Meet the new leader at the Art Academy

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When Joan Kaup moved into her building in Over-The-Rhine about six years ago, she made Christmas cookies for her neighbors.

The Art Academy of Cincinnati was one. Ensemble and Know theaters too. And James, a street vendor.

Before The Art Academy on Jackson Street was Kaup’s neighbor, the almost 150-year-old academy was her “hero,” she said.

Kaup, an advocate for the OTR for more than 20 years, said the academy’s move from The Cincinnati Art Museum to the neighborhood 10 years ago was a “game-changer.”

Since this summer, Kaup has a new relationship with The Art Academy: employer and collaborator.

She joined the leadership team in May as vice president for institutional advancement. She now manages the development office, the office of external relationship and the department of community education.

Kaup jokes she has the world’s longest title, and shortest commute.

“My first opinion was that these guys rock,” she said about the academy. “They are bold, forward-thinking.”

Kaup is now charged with helping the academy students and staff connect with the neighborhood, she said.

And the benefits will go both ways, she said.

One example: The academy hosts poetry nights at the facility. Why not move it to a nearby coffee shop?

“If they start to share their art with the public, they are going to get a different reaction, which I think is a richer educational experience,” she said.

And it’s good for the businesses in the area. These students could be the next employees of nearby businesses, whether it’s in design or creative problem solving. Or they could be the next generation of Cincinnati business owners.

Kaup should know. She earned a master’s in entrepreneurship from Xavier (And a bachelor’s degree in marketing from University of Cincinnati, which means she can’t lose during the Crosstown Shootout.)

Before her role at the academy, Kaup worked as the founding executive director of Social Venture Partners. She was also the vice president of marketing for Downtown Cincinnati Incorpo rated and vice president of tourism for Greater Cincinnati Convention and Visitors Bureau.

She also serves on the OTR Community Council and has served on the OTR Chamber of Commerce.

And Kaup doesn’t just support the arts. She lives in an artwork. Her building boasts an ArtWorks mural by Kim Krause, a local painter. He also happens to be the associate dean and chief academic officer for the academy.

She always wanted a Krause painting — Kaup believes in buying real art from real artists, she says — and got the “biggest one in the city.”

“Now I bump into him in the hallway,” she said. “It’s so exciting.”

A perspective from the president

We asked John Sullivan, head of the Art Academy, to answer a couple of quick questions:

Why is Kaup the right person for this role?

“In conversation with our Board Development Committee, we established a profile for the person who we felt would be the best fit for the needs of the College.

“We wanted that person to be well-established in Cincinnati, to know and be known to the movers and shakers in our philanthropic community, to be well-versed and experienced in the operation of nonprofit entities, to be collegial and energetic, etc. etc.

“With Joan, we get all that and much, much more. Joan is educated in the city, at UC and Xavier, has worked for many years in civic leadership roles with various nonprofits, is a property owner and resident of OTR, and has been bringing trays of cookies for our students for years. ... Joan has been at work just two short weeks and has already had a major impact on the organization and implementation of our fundraising projects going forward. I firmly believe she will lead us to levels of success that the AAC has never seen before.”

What is the main vision for position?

“At the moment, almost all of the operational support for the college comes from the tuition paid by the students who attend classes. Most would view this as appropriate—they are the ones who benefit most directly from the educational program. While this is a sustainable model, it doesn’t provide for much growth and/or expansion.

“So, if the AAC wishes to respond to the compelling interest in Cincinnati in becoming a center for film production, for example, it would be hard-pressed to find a way to build out the labs and curriculum needed to prepare the artists and designers who will establish their practice in film/video, sound design, and animation, since these costs would have to be borne by the students presently in attendance.

“We have space in the 1212 Jackson facility that could be utilized for this and other initiatives, but we need external funding to do a proper buildout. Providing support for this kind of growth and expansion, growing the endowment, improving our facilities, procuring space for student housing, these are all established short-term goals for the college that will benefit directly from Joan’s leadership and efforts. One of her first tasks is to lead our efforts to establish a true development plan to guide the institution beyond the near short-term. We haven’t had one of these since about 2009.

Conversation with the philanthropic community in the city and again make the case for support of this magnificent and long-standing asset we call the Art Academy of Cincinnati.

“By the way, this would not have happened without the support of a number of important donors who saw that the institution was ready to go forward with this initiative to reestablish the Office of Institutional Advancement and provided their support. It allowed us to move ahead more quickly, which will, in turn, bring Joan’s productivity on line sooner than might have happened otherwise.”