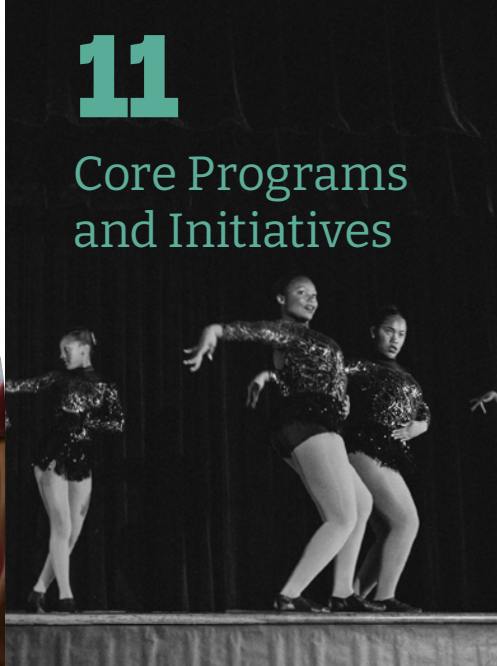


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CREATING A PLACE OF BELONGING

Nestled in the heart of Jackson, Mississippi, in 1929, a European immigrant breathed life into his dream, opening a bake shop that would later evolve into a cherished restaurant. Years down the line, his granddaughter's fondest memories were of laughter-filled Sunday gatherings, in the vibrant banquet hall of the restaurant.

This very restaurant, now under the management of MMI Restaurant Alliance, proudly claims its position as a cornerstone in Mississippi's collective memory. A statement from MMI on the restaurant's website reads, "We look forward to building on this legacy that has been part of the lives and memories of Mississippians for generations." This statement caught my attention and stirred my emotions.

It felt like a splinter, begging for introspection about the way I lead Griot. To fully understand the significance, let me first provide some context.

My father often painted a vivid mosaic of tales about growing up in Jackson during the 1950s. He would talk about his father's shoe shop on Ferris Street, where a federal building now stands after an inexplicable, rampant fire burned it down. From memories as a diligent busboy cleaning tables at the age of six to days spent as a caddy at the local country club, his stories were endless. Attending workshops with Freedom Riders, participating in protests, and having the honor of shaking hands with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. -- these memories were powerful yet bittersweet experiences that shaped his view of the place he called home.

Among my father's stories, the tale of the restaurant on 4330 N. State Street was the most memorable. As he would say, "If you didn't have a mop and a bucket, don't go there; you'll end up missing." We'd laugh, but behind that humor was a way to cope with trauma.

So, why share this?

Because, this restaurant that my father didn't dare step inside is the same one opened by a European immigrant in 1929 and cherished by so many Mississippians. What was a haven for a European immigrant and his family was a den of fear for my Dad. This juxtaposition underlines the profound difference of how spaces can offer belonging for some people while excluding others.



This is one of the reasons why, after serving as the Executive Director of Griot Arts for the past year, I've come to understand that the essence of our mission hinges on a single, vital concept: **belonging.**

John Powell, Director of the Othering & Belonging Institute at the University of California, Berkeley underscores belonging as the right to contribute, co-create, and be recognized for one's unique gifts. Inspired, I've steered Griot Arts to be more than just arts, education, and workforce development. It's a haven where we work to ensure that everyone -- board member, staff, or community member -- feels a sense of belonging. We live out our mission with a sense of urgency because when people don't feel they belong, they leave our community in search of it. My dad was one of them. While he journeyed away from Mississippi to find belonging, I've returned with a resolve: to nurture a place of belonging here.

Creating a culture where people feel they belong is similar to crafting a piece of art -- it requires several different paintbrushes to make the vision come to life. Similarly, it takes different skills and talents of each team and community member to actualize a belonging community. We work to bring these skills and talents together by consistently seeking feedback from program participants and community members. As the Executive Director of Griot Arts I wholeheartedly embrace the philosophy of "practice what you preach." We conduct bi-monthly staff meeting surveys to assess the effectiveness of our meetings to ensure that we are continuously adapting and evolving to meet the needs of our team. When people feel heard and their opinions are valued, the result is maximized commitment, engagement, and a culture that hinges on diverse contributions to build a community where everyone truly belongs. Creating such a culture is like walking a tightrope -- challenging and demanding precise balance. My motivation, however, is unwavering, driven by the profound impact that a genuine sense of belonging can have on someone's life and the thriving community it can create.

We have witnessed the positive effects of this approach as we watch our students embrace diversity in thoughts, opinions, and interests instead of othering. Community members are "creating some good" and utilizing Meraki as a sanctuary for collaboration and innovation. Surveys reveal parents' and guardians' satisfaction with the growth they see as a result of their child's participation in after-school programs at Griot. And, there has been a noticeable uptick in community events and flourishing partnerships through Griot. All of this has come as a result of our commitment to create a sense of belonging at Griot for everyone who walks through our doors.

As you review this report, every achievement and milestone you come across is a testament to our dedication to this central value at Griot Arts: creating a space where everyone can proudly declare, **"I belong here."**

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Rebekah Pleasant-Patterson". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Rebekah Pleasant-Patterson
Griot Arts Inc. Executive Director



OUR MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

At Griot Arts, our mission is to empower young people in Clarksdale, Mississippi, to create positive change in their lives and community by providing opportunities in the arts, education, and workforce development in a Christ-centered environment.

We envision a world where every individual experiences a sense of belonging and connection. Our goal is to create environments where individuals feel accepted, valued, connected, secure and have a sense of purpose, support, the chance to contribute and succeed.

We have three pillars:

**Creativity, Community,
& Compassion.**

Creativity is the cornerstone of our mission. We define creativity as creative expression, which stretches beyond traditional art forms to include problem-solving, courage, imagination, and the harnessing of self-expression to bring ideas to life. You can see creativity in everything we do here at Griot.

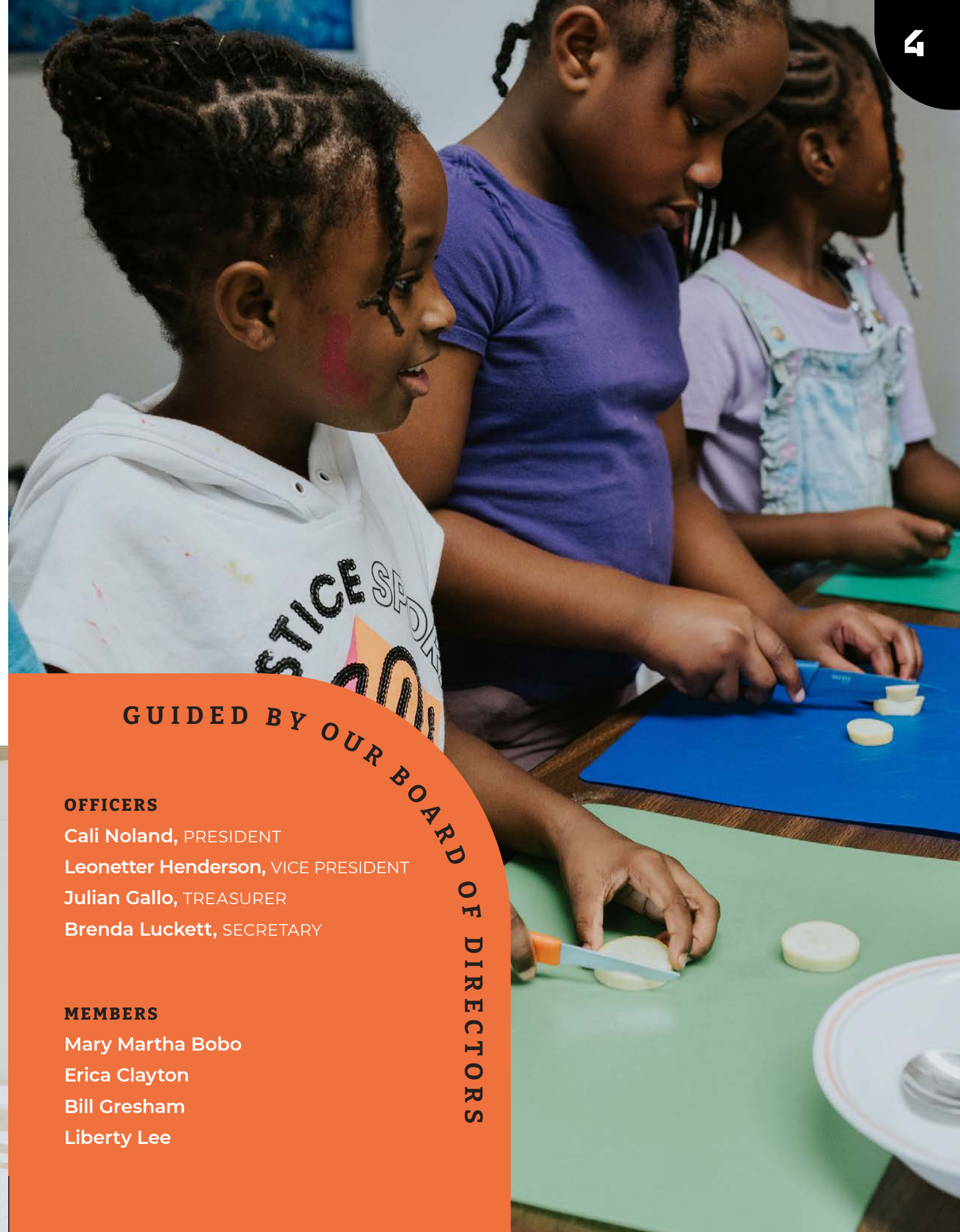
We aim to cultivate a well-rounded **community** by providing supportive services, being a supportive community partner, and building networks of partnerships to increase resources for community members.

Whether it's through access to a commercial kitchen, community events that bring people together, or a dance

studio for starting a fitness business, because we are a community partner, we share our resources to assist community members in removing barriers keeping them from succeeding.

Schools Involved: 23 schools, showing our extended impact in the education sector through these collaborations.

Griot defines **compassion** as the emotional response to another's pain, leading to a desire to take action. We prioritize approaching compassion with the goal of removing barriers rather than fulfilling a self-serving or savior mentality. There is a quote that says, "If it doesn't include me, it was never about me." At Griot, we strive to remove barriers by listening to our community.



GUIDED BY OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

OFFICERS

Cali Noland, PRESIDENT

Leonetter Henderson, VICE PRESIDENT

Julian Gallo, TREASURER

Brenda Luckett, SECRETARY

MEMBERS

Mary Martha Bobo

Erica Clayton

Bill Gresham

Liberty Lee

WHAT GRIOT MEANS TO OUR TEAM

Griot's mission keeps me going because a lot of times throughout my life I noticed that young people in Clarksdale didn't have anything to do to keep them out of trouble. Through my role at Merkaki, I'm helping to be part of a solution to that problem.



EUGENE WILSON
ROAST MASTER

I do this work because I am passionate about collaborating in a positive environment, with positive people with a vision that creates a healthy space for everyone.



WILSHERIE HOPSON
PROGRAM MANAGER

Working at Griot for two years right after I finished college has shaped the way I see work and community - each day is an opportunity to collaborate, create community-centric change.



ANNA CARSON
PROGRAM MANAGER

I am passionate about empowering young people by providing them with valuable skills and opportunities for personal growth.



ANTRIS PERKINS
MERAKI BUSINESS MANAGER

Through Griot, I can enact my personal mission of creating opportunities and connecting people to resources that empower them to grow in and discover their purpose.



BEN LEWIS
DEVELOPMENT AND FINANCE DIRECTOR

My passion for this work stems from a deeply rooted understanding of the transformative power of the arts, especially in communities with limited resources like the Mississippi Delta.



JAVETTE WHITE
DANCE AND MOVEMENT DIRECTOR

The work that I do at Griot is a calling. I always like to refer to the children as being like clay when they come to Griot. Here, we mold them in a way that improves their overall happiness and self-esteem.



CASANDRA BANKS
EDUCATION SPECIALIST

INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP

OUR LEADERSHIP REFLECTS THE CITY'S RACIAL MAKEUP (56.25% BLACK, 43.75% WHITE), ENSURING DECISIONS ARE INFORMED BY A WIDE SPECTRUM OF PERSPECTIVES.

SEPTEMBER

- Griot After School Open House
- First day of new After School Programs

AUGUST

- Hired Programs Director Anna Carson
- Began Dance Studio Renovation

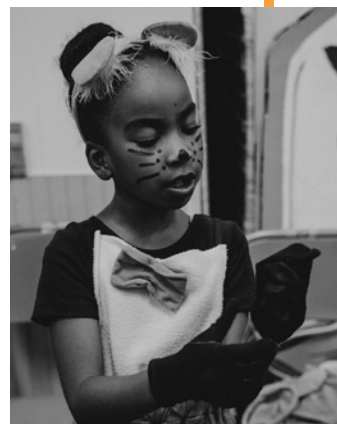
OCTOBER

- Community Breast Cancer Awareness Event
- Community Event in Partnership with PHA
- Downtown Trick-Or-Treating



NOVEMBER

- Partnership with "Stars in Motion" Nutcracker in Hernando, MS
- Griot Day of Giving



DECEMBER

- Clarksdale Christmas Parade
- Two Christmas Performances in partnership with CCC and First Presb.
- African Dance and Drumming Class at Delta Art Alliance
- Christmas Showcase
- Staff Christmas Party
- Partner StoryWorks Theater Showcase



JANUARY

- Added Dance Class to the Class Roster
- Parent Town Hall Meeting
- Meraki Team Professional Development
- Matilda Dance Auditions

FEBRUARY

- Sweat It Out: Community Heart Health Awareness Day
- Black History Workshop Series
- Chapel Hill Church Performance
- George H. Oliver Black History Performance
- Kaih, New Meraki Intern Joined the Team
- Meraki Spoken Word Event



APRIL

- Juke Joint Writing and Art Festival: We had three Griot Award Winners!
- Juke Joint Festival Creative Classes for Adults
- Meraki Team Professional Development

MAY

- Griot Arts Afterschool Dance Program Professional Picture Day in Costumes
- Magnum Opus: A week-long culminating event showcasing the progress and achievements of each class over the course of the year.
- Aspen Opportunity Youth Forum in Austin Texas

MARCH

Annual Fundraiser "A night Among the Stars" Red Carpet event in Partnership with Delta Dirt held. Largest annual fundraiser in Griot Ars Inc. history with \$73,000 raised.

JUNE

- Held Two Summer Camps
- Hired New Programs Manager Wilshere Hopson
- Griot Staff Professional Developments
- Meraki Family Night Screen on the Green

JULY

- Dance Summer Intensive for All Returning Students
- Griot Staff Professional Developments



31 PARTNER EVENTS

Hosted in our spaces, highlighting our commitment to communal sharing and support for a variety of local endeavors.

30 DIVERSE PARTNERSHIPS FORMED

Thirty partnerships that underscore the role of Griot's facilities in fostering collaboration and community service beyond our immediate activities.

5 FIELD TRIPS

Expanding the educational and cultural experiences available to our youth.

23 SCHOOLS INVOLVED

Twenty-three schools, showing our extended impact in the education sector through these collaborations.

34 GRIOT-HOSTED EVENTS

Further illustrating our central role in community celebrations and gatherings.



GRIOT REIMAGINED

THIS YEAR FOR GRIOT ARTS HAS BEEN ONE OF REIMAGINING, REINVENTING, AND REGROUNDING.

Our ultimate goal has always been to serve the whole child through the arts. While our old model was working, we realized our community needed more and there was more we could provide.

In the past, students could come to Griot and be exposed to a variety of arts classes, but there wasn't a track system in place for them to follow and grow in that discipline. Students were also required to come daily, which significantly limited the number of students Griot could reach. And importantly, our programming was only designed for after school students, not the broader community.

One of the deepest values we hold is honoring our students' inherent dignity and value. They come to us already full of natural talent and abilities. Our job is to help shepherd them as they develop these skills and sharpen their talents. We asked ourselves, "How can we do this better?"

THIS IS WHEN THE REIMAGINING BEGAN.

First, our team made the decision to shift how we offered our programs. Instead of students taking a wide array of arts classes throughout the week, we asked them to pick the ones they wanted to focus on and grow in most. Whether it's dance, music, or painting, our students are empowered to choose their path and excel at it. We offer art classes Monday through Thursday. The rest of the week is spent on supporting them and helping them overcome any hurdles that were holding them back from flourishing.

HERE IS WHERE WE REINVENT.

We began offering bridge services in an effort to connect community members to resources that will help remove the barriers that hold them back from achieving their creative endeavors.

BRIDGE SERVICES EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT: 70 OFFERINGS, PROVIDING TAILORED SUCCESS PATHS FOR 33 INDIVIDUALS, MAKING A DIRECT IMPACT IN A CITY WITH AN EMPLOYED POPULATION OF 7,538.

For example, realizing that a child cannot reap the full benefits of an arts class if they are failing one of their in-school classes. A parent might understandably keep a child home from dance in order to work on improving their grades. A student might be distracted in music with concerns of falling behind in math or not having a high enough ACT score to get into college. Our response to that was to offer tutoring and ACT prep for our students after school on days also provide GED assistance, internship placement services and workforce development trainings. These are not separate missions that we're trying to carry out, but rather a pulling together of all the strands that need to be braided for our students to fully thrive in a cohesive way. Birthed from this idea was also the concept that

we should start offering adult classes such as wellness and fitness classes. If we can meet the indirect needs of the child by giving their parents the opportunity to move and get creative, we are then better supporting our children by supporting the adults who care for them.

NOW, WE HAVE REGROUNDED.

We are regrounded in creativity, which is the cornerstone of our mission. We define creativity as creative expression, which stretches beyond traditional art forms to include problem-solving, courage, imagination, and the harnessing of self-expression to bring ideas to life. You can see creativity in everything we do at Griot. We've regrounded ourselves in community, which we aim to cultivate by providing supportive services, being a supportive community partner, and building networks of partnerships to increase resources for community members.

We've regrounded ourselves in compassion, which we see as the emotional response to another's pain, leading to a desire to take action. We prioritize approaching compassion with the goal of removing barriers rather than fulfilling a self-serving or savior mentality. With this regrounding guiding us, we look to move forward and continue creating some good.





GRIOT ARTS CENTER AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM

This vibrant program offers an array of daily after-school arts classes tailored for young artists aged 3-18. Our aim is not just to teach art but to impart excellence in training across diverse art disciplines. We are passionate about guiding students to do more than pass time; we instill in them a dedication to developing and refining a skill set that can open doors to greater economic possibilities or scholarship opportunities for further education. The journey to proficiency at Griot Arts Center is about more than artistic development; it's about nurturing life skills that empower our students to persevere and excel.

128 ADULT CLASSES OFFERED, indicating a robust adult education program that is an integral part of the community's lifelong learning journey.



MERAKI ROASTING CO

A program tailored for young adults aged 16 to 24, designed to cultivate a nurturing environment that enhances the development of essential soft skills, paving the way for their next career advancement.



BRIDGE SERVICES

Bridge Services is a dynamic support network designed to assess, bridge knowledge gaps and facilitate the sharing of information, in true Griot fashion, across various domains of education including academics and life skills. It stands as the heartbeat of our organization, emphasizing the importance of a community in which every individual is supported—not just equipped—in their endeavors. Alongside, our Community Activities offer a rich variety of classes in dance, fitness, and other engaging pursuits, with inclusive programs through a partnership with Creative Minds Academy specifically dedicated to individuals aged 55 and older. By providing the connective tissue of consistent and comprehensive assistance, Bridge Services ensures that everyone has access to the necessary resources to confidently face life's challenges and progress toward their goals.



IN THE FUTURE

This year, Griot Arts Inc. focus on vital back-end operations with our building expansion. We received invaluable support from Alembic Community Development whose expertise was made possible through the Mississippi Heritage Trust. This resource has played a pivotal role in elevating the maturity, credibility, and quality of our dreams for the space. As we move forward, we're poised to initiate a thorough cleanup of our building, which is a pivotal step in realizing our vision. We have also aligned with a financial developer who shares our commitment to Griot values, ensuring that our work remain rooted in purpose and integrity. Upon completion, all of our current programming will move to the new building.

CORE PROGRAMS

AND INITIATIVES

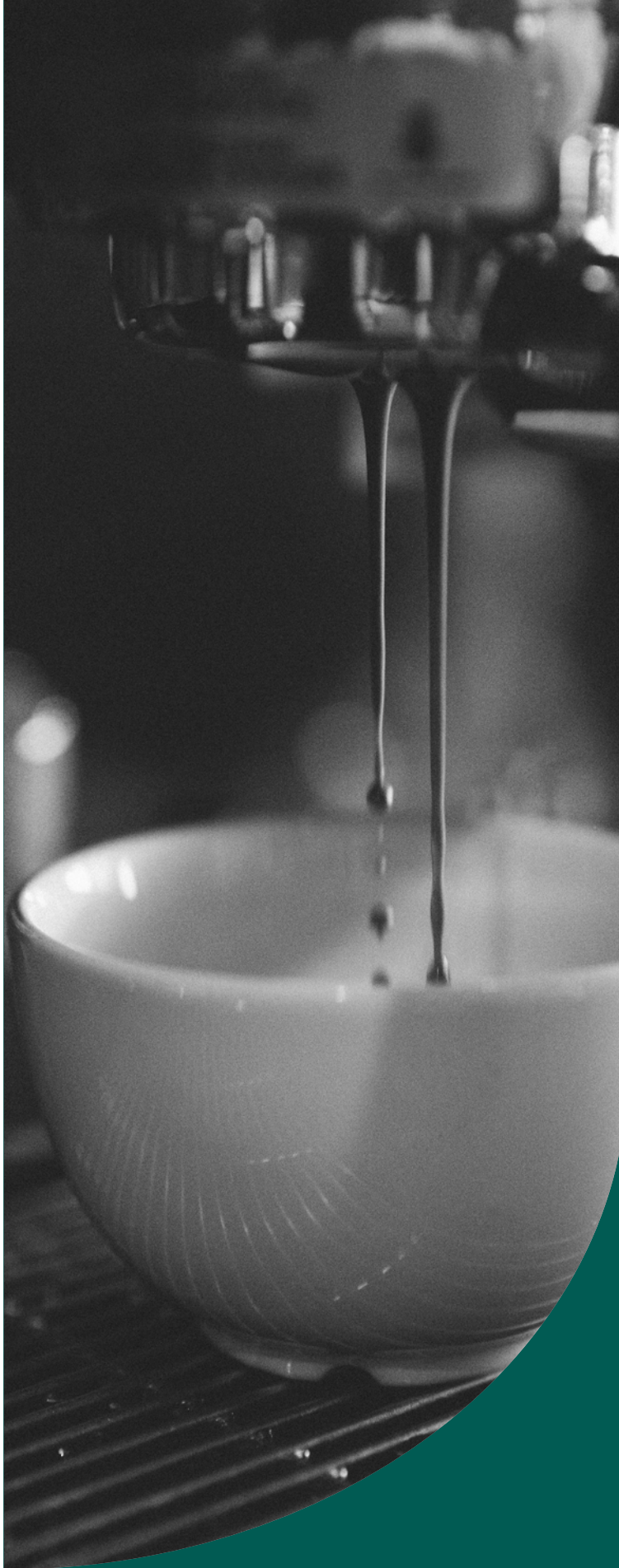
MERAKI ROASTING CO: EMPOWERING THROUGH WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

MUH · RAH · KEE (V.)
TO DO SOMETHING WITH SOUL, CREATIVITY AND LOVE; TO PUT A PIECE OF YOURSELF INTO YOUR WORK.

Every day ambitious young people come to work at Meraki Coffee Roasters to learn to roast coffee while building skills that will help them come closer to finding their God-given calling. While we are making excellent coffee, we teach young people in Clarksdale what it means to work with the Meraki ideals: to put soul, creativity, and love into their work. Through small batch roasting, Meraki Coffee Roasters produces excellent coffee. And beyond that, Meraki has become a community hub where people come together to foster ideas, co-work creatively, and grow together. Small business such as Sweet Tooth Teddy and Lil Sistas have incubated their dreams here, taking their start-ups from a concept to a full blown reality. Below, hear from a former Meraki fellow and a former Meraki intern about what their experiences meant to them.

Fred Monroe, 2022-2023 Meraki Fellow: I've gotten a lot out of being a barista at Meraki and going through the program -- not only learning the difference between coffee, but getting to know customers personally. I got to see everything that they do. It gives the community a lot of opportunities and I'm glad I got to be a part of that. Going out there and being the best person I can be is really the biggest lesson I learned from them. That's helping me a lot right now both in my job at Clarksdale Collegiate and with a TV show I'm in the process of writing.

Kaih Whitfield, 2022-2023 Meraki Intern: Working at Griot has given me an opportunity to do something that I've never done before. Rebekah gave me the chance to become a Marketing and Sales Intern and I had never done anything like that before. It opened up a whole new range of experiences for me. I learned different skills and then after my internship was over they kept me on. I also started working on the Griot side with the kids two days a week, which I never thought I would be doing, but I love it. Griot leadership creates a family environment where they care more about their employees than anything else. I've loved being at Griot. It's family to me.



New Meraki Partner
Theodore and
LaTanthony Strong
of Sweet
Tooth Teddy



CUSTOMERS SERVED
2,609
patrons, signaling
strong community
engagement.

DRINKS SOLD
14,379
beverages, reflecting the
popularity and integration of
Meraki in daily community life.

REVENUE FOR LOCAL CREATORS
\$42,357.82
generated specifically for local creators
and artists, underlining Meraki's role as
a catalyst for artistic and entrepreneurial
endeavors within Clarksdale.

GRIOT BY THE NUMBERS



2022 - 2023 FINANCIAL STATEMENT

	Aug 2021 - Jul 2022	Aug 2022 - Jul 2023
Revenue		
Grants	\$329,096.35	\$308,082.01
Donations	\$121,417.19	\$157,173.75
Arts Tuition	\$1,974.00	\$16,403.93
Meraki Cafe	\$197,579.97	\$180,622.08
Total Revenue	\$650,067.51	\$662,281.77
Expenses		
Meraki Cafe	\$148,773.15	\$135,101.29
Meraki Stipends	\$69,328.52	\$71,859.33
Staff Development	\$14,594.56	\$19,443.28
Fundraising Costs	\$5,117.85	\$12,189.28
Program Costs	\$161,295.80	\$312,632.61
Administrative	\$184,777.17	\$187,134.48
Facilities	\$54,587.80	\$81,101.26
Total Expenses	\$638,474.85	\$819,461.53
Reserve Balance	\$90,421.43	\$47,494.81

Our total expenses were strategically higher this year as we intentionally invested in pilot programs, staffing capacity, and overall growth. This investment was intentionally made as we prepare to expand into our new building. We have been proud to see our students flourish as a result of this investment and look forward to stewarding this new trajectory.



108

STUDENTS SERVED



295.5

TOTAL HOURS OF ARTISTIC CLASSES



13

UNIQUE WEEKLY CLASSES OFFERED



81

FAMILIES ENGAGED



EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT OFFERINGS THROUGH BRIDGE SERVICES



PEOPLE SERVED THROUGH BRIDGE SERVICES



ADULT CLASSES OFFERED THROUGH BRIDGE SERVICES



30
PARTNERSHIPS



70
EVENTS

MAKING AN IMPACT

“

MY DAUGHTER ALREADY LIKED ART, BUT PARTICIPATING IN GRIOT REALLY BROUGHT OUT AND FOSTERED HER LOVE FOR IT. SHE IS A SHY CHILD AND I THINK THAT GOING TO GRIOT HAS MADE HER GROW AND MADE HER MORE PRONE TO OPENING UP. FOR MY CHILDREN TO BE ABLE TO GO TO GRIOT NOW MAKES ME SO HAPPY TO KNOW THEY HAVE THAT OPTION. SOME CHILDREN ARE SO TALENTED BUT THEY DON'T HAVE ACCESS TO THESE TYPES OF CLASSES OR TO A TEACHER WHO CAN BRING IT OUT OF THEM.

- NANCY NEWSOM, PARENT

EDUCATIONAL IMPACT

108 STUDENTS ENGAGED THIS YEAR, MARKING A REMARKABLE 390% INCREASE FROM THE PREVIOUS YEAR'S 15, DEMONSTRATING A SIGNIFICANT COMMITMENT TO YOUTH DEVELOPMENT DESPITE A 3.73% POPULATION DECLINE.

ARTS AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT WEEKLY CLASSES:

13 UNIQUE WEEKLY CLASSES OFFERED CONSISTENTLY OVER 8 MONTHS, ENRICHING CLARKSDALE'S CULTURAL VITALITY AND ENGAGING A GROWING NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS.

TOTAL ARTISTIC INSTRUCTION:

295.5 HOURS OF CLASSES, SIGNIFYING A STRONG PRESENCE IN THE ARTS SECTOR, EVEN AS THE CITY NAVIGATES DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC CHANGES.

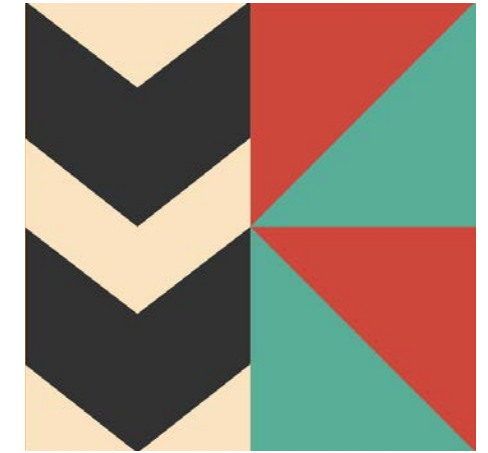
OUR GOALS

22-23



EXPAND OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY

Aim to increase community awareness and participation in Griot Arts programs by 20% over the next year. This could involve outreach campaigns, partnerships with local schools and community organizations, and targeted marketing efforts to reach new demographics, particularly focusing on those who may benefit most from the programs but are currently underrepresented.



ENHANCE PROGRAM QUALITY AND IMPACT

Develop and implement a comprehensive evaluation system to assess the effectiveness of all core programs, including Meraki Roasting Co, Griot Arts Center After School Program, and Bridge Services. The goal is to identify areas for improvement, measure the impact on participants' lives, and refine programs to ensure they align with the organization's mission of fostering belonging, creativity, and workforce development.

SECURE SUSTAINABLE FUNDING AND RESOURCES

Increase the organization's funding and resource base by 30% through diverse strategies such as grant applications, fundraising events, donor cultivation, and exploring new revenue-generating ventures. This will support the sustainability of existing programs and facilitate the potential launch of new initiatives aligned with the organization's evolving mission and community needs.



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DONATE TO OUR MISSION



THANK YOU

TO OUR 2022-2023 DONORS!

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Susan & Bowen Flowers
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Walton Family Foundation
Jack & Trish Denton
Clarksdale Garden Club
Philanthro Culture
Matt & Kristen Toombs
Patrick & Chanda Peay
Katherine & Rob Puckett
Lester & Carolyn Pleasant
Bill & Edna Gleason



“

TRUE BELONGING IS NOT PASSIVE. IT'S NOT THE BELONGING THAT COMES WITH JUST JOINING A GROUP. IT'S NOT FITTING IN OR PRETENDING OR SELLING OUT BECAUSE IT'S SAFER. IT'S A PRACTICE THAT REQUIRES US TO BE VULNERABLE, GET UNCOMFORTABLE, AND LEARN HOW TO BE PRESENT WITH PEOPLE WITHOUT SACRIFICING WHO WE ARE. WE WANT TRUE BELONGING, BUT IT TAKES TREMENDOUS COURAGE TO KNOWINGLY WALK INTO HARD MOMENTS.

- Brené Brown



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