

Where Art and Spirituality Meet

An Interview with MaryLou Pagano,
Executive Director, Sheen Center for Thought and Culture

EDITORS' NOTE MaryLou Pagano has spent 35 years in fundraising, beginning her career in the Development Office of the Archdiocese of New York. She has concentrated her efforts on advancing the mission of the Catholic Church through education, hospitals, and parish work. She began working at the Sheen Center in 2018. One of her favorite



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Fulton J. Sheen quotes is: "Humility is the virtue by which we recognize ourselves as we truly are." Pagano was instrumental in the rebranding process at The Sheen Center and is focused on introducing people to the place in New York City "Where Art and Spirituality Meet." She lives in Westchester with her husband and has three adult children.

ORGANIZATION BRIEF The building that is now home to The Sheen Center (sheencenter.org) originally served as a mission church for Italian immigrants. Founded by two Jesuit priests, The Italian Mission of Our Lady of Loreto quickly grew to include some 3,000 parishioners and a school for 500 children. By 1926, the parish was staffed by diocesan clergy and a brand new school and cultural center were built which included an auditorium with a professional stage on which some

half-dozen full-scale operas were presented annually. In 1938, following the ravages of the Great Depression, the parish was forced to foreclose on the cultural center. Catholic Charities bought the property at 18 Bleecker Street and created the Holy Name Centre – a residence and employment center for homeless men. The theater remained a part of the property and in the 1950s and 1960s was host to a number of Golden Glove tournaments. Daily Mass took place in a small chapel inside the building. By the mid-1980s, the church building of Our Lady of Loreto fell into disrepair and the congregation had significantly diminished. The property where the church stood, just south of 18 Bleecker Street, was sold and the parish was moved into the chapel of the Holy Name Centre. In 2011, the Holy Name Centre and Our Lady of Loreto parish were closed. Nearby Catholic parishes welcomed the few remaining parishioners, and services for the homeless continued at other Catholic Charities locations throughout New York City. Following extensive planning and renovations, The Sheen Center was opened in 2015 as the official Arts Center of the Archdiocese of New York and named for the Venerable Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen.

Will you highlight the history of the Sheen Center for Thought and Culture and how you define its mission?

Since its opening in 2015, the Sheen Center has brought virtues to light through art and conversation. We provide a platform to see all aspects of humanity through a creative lens of faith and respect.

What have been the keys to the Sheen Center's impact?

I think the key to the Sheen Center's impact is that its mission is infectious. People are looking to come out of the darkness and into the light. There is so much negativity in our world today and people are searching to be uplifted and feel that there is good



The Sheen Center is located in the heart of New York City's East Village on the corner of Elizabeth and Bleecker Streets

in this world. The Sheen Center is constantly providing its patrons with that light.

Will you provide an overview of the Sheen Center's programs, performances, and events?

Our offerings for the 2023-2024 season include: a series of world music events including international performers; *Hans and Sobie*, a play about the white rose movement; a wide variety of music concerts and partnerships with The Met, SOHO Forum, Spotlight Kids, and the like.

Will you discuss the strength and talent of the Sheen Center team?

The Sheen Center has the most dedicated team I have worked with in my entire career. Starting with Cardinal Dolan, who is responsible for the creation of the Center years ago, to our front house staff, everyone here believes in the importance of the mission, and it carries through to our partners and the board.

How valuable has it been to the Sheen Center's work to have such an engaged and supportive board?

Our board is tremendous. They give of their time, talent, and treasure in immeasurable ways. We are most grateful for their accessibility, not only to senior leadership, but to our entire staff. Our board attends many of our events and invites their personal friends and colleagues to join them. That, in turn, grows our community exponentially.

What are your priorities for the Sheen Center as you look to the future?

Our top priorities for this coming season are twofold. The first is to continue to get the message out in the crowded landscape of offerings, especially because our offerings are so unique. We curate every presentation and therefore we are confident patrons will leave here feeling better than when they came into the Sheen Center. The second priority is to continue growing our inter-faith programming and conversations. We have a wonderful series called, Faith the Competitive Edge, where we invite athletes and sports figures to speak about how their faith has encouraged their success. These athletes are of all faiths and their stories are so important for people to hear, especially our youth. ●



Lúnasa, an acclaimed and multi-award winning Irish music band, returns year-after-year to the Sheen Center to perform