**Heidi Fearing** [00:00:00] All right, I'll ask you one more time, could you state your name?

**Peggy Spaeth** [00:00:03] Sure, it's Peggy Spaeth.

**Heidi Fearing** [00:00:04] Okay. Could you give me some background information about yourself, including education, where you grew up?

**Peggy Spaeth** [00:00:11] Oh, okay. I grew up in Shaker Heights and... I don't know, what kind of background information do you want? About myself or about the organization?

**Heidi Fearing** [00:00:22] Oh, we'll get to the organization later. What, where did you go to school or.

**Peggy Spaeth** [00:00:28] I have a degree in art education from the Cleveland Institute of Art in Case Western Reserve University from 1972. But I never taught. I've just been involved in the arts all my life.

**Heidi Fearing** [00:00:42] Let's see. Do you live in Cleveland Heights now?

**Peggy Spaeth** [00:00:45] I do. I've been here forever.

**Heidi Fearing** [00:00:49] How did you become the executive director of Heights Arts?

**Peggy Spaeth** [00:00:52] Well, in 2000, the city of Cleveland Heights had embarked on a visioning process to assemble all the residents and talk about how Cleveland Heights would function, and would look, and would... how people would be living in Cleveland Heights in the future. And at the same time, some of us were talking about all of the... how rich Cleveland Heights and Northeast Ohio was in the arts. And we were, we were starting to investigate the possibility of creating an organization that tapped into the potential of the arts to positively impact community life. And as the city was doing their visioning process, we started going to meetings all over the city that they had convened and more and more people were talking about how important the arts were and what an asset they are not only to Cleveland Heights, but to the region and to the quality of life. So we felt very encouraged in our efforts to tap into the creative potential of the community. We made a laundry list of things we thought should happen. We wanted the streetscape to better reflect the creative community in the way it looked and felt. We wanted to have a gallery where we showed the high-quality local artists that lived here because sometimes people would be internationally known. But people, their neighbors didn't even know that they were well-regarded artists. And we also wanted to tap into the fact that about a third of the Cleveland Orchestra actually sleeps in Cleveland Heights every night when they're not on tour. And we wanted to better engage those creative musicians and musicians of other genre with people who live here. Well, so what's on our laundry list: public art, poetry, music, visual arts. So, every time there was another meeting in Cleveland Heights and people stood up and said, well, I think we should be called the city... Cleveland Heights should be, you know, not the Nuclear-free Zone, but the city of artists and things like that. We would invite those people to a meeting and we eventually formed a small group of people to create Heights Arts, which is and I stepped up to become the founder. Everybody else stepped back. I stepped up to be the founding director of Heights Arts. And so we've been operating ever since. We kind of checked off all of the things that we wanted to do. And it's been wonderful. Very. I think we've improved the quality of life in Cleveland Heights and we've supported local artists, which is very important for their sustainability. And we've positively impacted arts and education in the schools and just creating more of an awareness of how important the quality of life the arts are. We've also improved. I think we've done economic development by being essentially, even though we're a nonprofit, we're a small business right here on the street. It's yearly, and a lot of the business districts have recognized that public art can enhance their economic development, which is why we've worked hand in hand with Coventry Village and Cedar Fairmount and a little bit with the Cedar Lee business district to improve their streetscapes with attractive signage and benches and fences and public art.

**Heidi Fearing** [00:04:21] Well, you already answered my next question. I guess we're on to question four already. Could you talk a little bit about the Coventry street signs to begin with?

**Peggy Spaeth** [00:04:34] Oh, the Coventry street signs. Well, as I said, we... I have an awareness that how a business district or, you know, a residential neighborhood can be improved by good design and there are so many good graphic designers in our area, we suggested to the Coventry merchants and to merchants of other districts that part of branding their district and making it a destination is visual. And so we worked with them and we worked with the city to replace the traditional green and white street signs with something that's customized to that neighborhood. The merchants at the time wanted wanted to refer back to the history, kind of the hippie history. So those particular signs have are heavily flavored with the 1960s and '70s look. Some of the merchants, of course, wanted to kind of stay away from that history because there's ambivalence about the '60s rock and roll culture, so they just limited it to a couple of intersections. But we still think that there's a lot more that can be done in that business district with signage, funding permitting, of course.

**Heidi Fearing** [00:06:04] What about the Coventry fences?

**Peggy Spaeth** [00:06:08] Coventry Village obtained some funds for streetscape improvements. And they came to us and we suggested that they had in their budget that they could buy fences for their... what they're called, tree pits because little areas around trees that are... that they've turned into gardens have this unattractive name of tree pits. And so they had... They had in their budget that they would buy X number of tree pits for X number of dollars. And we said, why don't we just take those dollars and pay a local artist and design something that's unique to your business district. So we contracted with Brinsley Tyrrell, who lives in Kent, and he researched the history of Coventry and talked to a lot of people who went up and down the street. And he talked to all the old timers, new timers, and he delved into the history and he created a narrative of fences that goes down the street and they're wrought iron and each one is different and each one has a theme, beginning with prehistory, I mean, pre-economic history. Before it was even Coventry Village, when it was Woods. And so one of his fences reflects, you know, the wolves and the bears that used to live there. And then he incorporated some of the fences with businesses that when they when the business district transformed from a, you know, heavily Jewish neighborhood with a lot of delicatessens and bakeries. And in the '60s, when young entrepreneurs opened up. Bill Jones Leather Shop and Tommy's vegetarian restaurant and Coventry Cats and all that, well, so many of them are still there. So he put in some of the history of those particular businesses that started in the '60s. And some of them are still there today and some are simply memorialized in a fence. So it kind of runs the gamut. And the cool thing about it is that if you haven't come to Coventry Village, you can start at one end and you can engage in the narrative of the history of the street and read and look at the symbols on the fences as you go from one end to the other. So in a way, it creates a situation where a visitor like if you're just coming to have a milkshake st Tommy's, for example, you can follow that narrative down the street and maybe be drawn down to other businesses. So it's an economic development tool, as well as a narrative and history, as well as a good piece of art.

**Heidi Fearing** [00:08:43] I did notice one thing I love was there was a bicycle and that was I think it was really close to where Pee Wee's Bike Shop was.

**Peggy Spaeth** [00:08:53] Yeah, exactly Pee Wee's bikes. So, you know, the fences are there and they'll remind people of businesses that used to be there. Yeah.

**Heidi Fearing** [00:09:00] What about the benches?

**Peggy Spaeth** [00:09:01] The benches was kind of the same interesting story in that the Coventry merchants had a budget for benches. And once again, we said, well, what's your budget for benches? Because instead of just buying them from some off the Internet, some company that manufactures benches that are like benches in every city in the world, why don't we contract with the local artists to design something that's unique and reflective of your your street? And so we contracted with Raymond Bugelski, who when I called him, he had been recommended to me by Cleveland Public Art because he did a fence around a skateboard park downtown and they said, well, they recommended him. And when I called him, he said, well, I was just talking to somebody the other day about about the fact that Coventry just needs a little bit of, you know, sprucing up. They, they used to be so funky and it's getting a little maybe a little corporate looking. And so he was very eager to design the benches and we just love them. They're four different designs. One is the smiley face and one is yin and yang, a peace sign, which, of course, reflects back to the '60s culture. And what's the, I'm blanking on the fourth one. Red, yellow, blue. I can't remember, but anyways, he designed four very unique benches and very colorful colors, and there's no benches like that anywhere in the world. They're great.

**Heidi Fearing** [00:10:39] If you think of the last one.

**Peggy Spaeth** [00:10:41] Yeah.

**Heidi Fearing** [00:10:42] You can just blurt it out if you want. And what we really wanted to know for the Coventry tour was, to piece it all together, was the P.E.A.C.E. arch?

**Peggy Spaeth** [00:10:52] The P.E.A.C.E. arch. The P.E.A.C.E. arch was conceived when actually before Heights Art was fully formed and there had been a group formed through Coventry School called Coventry P.E.A.C.E. And I think P.E.A.C.E. stands for people enhancing a child's environment. They formed because they wanted to improve the playground at Coventry School and they had a grassroots committee that worked with the merchants in the neighborhood and they built that Coventry playground from scratch, which is one of the most creative and engaging playgrounds probably in the region. People come from all over bringing their kids to that. It has a somewhat dangerous slide, but I don't think they've lost any kids on that. It's very high and it's very fast. It's great. So I had been, my children went to Canterbury School, which is another elementary school in the district. And when we we didn't do quite as elaborate a playground, but we also built a playground from scratch because we were inspired by Coventry. And when we build our playground, I initiated an arts component. So we did a tile mural with the kids in the school. So the the Coventry people called me and said for some reason they thought that I had raised money for a soccer field. And they said, would you can you help us raise money for a soccer field? And I said, I think I really can't do that. I have no interest in soccer fields. But why aren't you incorporating art into your playground experience? And they said, well, that's an interesting idea. So I went and talked with them and we developed with the Ohio art with the help of the Ohio Arts Council, whom we applied for funds. We developed kind of a textbook public art call for artists and ideas. And so we involved the whole community in first inviting a select group of artists to show us their work and then selecting three artists and paying them a stipend to give us proposals. And then and we had a committee in all of our meetings were open to the public. And we invited those three artists to come to the Coventry Library and give us their ideas and draft models. And then the committee made a selection of Barry Gunderson, who is a sculptor who teaches at Kenyon College, to create the Coventry P.E.A.C.E. arch because it was our favorite and we raised the money through the Cleveland Foundation, the Ohio Arts Council. We had our first Tommy's pancake, New Year's wait. Tommy's New Year's Day Pancake Breakfast, and I think it was two thousand raised a couple of thousand dollars for the Coventry P.E.A.C.E. arch. And we had donations from various members of the community. And we raised the money and we, you know, paid Barry Gunderson. And one day he drove up on a flatbed truck with all the pieces and he erected Coventry Arch. And it's been there ever since. It's become I mean, part of it, part of the reasons for the decision to make the Coventry Arch, where we put it, was to use it as a gateway to the playground, and the school, and the library, and to become an iconic feature of the Coventry neighborhood, which it has become. And for several years, we ran a party in the Heights. We had concerts right there in that little area by the Coventry Arch. And we would have, you know, African dancing or a blues band or high school band. We had weekly every Thursday night. We had music, and now the Coventry merchants have taken that over and they do it, which is great. We love getting something started and then having somebody else do it. And they have movies there and concerts. And it's just become a real gathering place for the community because there's the arch, there's the schoolyard, there's a library, there's, you know, the whole business district. So it's got really everything. And it's all surrounded by a really beautiful residential neighborhood where you have people of diverse incomes who either rent to own their own homes. And it's just a very rich urban experience. Yeah.

**Heidi Fearing** [00:14:56] Could you describe the P.E.A.C.E. arch?

**Peggy Spaeth** [00:15:00] Sure, the Coventry Arch, I'm not sure how high it is, but it must be about 12, 12 feet high. And it's. [beeping sound as someone enters] We might want to stop because I think we have somebody... Hi, how are you? [recording is paused and then resumes] Yeah, the arch is about 12 feet high, and it's made of aluminum. So it will with... last any kind of weather. Barry Gunderson was very sensitive to the fact that we live in Cleveland and we have four seasons and we freeze. And we thaw and we get hot and cold and everything like that, so it's very durable to the weather. It has some textured elements that he so he embellished the service with, you know, stamping into it and grinding it and texturing and then rubbing some some paint into it. But it's basically silver and shiny and reflects the sun clean up against it on a hot day and, you know, feel the sunshine on it. And it's two figures. They're kind of, I think, have an art deco feeling to them, I think, which to me references the art deco bridge that goes over the river downtown, the Hope Memorial Bridge. And it's two figures, a male and a female, and they join hands at the top. And so the whole concept is to embody the feelings from the Coventry P.E.A.C.E. Park, which the original founders of the Coventry P.E.A.C.E. Playground wanted to convey. So it just is kind of a reinforcement of the concept that all kinds of people live here and and they live well together.

**Heidi Fearing** [00:16:36] Is there anything else that you think is interesting or that you?

**Peggy Spaeth** [00:16:41] You know, I can't think of anything.

**Heidi Fearing** [00:16:43] That's alright. What about like I noticed the. On Cedar Road, there was old bags that had been weaved into the fence.

**Peggy Spaeth** [00:16:54] Oh, that's a whole other public art project, Inspiration. I mean, I can talk about Fencepiration. I can talk about Knitscape. I can talk about the murals at Cedar and Fairmount, or the mural on the back of this building. We've done a lot of public art projects in town, so I don't know if you've noticed on at Cedar and Fairmount and either end of the Height's center building there's murals that are historical. Actually, because the artist took the photos from archives at the Cleveland Public Library. One's a trolley cars and one's an old storefront. So, I mean, there's I mean, we've done a lot of public art projects, including Fencepiration that that we could definitely talk about

**Heidi Fearing** [00:17:36] Whatever happened to the Fencepiration?

**Peggy Spaeth** [00:17:38] Well, Fencepiration was meant to be a temporary public art project. We first started it because they tore down the Cedar Center shopping center and it was really ugly. It looked like Dresden after the war. I mean, it was just a field of rubble and a very long field of rubble. And then they erected a construction fence. So just a chain-link fence with no. And then the economy crashed and the development, new development was stalled. And so driving by there, it was very depressing. And we didn't know when anything was going to happen. So we approached the developers and we suggested that we could enhance the chain-link fence. So we engaged Carol Humeau, who's an artist we worked with in the past, and who lives in Kent in the project, and we all came up with the idea of Fencepiration. So Carol and Debbie Apple-Presser, who both use recycled materials, started to run workshops throughout the South Euclid, University Heights and Cleveland Heights, which are all involved in that stretch of road. And we collected aluminum cans and plastic bags and rubber hoses and a lot of plastic bottles and under their direction and facilitated by Andrea Joki, our program coordinator, we created a landscape along the fence with flowers made out of recycled materials and a river made of blue trash bags. And it was always meant to be temporary because all of those materials are kind of fugitive. And it was on a road where you have, you know, ten thousand cars going by every day. So everything got kind of like covered with soot it was very gross. But but it really made people smile and it sparkled in the sun and it created a landscape on a chain-link fence overlooking a rubbled field that really improved the experience of either walking or driving by that shopping center for about a year and a half until they started building again and then we took it down. And recyclable all of the materials.

**Heidi Fearing** [00:19:58] That was. I really liked it when I drove by.

**Peggy Spaeth** [00:20:00] These are made by a biologist who these are made of water bottles.

**Heidi Fearing** [00:20:07] Oh!

**Peggy Spaeth** [00:20:07] Aren't they cool.

**Heidi Fearing** [00:20:08] I was, I was eyeballing them earlier.

**Peggy Spaeth** [00:20:11] Really? They did such a good job. Ours weren't quite so fancy. But ours were outdoors. Yeah.

**Heidi Fearing** [00:20:17] I love this one.

**Peggy Spaeth** [00:20:18] Yeah, I do too. It's pretty.

**Heidi Fearing** [00:20:23] Well, I ran out of questions that I had written down.

**Peggy Spaeth** [00:20:25] Okay.

**Heidi Fearing** [00:20:26] I was hoping to think of more along the interview, but I haven't been able to think of any more.

**Peggy Spaeth** [00:20:31] I think I covered, you know, what you're looking at, which is the Coventry Arch and, you know, using in general the way Coventry Village has used the arts to brand their district and to enhance their businesses. I think it's become a very unique shopping area, not only because of the businesses there, which are mostly local independent businesses, and the merchants are all very hands on and they're very involved in the community. But also they've used the arts and they've used local artists to make it look and feel unique and and cared about and imaginative. And it's an inspiration, I think, for people. And I think everybody else should follow their lead.

**Heidi Fearing** [00:21:16] Do you have future plans for this area? For Lee Road?

**Peggy Spaeth** [00:21:19] Lee Road has a streetscape plan that we were not involved in developing. So we have lots of ideas, but we don't really have any plans.

**Heidi Fearing** [00:21:31] Do you think someday your ideas might?

**Peggy Spaeth** [00:21:37] I would like that.

**Heidi Fearing** [00:21:38] Well, if you can't think of anything else, did you remember the bench?

**Peggy Spaeth** [00:21:42] Red, yellow, blue.

**Heidi Fearing** [00:21:48] Is it green?

**Peggy Spaeth** [00:21:49] No, did we only do three benches? Okay, we've got the, we've got the peace bench, which is blue. Its got its fingers like this. We've got the smiley face, which is right in front of Tommy's. Now, that's [inaudible]... It's yellow with a smiley face. We've got the red one that's in front of Hunan that's got the yin and yang. Gosh. Just go to my website.

**Heidi Fearing** [00:22:16] Sure.

**Peggy Spaeth** [00:22:18] It... Sure. The fourth bench is well, it's kind of reddish-purple or purplish, and it's a sun. A sunshine.