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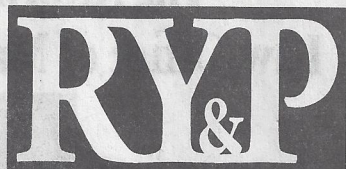
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Architect of a thriving arts community

By DAVE SOLOMON
New Hampshire Union Leader

MANCHESTER — Monica Leap defies the stereotype of the struggling artist working in isolation.

She is certainly an accomplished artist in her chosen field of ceramics, but she is not struggling financially and is certainly not working in isolation.

Instead, she has in the past two years built the Studio 550 Arts Center at 550 Elm St. into a vibrant force for the arts in downtown Manchester, enlivening the community with public art projects, classes for all ages and affordable studio space.

Her success in promoting the arts and infusing the Queen City with color and culture earned her a much-deserved nomination to the Class of 2015 Forty under Forty.

A first-generation American, Leap's parents moved from war-torn Cambodia in the 1980s with two young children, at first to the Nashua area. Now 29, she lives in Manchester with her husband and three-month-old daughter.

After graduating from Nashua North, she got her B.S. in ceramic arts and entrepreneurship from Syracuse University, was artist in residence at a program in Maine, then completed a graduate degree at the University of North Carolina in city planning.

"After school, I was given the option of two different life dreams of mine," she said, "to build a community arts center in an old

mill building, or to go to Cambodia on a Fulbright Scholarship. "Fortunately for Manchester, she chose the former. "The reason was for family," she said.

That long-term decision led her to take over a building that had been occupied by her family's Asian market. Her planning skills were put to the test as she served as general contractor for the renovation of the space that now serves as Studio 550.

While many Manchester residents or visitors may not be familiar with the classes and studio work that goes on behind the walls of the arts center, the public

impact of the organization is hard to miss.

There's the annual "Monsters on the Loose" program, in which 100 small clay monsters are hidden throughout the downtown in a sort of scavenger hunt. Studio 550 is also the moving force behind "Think Outside the Box," in which artists paint utility boxes in the downtown area, turning eyesores into beautiful public art.

In just two years of operating Studio 550, Leap has come a long way toward her goal of "building a dynamic and thriving community based around the arts.

Monica Leap • 29

Home: Manchester

Birthplace: Nashua

Family: Husband, Alexander Metzger; daughter, Leah Sovanna (born October 2014).

High school: Nashua High School North & South

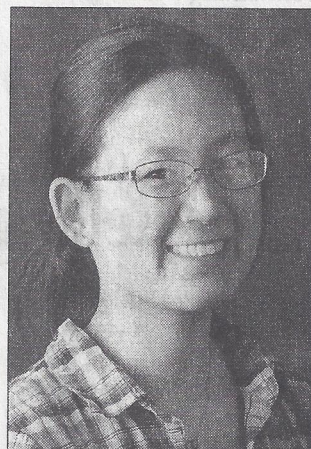
College/post grad degrees: Syracuse University, 2007, BFA Ceramic Arts & Minor in Entrepreneurship; University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, 2010, Master of City and Regional Planning (focus in bike/pedestrian planning and downtown community development).

Current job: Owner of Studio 550 ART CENTER, ceramics instructor.

Key past positions held: Planning intern at Southern NH Planning Commission; assistant studio manager at Syracuse University/ Penland School for Craft, Pipeline Pottery, and more; research assistant at the Pedestrian Bicycle Information Center.

Volunteer activities: Granite State Aikido, Empty Bowls advocate.

Last major achievement: Gave birth.



MANCHESTER — Next up on Tate Curti's reading list is "The Bully Pulpit," the early 20th Century and claimed chronicle of the Roosevelt and Theodore Roosevelt presidencies of Howard Taft. Once his busy scheduled- parents and Curti can

from him. He's quite the character." Curti won't be growing a bushy mustache or lead- ing any charges up San Juan Hill, but he has most certainly pursued a leader- ship role early in the 21st Century. At 35, Curti is vice presi- dent of professional and support services at Elliot Health System. It's a big

on now." Curti first came to the Elliot while completing his master's program in health services administration. He had gone to graduate school after exploring a ca- reer in the pharmaceutical industry, working in mar- keting, sales and research of a physician. Curti said working in health care was a natural fit, but felt he

stressful, but it's also very rewarding. "If you get the bug, which I have, it can be very mean- ingful work." The "bug" Curti referred to has also led to a seat on the board of the Granite State Children's Alliance. He is also the organiza- tion's treasurer, volun- teering his time to help children who have suffered through abuse.

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By DOUG ALDEN
New Hampshire Union Leader