

Michael S. Heagerty

She chose to make Syracuse her home

Even though I was born here, I distinctly remember deciding that Syracuse was and would always continue to be my home. I didn't have to stay, but I'm very happy I did. Perhaps this explains the easy affection I feel for those who weren't born here but who also choose to call Syracuse home. Thea St.Omer was one of those people.

As an artist, a filmmaker, and an entrepreneur, Thea was a woman whose interests and creativity seemed boundless. And her serene but always welcoming nature made it easy to guess that she was originally from California. Yet, happily, she established deep roots in Syracuse and became a beloved part of this community and a friend who continues to inspire me and, I'm sure, many others.

Six years ago, Thea walked by while I was working outside of my building—a single-screen theater that my grandfather built almost 100 years ago. As a filmmaker and an endlessly inquisitive person, Thea began a conversation that would lead to hundreds more. Over time, I was fortunate to see this inquisitiveness play out on the screen. Her films are a tribute to her talent as an artist and to the fearless and trusting way she lived her life. In them she explored topics and emotions that most would rather avoid. Similarly, her bold and colorful paintings often held unexpected objects that others had merely discarded.

Through our friendship, Thea St.Omer taught me that happiness comes from being able to see the extraordinariness of even the simplest things in life. I can



still see her popping her head into my office, asking if I was busy. I would always say the same thing, “Come in and sit down, and have a cup of coffee.” To which she would smile and often say, “No, you’re busy—I’ll come back another time.” She was so humble and never wanted to put you out, but I was always willing to stop what I was doing to hear her latest big idea.



Michael S. Heagerty owns and operates The Palace Theater on James St. in the Eastwood section of Syracuse, a specialty venue that he lovingly restored to its original glory as a luxurious “movie palace” of yesteryear which now hosts several major regional film festivals. A number of Thea’s films screened at The Palace and she also used the building on occasion as a set. Michael generously opened the Palace on May 28, 2015 for a community celebration of her life and work.