

Cleveland ARTS Education Consortium (CAEC)

# Remembering Colleen

**Colleen Toohey Porter (1959-2012)**

**Director of Community Engagement and Education, Playhouse Square, 2002-2012**

**President, Cleveland Arts Education Consortium, 2003-2007**



Our friend and colleague Colleen Toohey Porter lost her battle with cancer on March 22, 2012. In her work at Playhouse Square with the artists and educators she loved, Colleen brought unbounded enthusiasm for theater and the arts, knowledge and a wonderful sense about education and teaching, and a special dedication to excellence in all. With Colleen's input and guidance, Playhouse Square outreach and education programs changed the lives of many, many children and adults through great theatre immersion and experience. Colleen was part of the group of arts educators who established the Consortium in 1999-2000. Colleen served as President prior to the Consortium's CSU residency in 2008, and has continued to serve as an active member of the Executive Committee. Colleen loved life, lived it fully, and her vibrant spirit will remain with us all.

Colleen was the moderator of CAEC's October meeting in the elegant Reinberger Chamber Hall at Severance Hall. She guided panelists Raymond Bobgan, Marcie Goodman, Sari Feldman, and Terry Stewart and the audience in a lively conversation about connecting programming with missions. Photos of Colleen and the panelists were captured from the video of that session.

## **Reflections on Colleen from Joan Katz Napoli CAEC Meeting, April 16, 2013**

When I first met Colleen I thought she was the "coolest" Education Director I had ever met.

"Cool" is not usually the first word that comes to mind when describing Education Directors (at least not orchestra Ed Directors). Colleen changed all that. With her cool leather jacket, her cool glasses, and her cool way of thinking, she somehow raised us all up by her very (cool) presence.

Too often we Education Directors have been a hard-working yet down-trodden bunch, struggling for our voices to be heard in the upper echelons of our institutions. Colleen changed that too. She forged a remarkable alliance with her Executive Director Art Falco; together they took on their Board and funders; Colleen articulated a compelling vision and invited them to work with her to build an extraordinary education and community engagement program for PlayhouseSquare. And they did just that.

Colleen was a great leader. She had an awe-inspiring commitment to arts education -- she was in it to change lives, and she touched tens of thousands of children and families in doing so. Colleen also had a great business sense. She proved that education and community engagement were good business for PlayhouseSquare, and for the rest of us too.

Colleen was a clever, confident, action-oriented leader, with a no-nonsense style, a positive, "we can do this" attitude, and a drive to get the job done, and done right. She was crazy smart, respectful, strategic and aggressive (in the best sense) and she always had the big picture in mind. It was never about her. She was also really, really funny. I will miss our CAEC girls-night-out drinks at Sarava; exchanging "knowing glances" (aka eye rolls) with her at meetings; and the funny emails Colleen would send me during boring conference calls (knowing I was looking at emails while on the call too).

The greatest gift Colleen gave to so many of us, was the gift of her friendship. When you were with Colleen you had her undivided attention -- she made you feel special (not in a Mr. Roger's syrupy-sweet way, but in a collegial, 'insiders,' way).

Colleen also showed the working moms among us that you could have it all, just maybe not all at the same time. Her extraordinary devotion to her husband and children, family and friends, and work was deep and passionate and legendary. "You've got to set your own priorities and stick to them," she would say, "Make your own way because no one else is going to do it for you." How right she was.

Colleen's time on earth was far too short but my life/our lives are so much richer for having known her... and loved her. We will miss you my friend"



Colleen Toohey Porter and Sari Feldman, Cuyahoga County Public Library



Panelists Raymond Bobgan (Cleveland Public Theatre), Marcie Goodman (Cleveland International Film Festival), Sari Feldman (Cuyahoga County Public Library), and Terry Stewart (Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum) with Moderator Colleen Porter (center)