

Willow Grove Cultural Commons Quarterly Stewardship Report

April - June 2026



Willow Grove Activity

Sandy Spring Museum continues to recruit Willow Grove partner organizations. As of June 30, 2026, we have 22 Willow Grove partners, including individuals and organizations devoted to the music, dance, writing, theatre, and visual arts of diverse global cultures.

Spring is always a busy time for Sandy Spring Museum, and we are especially grateful to have Willow Grove to serve our cultural heritage partners, host programs, and play a key role in seasonal festivals like Puerto Rico in Maryland and the Strawberry Festival. The Helen Nesbitt and Arthur Douglas Farquhar Creative Space and Naomi Yadin-Mendick and David Mendick Gathering Space were in frequent use by partners, and the Warner Williams Plaza enabled us to take advantage of the inviting spring weather.

The following partners have hosted events, rehearsals, and art exhibitions in the Grove this quarter:

Spyros Koliavasilis

Rehearsals for a new Mediterranean orchestra

Cultura Plenera / Los Hijo 'e Plena

Puerto Rico in Maryland Festival

Frank Letkiewicz

Songwriters Showcase series

Pierre-Alain Auroux and Laura Sturza

MoCo Underground Writers Showcase series

Governor's Office of Community Initiatives

Rooted & Rising: AAPI (Asian American Pacific Islander) Stories through Visual Art in Celebration of Maryland 250

Somapa Thai Dance Company

Rehearsals

AmaZing Theatre Company

Rehearsals and storytelling events

Spotlight Academy USA

Rehearsals for Spotlight of Indonesia 2026

Susan Milner

Sip, Sway, Support coffeehouse-style concert benefitting Montgomery County Immigrant Rights Collective

Rooted & Rising: AAPI (Asian American Pacific Islander) Stories through Visual Art in Celebration of Maryland 250

On Saturday, May 16, Willow Grove was the site of an exhibit and reception featuring the winners of this student art competition launched by the governor's office. Nearly 100 people attended, including young artists and their families. Student drawings, paintings, and multi-media art told stories of heritage, identity, and community.



Photos by Museum Staff

Songwriters Showcase: A New Willow Grove Program

Frank Letkiewicz has been a museum member and regular participant in the Bluegrass Jam for years. He has written songs for most of his life and played with Rain, a popular DC-area band. When he wanted to bring together performers he met at open mics, Frank thought of Sandy Spring Museum and became a Willow Grove partner to host monthly Songwriters Showcases.

The first event, held in April, was filled to capacity. Songwriters have booked slots through September, attesting to a strong interest in this type of opportunity. If you write or play, consider signing up for a future date. Audience members are also welcome!



Photo by Museum Staff

"Willow Grove Cultural Commons is the perfect venue for local singer-songwriters to share their songs with the community. The room has excellent acoustics so that the audience can fully hear and appreciate these original songs by the performers without the distractions that typically occur at most other settings in the area."

– Frank Letkiewicz

Songwriters Showcase participants this quarter included local musicians Ed Schaeffer, Wayne Unchained, The Lashes (Michael Occhionero and Sarah Pinto), Rich Morey, Luther Jett, Jeff Jones, Michelle Murray, Joseph Isaacs, Maddie Desrocher, Ed Fatula, Selena Raj, Juels Bland, Rebecca Berlin, and thirteen-year-old singer/songwriter Kylie Coblitz. Following Kylie's performance at the May showcase, Sandy Spring Museum invited her to take the community stage at the 2026 Strawberry Festival. Willow Grove continues to be a welcoming environment where rising artists can grow.

"Kylie was so excited to be part of the event and had such a wonderful experience performing at both the festival and showcase. Everyone was so welcoming and supportive, and it truly meant a lot to her. Thank you for helping create such a warm and encouraging environment for local artists and performers."

– Lauren Coblitz



Photo Credit: Blue House Productions

MoCo Underground Writers Showcase: A New Home at Willow Grove



Photo Credit: Tom Drischler

When founder and longtime organizer Julia Tagliere made the decision earlier this year to step down from MoCo Underground Writers Showcase after six years of wise and wonderful leadership, the program welcomed new host Pierre-Alain Auroux and co-host Laura Sturza. Pierre-Alain and Laura, both museum members, made the decision to transfer this long-standing event to a new permanent home at Willow Grove Cultural Commons. Their first meetup at Willow Grove took place Thursday, June 18 and was televised on the Montgomery Municipal Channel.



Spring Festivals

Puerto Rico in Maryland – Saturday, May 30



Photo Credit: Diasporic Boricua

This exciting annual event took place across the entire museum and its grounds, including in Willow Grove and the Warner Williams Plaza. The sounds of Afro-Puerto Rican music known as Plena and Bomba rang out from the plaza all day. Los Pleneros de la 21, a New York-based and Grammy-nominated ensemble, played to an energetic audience of all ages. Attendees learned new skills at a Bomba dance workshop led by Julia Loiza Gutiérrez-Rivera and a Plena percussion workshop taught by Nelson Matthew Gonzalez. Food stalls, craft vendors, and other fun made for an all-day celebration.

"Please thank everyone who made Willow Grove possible because it is the most brilliant upgrade I have seen any venue integrate into their spaces in all my years working with community partners." – Angel Rivera

After the festival, Cultura Plenera founding member and programs director Angel Rivera shared that Willow Grove dramatically changed the festival experience for organizers. He noted specifically that Cultura Plenera's ability to use Willow Grove during the festival as a staging area and haven for festival volunteers to rest lessened the physical tax on organizers and allowed them to enjoy the festival to a far greater extent than had been possible in years past.



Photo Credit: Cultura Plenera

Strawberry Festival – Saturday, June 6

Finally, the Warner Williams Plaza served once again as the Main Stage for the museum's largest annual event of the year: the Strawberry Festival. Crowds enjoyed the vibrant sights and sounds of seven energetic groups:

- Footworks Percussive Dance Ensemble
- The Gilly and Book Quintet
- OCEAN Celtic Quartet
- Miyako Taiko
- Kamalakiran Vinjamuri (presented by the District of Raga)
- The Barnstormers
- Silk Road Dance Company

The role and contribution of Willow Grove to the Strawberry Festival can't be overstated. As a stage venue, it was warm, welcoming, and acoustically outstanding. 4,300+ audience members attended the festival and enjoyed performances, demonstrations, delicious treats, and one another's company.

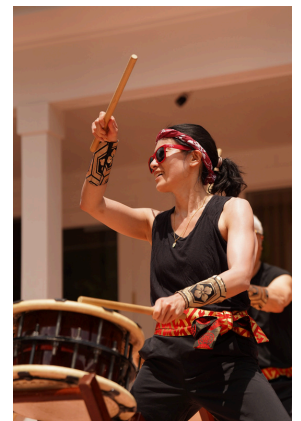


Photo Credit: Blue House Productions