

## *History of Art & Soul*

The Art & Soul Center was conceived 15 years ago when its founder, Jennifer Ritchkoff, was working as a personal assistant to a playwright who was also a mother, and who dreamed of creating a space where she could escape to in order to write, or to meet with actors, share ideas with other playwrights and get support for her creative endeavors. As an actress, Jennifer shared that dream, and started putting down on paper what that creative space would look like if she could bring it to light. While pursuing her love for acting, she always had Art & Soul in mind, and when this playwright, her friend and mentor, died nearly a decade later of cancer, she vowed she would make it happen.

After moving to Los Angeles and working many years in the Hollywood arts community, as an actress, producer, marketing director and arts administrator, the need for a center for artists became more apparent. In 2002, the nonprofit was formed, and she brought together her close friends of artists to create the board, and sought out to open the doors of Art & Soul.

Soon the need for community development, coupled with the need for arts advocacy and artist resources, pushed Jennifer in the direction of Social Work. She received a Masters degree in Social Work, with a concentration in Community Organizing, Planning & Administration from the University of Southern California in May of 2006. While at USC, she completed a field placement, which was an independent study dedicated solely to Art & Soul; during which time she completed a comprehensive business plan (and was accepted into a school-wide business plan competition at USC).

During this time, the organization formed a stronger vision toward bringing together community work and the arts, and social workers and social activists were added to the board of directors and advisory board of Art & Soul, in order to bring in expertise from several different arenas. It was during this time that Jennifer reached out to like-minded organizations to join forces, and the Hollywood Arts Council was one of the first.

The mission for Art & Soul is very much aligned with that of the Hollywood Arts Council, and a partnership seemed inevitable. The historic preservation project helped bring the two entities together, and both organizations are excited for the prospects of helping to open this creative space for the arts community.

Jennifer has already begun working with the Hollywood Arts Council on various projects, including doing grant writing for their after school program. She continues her education through seminars and workshops at the Center for Nonprofit Management, and with empowerment and capacity-building workshops offered by the city, through her work with the neighborhood council; geared toward nonprofit management, grant writing, and community development. Additional management experience includes four years of property management of a large, luxury building in L.A., and two years as an office manager of a law firm in NY; in addition to arts administration experience in audience services and box office management, and theatre marketing.