

# chairs for a cause

ADOLESCENCE IS SUSAN RODGERSON'S CANVAS, AS SHE CELEBRATES 20 YEARS OF CRAFTING YOUNG ARTISTS. BY JARED BOWEN

By her own admission, Susan Rodgerson's legacy in founding Artists For Humanity (AFH) is unexpected. She never imagined she'd give Boston students the opportunity to blossom as working artists. She didn't foresee that a collaborative painting project she started in a Boston middle school 20 years ago would one day have its own gleaming headquarters, the EpiCenter in the Fort Point Arts District. Rodgerson looks back on her efforts with refreshing humility: "It's been wonderful, but I'm glad I didn't know ahead of time what it would take, because I would have been scared."

In 1990, Rodgerson founded AFH with a simple goal. A painter herself, she wanted to give urban teenagers an outlet and an opportunity. "I needed to expose underserved kids to the creative process," says Rodgerson, who now serves as AFH's executive and artistic director, "which would inspire them to see the world differently and see what's possible." To Rodgerson's delight, her mission resonated. What began as a program for six kids has ballooned into a large-scale enterprise. The after-school and summer programs employ 250 teenagers annually as paid apprentices,



PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOEL BENJAMIN



AFH mentors kids in painting, graphics and industrial design.

Chair lift: Rodgerson with an AFH apprentice



paint and I get paid for that?" McDonald remembers thinking when she landed at AFH three years ago. "I was in awe, because that didn't sound like a job at all." She later realized, "The idea is to take kids off the street and give them something to do."

Now an AFH alum, McDonald is one of many students to design and paint a series of chairs that will be the centerpiece of AFH's 20th anniversary gala, titled *Have a Seat*. The gala is AFH's first, and it is attracting eminent hosts Carolyn and Peter Lynch, Boston Public Schools superintendent Carol Johnson and Museum of Fine Arts director Malcolm Rogers. "I wanted to be involved in recognizing Susan's work and AFH's achievements," Rogers says. "Empowering and employing Boston teens for 20 years is something to be celebrated."

Rogerson's inspiration for the gala is the belief that drives her work at AFH—that everyone, including youth, deserves a seat at the table. The chairs recall the nascent days of AFH, when the middle-school-aged cofounders of the group met in her studio and transformed old mismatched chairs into art objects. Now they get to celebrate 20 years of transforming teens into artists.

*Have a Seat* takes place at 7 PM on November 11, AFH EpiCenter, 100 W. Second St. For tickets, call 617-268-7620. **BC**

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## Charity Register

OPPORTUNITIES TO GIVE

### UNICEF

**What:** The US Fund for Unicef honors Sting and his wife, Trudie Styler, at the Children's Champion Award Dinner. Cochairs and board members Alli and Bill Achtmeyer, with Barrie and Kevin Landry and Elaine and Bobby Sager, host a cocktail hour, dinner and auction to raise money to help protect children from preventable diseases. [unicefusa.org](http://unicefusa.org)

**When:** October 20, 6:30 PM

**Where:** The Park Plaza Castle, 130 Columbus Ave.



### ROOM TO GROW

**What:** Emcee Mary Richardson and community leaders celebrate the efforts of parents helping their children thrive despite the challenges of poverty. The annual Room to Grow Fall Gala will honor Dr. T. Berry Brazelton, one of the world's foremost authorities on pediatrics and child development. The event includes dinner and an auction. [roomtogrow.org](http://roomtogrow.org)

**When:** November 5, 6:30 PM

**Where:** Boston Public Library, 700 Boylston St.



### BOSTON LYRIC OPERA

**What:** Boston Lyric Opera's annual fundraising gala celebrates the supernatural this year. *Hocus Pocus: An Operatic Trip to the Dark Side* includes cocktails and dinner interspersed with ghost stories and music performed by BLO emerging artists. Chaired by Willa and Taylor Bodman, Lisa Greiner and Alan Dynner. Black tie or occult couture encouraged. [blo.org/events](http://blo.org/events)

**When:** October 22, 6 PM

**Where:** Mandarin Oriental, 776 Boylston St.

